

THE PIONEERS

Vol. 22

Crisis and Victory

Contents

384. Commencement	2
385. Engagement	14
386. Pardon	26
387. A Passing	49
388. Controversies	63
389. Water of Life	83
390. Accommodation	103
391. Sumilara	120
392. Whirlwind	142
393. Popular Acclaim	164
394. Spiritualization	180
395. Changing of the Guard	198
396. New Potentials	215
397. Big Changes	232
398. The Heat of the Fast	254

384.

Commencement

Kaiménu, 17/635

Jordan and Tiamaté hurried over to the family as soon as the commencement ceremony was over. Chris rose from his seat—awkwardly, his arthritis was hurting that day—and extended both arms.

“I’m so proud!” he said. He embraced his grandson first. “A *kwéteryeri*: quite an accomplishment.”

“Thanks, grandpa,” said Jordan.

“They both can have a Masters in less than a year if they expand their senior theses into books and take a few courses,” added May Keino, Jordan’s aunt.

“We’ll plan on it,” agreed Tiamaté. She turned to her mother, who had tears in her eyes.

“Congratulations, dear,” said Sarédaté, choking back her emotions. Even her father was moved.

“I’m proud, too,” said Aisendru. “Even if I said girls shouldn’t have such an education.”

“Thanks, dad.”

“Just give us a grandchild soon,” added Sarédaté.

Tiamaté nodded, irritated by that suggestion, but not showing it. She turned to her brother Aisugu, 18, who had just completed the Army High School in ɛndraidha. “I’m glad you’re coming to Melwika Génadema this fall.”

“Part of his officer’s training,” added Aisendru quickly.

Meanwhile, Jordan turned to his dad. “Congratulations,” said Behrouz, a warm smile on his face. “I knew you’d do it.”

“So did I, dear,” added Lua, embracing her son. “The first of the next generation to complete their degree.”

“Thanks, I wasn’t so sure!” said Jordan. He shook hands with and hugged Amos, Thornton, Liz, and Lébé as well.

The crowd was breaking up; four hundred students had graduated with two or four year degrees, masters, or doctorates that day. The graduates were wearing robes, either black with red trim or red with black trim depending on their degree, and were smiling and embracing proud family members. As the Mennea family walked home, many approached them to greet or thank them.

May beckoned Tiamaté to walk with her. “This is a good time to consider a family,” she said, referring to the comment by Sarédaté. “The two of you won’t have any problem hiring help to take care of a house and help with kids. The sooner, the better. Not only does it look more . . . traditional, it’s wiser from the point of view of health and stamina.”

“But I really don’t want to be traditional.”

“Tiamaté, there are some things one should be traditional about, and one is having children; not six or eight, but one or two or even three. Talk to Lébé; she’s done quite well with a career and family. You can do it. My kids are now 12 and 15, they’re coming along fine. So are two colleges for women, a Bahá’í Studies Institute, and a few publications.”

“You and Lébé are my heroines!” said Tiamaté. She nodded. “I see your point.”

“Bahá'u'llah says to marry and have children as an ‘assistance’ to ourselves, remember.”

Tiamaté nodded again, thinking about May’s words. The streets were crowded—it was Suksdiu, the equivalent of Saturday, and everyone was out shopping if they weren’t returning from the commencement—so they walked slowly among the crowds.

The Mennea household was ready for a large dinner when they arrived; the cooks had been working all morning. The commencement speaker—Werétrakester—arrived as well, as did John Miller and his favorite wife, Awsé, so the dining room and courtyard was full of people. Werétrakester headed straight to Jordan as soon as he came in the front door. “I want to congratulate you on your success.”

“Thank you, widu,” said Jordan shyly as he shook both hands with the prophet. “I greatly enjoyed your speech today; thank you for your wisdom. Service is dear to my heart as well.”

“Of course; it is dear to the heart of all Menneas, and I think to all Bahá’ís.” He smiled. “So, the first of the third generation to reach adulthood. Do you feel Eryan or Gædhému?”

“I don’t know! People consider me gædhému. I was born on Gædhéma and we arrived here when I was six. My English is awkward and limited; Eryan is my mother tongue, even if it isn’t my native tongue. I have very few memories of Gædhéma and they aren’t the sort that are unique to the place; I remember our house, my bedroom, my mother’s clinic, and the day care facility I went to every day.”

Werétrakester nodded. “I see.”

Jordan pointed to his young brother Rostamu, almost 16. “It’s hardest on him, I think. He was in mother’s womb when we arrived here. He was born here. The kids at school treat him as a gēdhému, but he isn’t.”

“I suppose that’s true of all your cousins. Your children will have to deal with that as well. Are you continuing your consulting business?”

“Yes, definitely. Everyone loves it; we’re hiring people to carry out specialized tasks. Two months ago I was in a village in Véspe, Mitranimēla. The lord had received a total of five grants; I checked after I got home. The last two were for biogas and water and sewer systems; I was there to check them, and of course they were fine. The first three were for paving the village streets, building a dam, and installing a hydroelectric plant. Instead, the lord has a very nice, large, comfortable house.”

“Lord Mitranu is typical, too. Corruption of that sort will now be impossible.”

“Not impossible; difficult, and dangerous to my staff. One of my people visited Manuagras last month to review an approved grant for a pasta plant. There was nothing there and the lord tried to bribe him, then threatened him. I told the palace and they stopped the grant.”

“Good. The lords must learn to keep their word. Their sons generally are doing better.”

“I think that’s true.”

Wērētrakester put his hand on Jordan’s shoulder. “Keep up the good work. We need honest and experienced experts who can help villages plan good projects, then make sure they happen. I will pray that blessings from Esto descend upon you.”

“Thank you, widu, I need your prayers very much.”

Werétrakester nodded and winked at Jordan, then walked to Chris. “I saw how proud you were of your grandson, at the end of the ceremony.”

“Indeed, my old friend. He is doing incredible work. In many ways, he’s closest to me, of all my children and grandchildren. Thornton is a scientist. I wish he were more of a businessman and a politician. But Jordan fills those shoes.”

“I can see that. He runs Melita too, right?”

“I haven’t attended a City Council meeting there for three years; he goes, he lets me know what’s planned, and he does everything a lord should do. Thornton is doing the same now for South Ménwika and mostly for Mèlwika as well. I attend the City Council meeting here every three months.”

“And that frees you to do what? Tomis?”

“I still tour the tomis twice a year on behalf of the palace, and I am on all the Boards. That’s interesting because if I can attend—which I often can—I am in the position to tell them all the plans of the other provincial tomis. Someone needs to do that, so they have a certain amount of coordination. I am more active on the Jérdomais Tomi and its modular house factories, partly because much of their work is located in Melita. I am on the All-Grange Council and that takes some time.”

“How’s that going? I gather you formed 73 new granges.”

“Yes, we now have 105 granges serving 200 of 250 villages. Some of them are pretty weak. It was quite a scramble to help all the new granges plow farmland this spring, but we did it. Miller has cranked up tractor production and plans to produce over 100 this year. We didn’t get a new tractor to every grange, but we were able to loan them tractors, lease them old trucks, rent fire engines to pull plows, even use pickup trucks to

plow fields. Horses and oxen were used more this year than ever, also. We managed to plow 180,000 agris mechanically, double what the tractors accomplished last year, and plant 450,000 agris, twenty percent more than last year.”

“So I heard, and crop prices have been alright.”

“Yes, because granges are going into chicken, pig, beef, and dairy production, and the animals need feed. Five granges are buying fishing boats. Getting the granges set up and functioning has been an absolutely huge task, but a group of us accomplished it. I didn’t teach any courses in the spring; the all-grange council consumed all my time. Jordan helped, too; his business reviewed all grant requests for grange equipment.” Chris looked at the widow. “So, how is your family?”

“My wife wants me to stop living in a cave or a tiny, drafty hut and settle into a nice, comfortable house with her again. I stop there, live with her for a while, then feel the need to sacrifice for others. The house is too comfortable. My son and his family live there, maintain the house, and live on the income derived from estates southwest of Mèddoakwés and profits from the tomis. They are comfortable.”

“Comfortable.” Chris nodded. “I understand how you use that word.”

“There are times we need some comfort, but we are not meant to be ‘comfortable’ all the time. We have to sacrifice for others.”

“Exactly.”

“I pray for you, my friend. You use your comfort as a haven, so you can go out and sacrifice again. Wealth is a terrible spiritual test for so many. But I am so impressed by what you do. I was telling Her Majesties yesterday that because of you, almost the

entire population of this world is richer, and most are twice as rich. I wish those who have gained more than twice as much wealth would sacrifice the way you do.”

“The irony, friend Werétrakester, is that I still grow more wealthy, not less. Once the all-grange council passes through its birth pangs, I will be starting timber companies. So far, there are three of them. We need to manage Éra’s forests because we are already cutting them down faster than they are regrowing. If we continue on this path, the coal will run out and we will have no fuel. The companies must be owned by tribes, villages, cities, or provinces and must manage all their forests to be effective.”

“There has been talk of new forestry laws.”

“There have to be such laws. The mountains around Kerda are being stripped of trees. When it rains, some rivers flow into the valley brown with mud.”

“That’s true of the waterfall near my cave. I must go speak to your wife.” The widu nodded in goodbye and abruptly headed to Liz. Chris watched him go, struck by how white Werétrakester’s hair and beard were, even though he was younger than Chris.

Nearly all the guests had gotten lunch from the buffet table. Once the line was cleared, Chris filled his plate. He sat next to Thornton. “So, a summer in Wurontroba and Gréjpola.”

“Yes. I would say ‘thanks to you’ but that might sound ungrateful. The kids will enjoy the quiet, they’ll help give children and youth classes, and they’ll have a lot of fun in a safe place. Lébé will gather folk tales and I’ll give all sorts of classes and courses, in and around organizing those timber companies. I’ve got a geology class coming down, too; we’ll explore the southern end of the Spine.”

“There will be about forty Bahá’í youth in Wurontroba, Wëranopéla, and Gréjpola as well; we’re counting on you to keep an eye on them.”

“Yes, I’ll do that, too. Will you be coming down?”

“Once I make my round the world trip to visit tomis I’ll stop by every few weeks. Meanwhile, you’re coming up for the Mëlwika and South Mënwwika Council meetings, right?”

“Yes, I’ll drive up a day or two every week.”

“Good. One other thing; next week can you come with me to the Grand Court?”

“The Grand Court? I was planning to leave for Wurontroba as soon as the All-Génadëma Conference ends. But sure, I can stay an extra five days. From everything I’ve heard, it sounds pretty boring.”

“It’s a chance to see people. I want to introduce you to many of the lords. You know some of them; more of them know of you, but haven’t met you.”

“Alright, I guess I had better order some red-edged robes.”

A week later, Thornton and Chris drove the old rover to Mëddoakwës for the Grand Court. It was attended by most of the world’s 250 lords, 50 distinguished members of old houses who currently had no villages but did own estates, a few royalty who had no lordly titles, some wives and heirs, and a scattering of others who managed to arrange an invitation. The first day was a lengthy formal audience with the two queens when the dukes, counts, and several dozen lords rose to talk about the great accomplishments of their places over the last year. Queen Dukterësto looked frail and distracted, but sat

through the entire six-hour gathering. When it ended, huge quantities of food came out and Chris began to introduce Thornton to everyone who came to speak to him.

“This year, we’ll make a statement of sorts,” said Chris, when there was a break in the conversations. “Let’s go stand with the Tutane chiefs. Few go speak to them.”

“They’re not even all here.”

“No, many don’t bother to come, but our two Bahá’í chiefs are here. Tomorrow we’ll go stand with the Sumis. I’ll count on you to chat and translate for me.”

“Okay.” They walked over to the Tutane “lords”—seven of the twelve came this year—and struck up a conversation. Thornton knew all of them.

The crowd was beginning to thin out when Estoiyaju, the Queen’s personal secretary, approached Chris. “Lord, Her Majesties favor your company.”

“Certainly.” Chris looked around; neither was in the hall. Dukterésto had left shortly after the arrival of the food, leaving the royal duties to her daughter, Estoibidhé. Estoiyaju headed for the door, so Chris nodded goodbye to Thornton and followed.

Dukterésto had rested and was looking less tired, but Chris was struck by how old she looked. Her glasses were thick; her eyesight was failing. Chris bowed to both. “Your Majesties, I am at your service.”

“Thank you, Lord. Please sit with us.” Dukterésto pointed to a chair nearby. She looked at him. “You are looking as white-haired as I, lord, and you walk with a limp.”

“We’re both gaining in years, Your Majesty.”

She leaned forward, so he repeated himself more loudly so she could hear.

“Indeed we are,” she agreed. “That relates to my question to you. It has now been over fourteen years since the Sumi rebellion and the Battle of the Palisade. The guerilla war

lasted a year longer, then the ring leaders were captured and sent into exile. I wonder whether it is now time to let them return home.”

“You are generous, Your Majesty. I am not in direct contact with Rébu, the one we used to call Kwéteru. He lives in Moruagras with his Tutane wife and two children and earns a living as a high school and genadema teacher and as a translator of articles into Sumi. I gather Skandu has army permission to keep in touch with him.”

“He does. Kwéteru’s writings, even the ones in Sumi, have come to avoid politics entirely. He seems reconciled to a world united under one royal family.”

“From the little I’ve heard, I gather that is true. He has continued work on his Sumi-Eryan dictionary and has written some historical articles. He is a brilliant scholar and that has become his focus.”

“What are the ethical principles, in your opinion?” asked Estoibidhé.

“There are several. Justice calls for punishment and that must be respected. The punishment must fit the crime; perhaps fourteen years of exile is sufficient, perhaps not. There’s a role for mercy as well. And I would include the principle of consultation. Perhaps you should ask people on Sumilara what they think. Countess Ninti is very aware of what is happening on the island.”

Estoibidhé turned to her mother. “Consultation; that’s a principle to consider.”

Dukterésto nodded. “And my former daughter in law is knowledgeable, as well as powerful. What else, lord?”

Chris considered. “It is important to ascertain whether the exiles are contrite, or whether hatred still burns in their hearts. Exile no longer provides much isolation, but it is a statement about the danger of hatred and its dangers.”

“We’ll ask Skandu about that. Yes, if they are contrite and the island wants them back, a pardon would be a good thing.” Dukterésto nodded. “Thank you for your ideas, lord. How is your family?”

“They are quite well, thank you. My oldest grandson, Jordanu, just completed his kwétɛryeri. I am immensely proud of him.”

“He has become famous; I’ve heard of him as well. His praises constantly emanate from the Exchequer. Aryéstu says he has made development monies much more efficient.”

“He helped with the grange setups as well; we gave three hundred thousand dhanay to seventy-three granges in three months and we have a very good idea how it was spent. My tomi’s accountants helped with that, too. Your Majesty, this reminds me of a request I have for you.”

“Speak freely, lord.”

“Your Majesty, I am lord of three townships, a highly unusual situation that causes jealousy. You granted a fourth, Pértatranisé, to my son in law, Amosu. Jordanu has been serving as lord of Melita for several years and I would like the township granted to him. My son has begun to serve as lord of South Ménwika and I would like that arrangement formalized as well.”

“Your son Dhoru is your heir?”

“Indeed, and he will be Lord of Ménwika some day. But he has two sons and this would give both of them a township eventually. I have four grandsons altogether.”

“If you want a fourth township, I will grant it to you, Lord! Every piece of land you touch has become filled with prosperous inhabitants. Since you believe in equality of

men and women, I will grant townships to your daughters and granddaughters as well, if you ask. I grant your wish that Jordanu and Dhoru become lords of Melita and South Ménwika. They should be here on Penkudiu when I announce the new appointments. I will elevate you to the honorary position of ‘Count of the New Cities’ in gratitude to your service to the kingdom.

“Yesterday the Exchequer reported that the harvest will be twenty percent larger than last year and will bring in ten percent more tax revenue. The grange effort has brought the crown a million dhanay more income than anticipated. That means the rural people have four million dhanay more money to spend than before; about 100 dhanay per household. Your proposal to expand the grange has been an instant success; I have been convinced of its wisdom. On Penkudiu I will announce that all the increase in taxes will go to rural development.”

Chris smiled. “Thank you, your Majesty. I am sure much good can be done with that money.”

Reread and edited, 6/16/13, 8/31/17, 11/30/24

385.

Engagement

mid Kaiménu, 17/635

Thornton walked around the camping area set aside for the fifteen Bahá'í youth volunteers. It was close to Gréjpola's big, powerful spring and its azure pool, and under a grove of citrus trees that bore tiny bitter limes. A narrow footbridge of two logs sawn in half, laid next to each other, provided access to Gréjpola itself.

"I guess this heap of stones was put here so they can build a fireplace," said Lébé. She pointed to a bluff nearby. "There are plenty of loose stones over there, too, if they want to make it bigger. But where will they get firewood?"

"We'll have to haul it in," said Thornton, casting a glance at the prairie all around. "The Kwétékwone send a pickup truck south almost every day to haul back a load for the village."

"Much better than cattle dung; I suppose that's all they used to have. I'd put the tent for the girls under these three trees to the right of the footbridge and the tent for the boys to the left of it, with the fireplace in between. The farther apart, the better."

"I agree. I wish we could spend our time here, rather than Wurontroba."

Lébé shook her head. "Wurontroba's cooler, the kids are safer there, and I've already started my research. But I suppose you'll come here almost every day?"

"Here, or Sértroba, or Awstroba. I'm going to be pretty busy driving around. When I come here I can bring a big pile of firewood."

"The youth team in Wurontroba can collect it for the team here."

“Let’s go talk to Menégékwes and Déodatu.” They turned and carefully balanced on the logs to cross the river to the village, then headed for the lord’s compound. They stopped at Déodatu’s first to bring him along. “I hope you’ll have time to supervise the youth every day.”

“Yes; I’ve run youth groups in several places, so I know how to do it. The grange and quarries won’t take that much time; the quarries run themselves and the grange doesn’t have anything yet!”

“But a tractor is arriving in a few weeks, so you’ll have that. I know you have experience.”

“Don’t worry; everything will be fine. How does the campsite look?”

Good.”

They reached Menégékwes’s front doorway—which was wide open—and walked in. The lord was at his desk. “Come in. So, Dhoru; you are now Lord Dhoru.”

“Yes, much to my surprise. My father had asked me to attend all Village Council meetings in South Ménwika last year, so I’m already familiar with the place.”

“And it’s expanding fast.” He sounded skeptical.

“Yes, father decided to sell the entire township to farmers. We’re setting up the irrigation in sections, farther and farther south; each section’s a bit higher. The land isn’t selling as fast as we had hoped because people are staying at home and joining local granges.”

“One project competes against another. I’ll ignore the fact that the land was taken from our cousins, the Médhelons.”

“All of Melwika was taken from Tutane,” added Thornton. Paradoxically, that seemed to help.

“So, when will the volunteers be here?” asked the lord.

“By sunset,” replied Thornton. “They’ll leave Mëddwoglubas by bus in the morning there, which is already afternoon here. The first day they’ll set up their camp and adjust to the change of time.”

“We need to plan their time,” said Déodatu. “Most of them can give classes, but they are also available to do several hours of heavy work every day with us. Twelve of the fifteen are young men.”

“As long as they stay away from our girls.”

“I’ve started to draw up a list of projects,” said Déodatu. “The school has three classrooms and needs at least three more; five would be better—”

“A soccer field.”

Déodatu frowned. “Soccer field? Alright. If we can finish the classrooms, a bathhouse would be wise as well, next to the river—”

“A soccer field,” Menégékwes repeated, more loudly.

Déodatu nodded. “I’ll add it to the list. We also need a site for a water tower so that we can establish a village water system. It would also help us fight fires. The grange would like to deepen the irrigation canal along the southern edge—”

“A soccer field! Start with that. Put it over by the lime grove where they plan to camp. It’ll bring us prestige. These other things are nice, but less important.”

“But lord, we need classrooms and—”

“Start with a soccer field!”

“Alright,” he agreed.

“The Kwolone have two or three,” added Menegékwes. “After that, the classrooms.”

“As Déodatu noted, the Bahá’í youth volunteers are not here just to do hard physical labor,” exclaimed Thornton. “When they do heavy work, they should be no more than half the team doing it. That way their presence encourages local work as well.”

“I understand. They are guests, not slaves; we will feed them well, and the six Kwétékwone youth in Kadakvas and Akeldædra will be treated equally well, I am sure. I think this Bahá’í project is a marvelous idea. It’s good for our kids, too; the ones that volunteer will see some of the world, and the ones that stay will have a bit of the world come to them.”

“Among the fifteen are Sumis, Khermdhunans, Eryan, and Tutane,” confirmed Thornton. “Altogether, 350 youth are participating.”

“Are they giving Bahá’í classes?”

“They will be here to support the development of the tribe.”

“They can give Bahá’í classes; they shouldn’t be shy. If my people are curious and want to know, they are free to study the Bahá’í Faith. My only concern would be coercion, but I know you don’t do that. I am very impressed by the Bahá’í teachings. I read *The Proclamation of Bahá’u’lláh*.”

“Really? What did you think?” asked Thornton.

“It’s remarkably foresighted and very prophetic; Bahá’u’lláh doesn’t mince words. Déodatu got me a copy of *The Secret of Divine Civilization* and a prayer book,

and I'm working through both of them as best I can. Standard Eryan is strange to me, and I can't read very quickly."

"I'm pleased the book is useful and helpful, my lord," said Thornton. "I'll be here once or twice a week for either a morning or an afternoon to give classes. This month I'm offering Introduction to Ecology here, Wurontroba, Awstroba, and Sértroba. Next month it'll be General Science, with a focus on geology, and it'll culminate in a four-day field trip to the Spine Mountains for everyone who wants to go."

"And I'll be giving a course in geography this month and Eryan folk tales next month," added Lébé. "Thank you for allowing us to use a classroom in the school."

"I'm sure the school will be packed. We are grateful for your contributions," replied Menégékwes. "The Kwétékwone are no longer an isolated and backward people. We are doing well and we will do better. Your assistance is warmly welcomed and much appreciated."

"Thank you. There's one assistance you can give to us, if you please: write the chiefs of the Mémengone and Késtone, and perhaps even the Ghéslone and Géndone. They have refused any Bahá'í youth volunteers for two years because they don't want their people to become Bahá'ís. Even if we don't teach our Faith there, people ask and read about it. Except for the Ghéslone, these tribes are the poorest in the world. They don't have granges or factories. The Mémengone and Késtone have many problems, also, because so many of their people have lived in Kostékhéma and have been attracted to drinking and prostitution."

"They do have many problems. Alright, I'll write to my cousins."

Jordan hunted around for a parking space for ten minutes, then gave up and parked in the basement of the Mennea Tomi building. “I’m pretty sure there’s space here all day because Thornton and family are in Wurontroba,” he explained to Tiamaté as he drove their steam car into the garage.

“Now we just have to find Mitru Miller’s house, and that may take a while, and we’re late.”

“Engagement parties don’t start on time, anyway,” replied Jordan. He closed the air supply to the firebox and locked the steering wheel, then they stepped out of the car. He closed the garage’s outer door and locked it; he had a key.

“You’ve got the present? This way,” he said.

They followed Temple Street across the Péskakwés—which was reduced to a trickle because of the demand for irrigation water that the summer heat caused—up the hill to Temple Square, then west toward the headquarters of Mitru Transportation, which was built into Mitru’s house. “I wonder why they’re holding the party here?” asked Tiamaté.

“I bet Manu Miller isn’t altogether pleased that his daughter’s marrying Primanu,” said Jordan. “Manu believes in prestige, and Primanu’s about as common as one can get.”

“Of course, he’s now a big customer for the foundry!”

“I’m not sure that counts. Besides, Mitru’s a Bahá’í.” Jordan rang the doorbell and a moment later Mitru himself answered.

“Hey, Jordan, Alláh-u-Abhá. Welcome, come in.”

“Alláh-u-Abhá.” They shook hands. “How are you doing?”

“Pretty well; as usual for this time of year, I’m tearing out my hair trying to get everyone to Isurdhuna who wants to attend the annual pilgrimage. I think this year we’ll break the fifty thousand mark! Gramé and Primanu are greeting people in the parlor. This way.” He led them to the reception for his niece and her groom to be.

A dozen were there already, either schoolmates or Bahá’í friends from their many youth volunteer projects. They made a beeline to the affianced couple. “Congratulations on your plans!” said Tiamaté to Gramé. “And you’re getting married this winter?”

“Or sooner; it depends on when he can replace his pickup truck and tent with a house trailer or a house!”

“So, you’ll go out with him?”

“He needs someone who knows accounting!”

“That’s true,” agreed Primanu. “And she’s incredibly good.”

“So, you’re marrying her to save money,” mused Jordan.

Primanu laughed, then shook his head when Gramé looked at him funny. “I’m scheduling a group of projects for the central western shore starting in late fall so we can rent a house in Pértatranisér and work from there. Then we’ll move to the southern shore for six months, then the western shore for six months.”

“So, you don’t want our house trailer?” asked Sulokwé.

Primanu shook his head. “I don’t think so. I need something permanent like a house. My life has been too transitory.”

Sulokwé nodded, recalling Primanu’s difficult childhood and abandonment.

Tomasu turned to Jordan. “We have a bit of an announcement. We’re going to have a baby.”

“Really? Congratulations!” said Jordan.

Tiamaté hugged Sulokwé. “Marvelous, when is the baby due?”

“Mid winter; six months. That’s another reason we’ll be selling the house trailer and settling here.”

“I’ll still be going out to do biogas jobs,” said Tomasu. “But the big ones will all be finished by then. I’ve been doing biogas for two years now, serving 100 villages and up to a hundred thousand people. The village pipelines are installed; starting this fall we’ll mostly be adding digesters to meet increasing demand.”

“You just finished one hundred digesters in Gordha, right?” asked Jordan.

Tomasu nodded. “A huge job, but they slaughter six thousand cattle per year and have a mountain of manure to convert to methane. Gordha wants a pipeline to Melwika, but no one will invest in it, so they want to truck gas here! Melwika and Melita both have a hundred digesters. The Kwolone want fifty this fall. I’ll be plenty busy, visiting work teams and negotiating new business.”

“Still, there’s a limit to the number of digesters,” said Sulokwé. “In a year or two, we’ll need to look for another line of work.”

“I might need help,” said Primanu. “There are at least five years of new water and sewer systems to install!”

“I have a better idea,” said Tomasu, looking at Primanu and Gramé, who was his niece, though they were the same age. “We need to think about something we can become partners in, in a few years.”

Primanu’s face brightened. “That’d be fun.”

“We’ve got plenty of time to think about it,” said Tomasu. “You’re working in the North Shore now?”

“The northeast polar basin, then west of Bellædha and Jærnstisér, then the western shore. Thanks to Jordan’s help, I’ve been able to bunch jobs together geographically.”

“For a fee,” added Jordan.

“Are you buying a house?” Tiamaté asked Sulokwé.

“We just did! South of here near the Mælwika grange; we’re staying there tonight for the first time. It’s small; we want to start with something modest and add a wing when we need more room.”

“We’ve got three agris for a garden and orchard,” added Tomasu. “There’s a walled garden, too, so the little one can’t wander away.” He looked at Sulokwé affectionately. It prompted Tiamaté to look at Jordan.

“So, Lord Jordanu; how do you like being an aristocrat?” asked Tomasu, envy in his voice.

“It’s strange. I’m not any more powerful than I was before; I’ve already been going to Mælitæ City Council meetings for a few years. But people look at me differently and treat me differently! I don’t like it.”

“It is strange,” agreed Tiamaté.

“Maybe I should get a big estate in one of those South Shore townships they’re settling,” said Tomasu to Sulokwé, half seriously.

Just then the door to the parlor opened and in came Budhéstu and Blorakwé. She was carrying their two-month old baby; Budhéstu followed with a basket of diapers.

“You made it and brought the baby!” said Sulokwé, delighted. She kissed Blorakwé.

Tiamaté hurried over, mesmerized by the little one. “How’s it going?” she asked.

“Pretty well, I guess. Sleeping is hard, but I’m finally making enough milk for him. He may be beginning to smile.”

“What’s his name?” asked Jordan.

“Budhkandu,” replied Budhéstu.

“‘Enlightened of the glory’ I’ve never heard that name before.”

“We invented it. Anything that ends in ‘estu’ can end in ‘kandu’ instead.”

Budhéstu smiled. “He’s a sweet little boy.”

“He’ll be smart like his parents, too,” said Tomasu.

“So, are the two of you permanently in Isurdhuna?” asked Sulokwé.

Budhéstu shrugged. “For another year or two. There’s a lot we can do with mental health there. Lord Yusbéru is young and pretty enlightened and many of the older people settling there have a bit of wealth, so they can afford counseling.”

“Of course, they regard us as being too young to give them advice,” said Blorakwé. “But the baby helps a lot; people who are in grief or are sick respond to him when they don’t respond to us.”

“What about a mental hospital?” asked Jordan.

Budhéstu nodded. “That’s under consideration, but we’re still not sure what it would be like.”

Tiamaté offered to take the baby and Blorakwé handed him to her. “How are you balancing career and motherhood?”

“Right now, I’m mostly mothering! He’s too little! But in a few months we’ll hire a wet nurse, and we’re sending out the diapers—sometimes fifty a day—to the laundry, so that helps a lot.”

“There are a lot of young Bahá’í village women who need a chance to serve as a nanny in a house in the city,” said Gramé. “They might go on to get an education as a result, too.”

Tiamaté nodded. Jordan watched her hold the baby and he could see that she wanted a child. After a minute she passed the baby to him and he cuddled the sleeping form as well. Then he handed the child to Sulokwé, turned to Tiamaté, and smiled.

“How are the youth groups working out in Kërda?” asked Primanu.

Budhéstu nodded. “We have three, fifteen kids each, and so far they’ve been accepted pretty well. Tomasu, remember Lord Sugwétu in Lèpawsnédha, in the northern valley?”

“Yes, he forbade us to do anything at all about the Faith last year.”

“He’s letting the youth group do tutoring and help repair the water system. So you helped them make some progress.”

“Wow, glad to hear it.”

“There’s a twelve-kid group in the northeastern polar basin and it includes two kids from Khermdhuna,” added Primanu. “They’ve been accepted! So there’s some progress there as well.”

“Good,” said Jordan. He turned to Sulokwé and she handed Budhkandu to him again. He took the baby and held him a long time before passing him along.

A few others arrived, then Primanu and Gramé opened the presents and Mitru entered to load the table with food. They had a long, joyful banquet, followed by singing and lots of conversation. As the sun set and twilight began to gather, the guests began to leave. Jordan and Tiamaté headed along Temple Street toward the Mennea house.

“Budhkandu is so cute,” said Jordan.

“Wasn’t he? Jor, what do you think? Is it time? My mom thought so at the graduation two weeks ago, and so did May.”

“I saw the way you were holding the baby.” He paused. “What do you think? It’s a big change in our lives.”

“It is, but I feel ready.”

“Alright. I suppose I’m ready, too.”

“You don’t sound it.”

“It’ll take some getting used to. It’s a bigger commitment for you than for me, in many ways.”

“I suppose, but you’ll be a responsible father.”

“I’ll try.” He stopped walking. They had reached an intersection; turn right and they’d come to the garage entrance of the tomi; continue straight, and they’d go uphill to the Mennea house. “What do you say? If we go into the house it may be quite a while before we can leave. They’ll want us to stay the night.”

“Let’s go home.”

“Alright.” They turned right and headed for the car.

Reread and edited, 6/16/13, 8/31/17, 11/30/24

386.

Pardon

Early Dhonménu/late July 17/635

“Chris, we’re not going to crank up tractor production any faster,” said John, when he saw Chris outside his office door.

Chris was startled by John’s comment. “I wish you’d reconsider, John. At this rate, it’ll take two years to make enough.”

“I know, but the alternative is to crank up production, then close the line when demand crashes. That’s not good for the granges, either, and it’s bad on business; steady production is cheapest. Has the palace released that rural development money yet? Because half of it will be spent buying manufactured goods made in Melwika, and a large fraction of that will come to me.”

“Not yet; I think it’ll be next week.” Chris sat. “The Queens are wrapping up their business in Meddoakwés; they head for the western shore in a few days. The harvests are still coming in farther north and south; the million dhanay of extra taxes was an estimate, but it appears to be accurate. The All-Grange Council is getting 350,000 dhanay to allocate to granges, mostly to buy heavy equipment, and that would be 100 tractors if you could make them!”

“Over two years, like I said. Meanwhile, they can buy trucks and pickups. I suppose a lot of the rest will go to water pipes, corrugated nickel-steel sheeting for the roofs of schools, etc.”

Chris nodded. “Probably. Like you said, it’ll be allocated for rural development and will come back to the urban areas pretty fast. But I didn’t come here about that. Can you write a letter to General Roktekester supporting the construction of a good road—graveled now, paved later—from Melwika to the north polar basin.”

“Sure; it’d be good for business.”

“Dentastéa, the last village in the eastern basin, is almost due north of here. They have a network of dirt tracks for hunters, suitable for pickups, and one track comes within five kilometers of the dirt track that extends to the headwaters of the Arjakwés. Linking the tracks and improving them into seventy kilometers of decent road will cost 150,000 dhanay. But here’s the advantage: it’ll connect to 100 kilometers of decent road to Khermdhuna, so the entire north polar basin will be less than a three hour drive. If an eighty-kilometer road is built from Khermdhuna due south to Isurdhuna, Isurdhuna will be less than four hours from here; right now it’s five or six. If an electric line is built along the new route, the power grid will be more resilient.”

“That would help. Sure, I’ll write the letter. Does the army have the money, though?”

“They always seem to. They’re scheduled to spend 1.7 million dhanay on roads this year. Tax revenues keep going up!”

“I know, I’m selling more than ever and paying more taxes than ever. Demand for pickups and steam cars has been solid and production is higher this year, though efficiency will go up only two or three percent. How much longer can the economy grow like this, Chris? It worries me.”

“We’ll probably have to slow down, but conditions seem right for annual increases of eight to ten percent for at least another decade. We have a long way to go before prosperity begins to reach the levels of the wealthier parts of Earth. There’s still plenty of demand for factory goods, plenty of workers seeking employment, plenty of literate workers improving their education . . . next year the first children born after my family’s arrival will turn 18, and in the years after that we’ll begin to get the baby boom flooding out of high school and into the job market. There’s a lot of growth left, John. My worry is the sustainability of the boom if we don’t plant forests fast enough. Right now we’re cutting them down too fast.”

“That’s something the Count of the New Cities can do something about.”

“I have been! I’m starting forestry companies. Here in Melwika the forest cover’s increasing.”

“True.” John looked at Chris, contemplating his friend’s new title. “So, what do you plan to do with the new title?”

“Do with the title? Nothing.”

“So, you’re earning over a million dhanay a year and so am I, but you get a title and I don’t.”

“This isn’t about money and profits, it’s about service. The queen gave it to me spontaneously to thank me for serving the kingdom.”

“It’s always about religion.”

“No; it’s about values, what’s important. Money—profits—are important, but they are a means to an end, not an end in itself. Service and carrying forward an ever advancing civilization are the important values to me, and to the queens as well.”

“Then in other words, you are Count because you are a Bahá’í.”

Chris scowled impatiently. “No, I don’t think so. First, if I were a Bahá’í and not interested in service, I wouldn’t have been elevated. Second, Queen Dukterésto seems to be wrapping up various loose ends in her life. You saw that in some of the other appointments she announced last month. She’s also working on some pardons.”

John nodded. “Speaking of appointments. Do you think I can get any lordships for some of my sons? She just created three more townships.”

“I think she’ll create one or two a year, but there’s a surplus of farmland, so she can’t create them too quickly. The sons you want to elevate to lordships haven’t done any service to the crown, so you’d have to buy lordships for them. But the palace isn’t short on funds, so that won’t happen soon, either. I suggest they seek becoming ‘estate lords’ in some of the new townships.”

“Can they become estate lords in South Ménwika?”

“We have seventeen or eighteen thousand agris that are unassigned. We’ll have to come up with a financial arrangement, though, because I need the money, now that my taxes have gone way up.”

“Chris, I’ll be frank with you. I’m getting old and I feel it. If I were to die tomorrow, there’d be a huge fight among my sons. I need to settle the arguments now, and that means giving land to as many sons as possible. There are three or four of them that can’t manage a business.”

“You’ve got some land, too, west and northeast of town.”

“I can make one of them an estate lord here in Melwika, maybe two, but I’d rather make them estate lords elsewhere. Even South Ménwika’s pretty close.”

Chris nodded. “Okay, now I understand you. There’s unassigned land within various townships. I’ll talk to Lord Kandékwes, find out what’s available, and get back to you. But it’ll be a month or two because I’m about to go around the sea.”

“Have a good trip. I appreciate the help. And I’ll write the letter to Roktækestær.”

Lua slowly climbed the stairs that ran up the face of Mæddwoglubas’s cliff, being careful to watch where she was going in the bright Skandalight and the evening’s residual twilight. At least it was now cool; summers in Mæddwoglubas tended to be hot and humid.

At the top of the stairs the sidewalk ran across the lawn between the old fort and the temple to Esto. She could see the bright lights of workmen toiling on the new Institute building near the Bahá’í House of Worship. She slowly ambled to the side entrance of the fort, entered, and crossed the central courtyard to the southern wing, which served as the city’s hotel. She walked to room 16, which served as her “living room,” and opened the door.

Behruz was sitting at a large table with his Persian class: Sugérsé, Wérbéru, and Awsané, reviewing the Hidden Words of Bahá'u'llah together and discussing the imagery. He looked up. “Good evening! We’re doing an extra session tonight.”

“Because it’s so interesting,” added Sugérsé.

“And we learn faster this way than doing homework,” added Wérbéru, a bright-eyed young man from the nearby village of Delongagras.

“We have to finish up pretty soon, though,” said Behruz. “Because I have to get ready for tomorrow morning’s class on the Book of Certitude, and I think Sugérsé needs to prepare for the afternoon class she’s giving.”

“I do,” she confirmed.

“How’s the Arabic class going?” asked Lua.

“It’s too difficult for me,” replied Behruz. “It’s been too long. I think we’ll have to arrange for classes by Estodatu. When I tutored him in Arabic twelve years ago, he was practically teaching me the language! He’s a genius. You can give him a dictionary and a grammar book and a month later he can speak to you in the language!”

“Perhaps,” said Lua. She didn’t want to sound negative, but she knew the Central Spiritual Assembly wouldn’t hire a non-Bahá’í alcoholic who chased boys to teach at a Bahá’í institution. “And the Sumi course?”

“Randu is a great teacher,” replied Sugérsé, and Wérbéru, who was also taking the course, nodded. “By the way, did you hear that the great Sumi scholar, Rébu, has been pardoned?”

“Really?” said Lua, surprised. “No, I didn’t hear! I’ve been in the hospital all day, and it has been really busy.”

“It was on the radio two hours ago when we were starting class,” said Behruz. “I was surprised. The entire group of exiles was pardoned. They all plan to return to Sumilara.”

“I wonder whether we can get him to come here for a lecture, sometime,” said Sugérsé.

“Maybe,” said Lua. “Remember the Central Spiritual Assembly hasn’t yet figured out whom it will invite and under what circumstances. I’d like to invite Tanaravi to talk about Sumi philosophy, and Andrunu of Isurdhuna. It’d be fascinating. I think we’ll get there in a year or two. But right now the Institute operates out of a few hotel rooms and rented high school classrooms. We need to get it started and develop its reputation.”

“One way to do that is to invite philosophers, though,” said Sugérsé. “We don’t have Bahá’í philosophers or theologians—not yet—but May is quite a good thinker and speaker, as are Randu, Modolubu, Estobaisu, and Mitrubbéru. We have resources.”

“I agree, and in ten or fifteen years we’ll have a whole new crop, maybe including the three of you,” said Behruz. “So keep studying! I am very pleased with the fifteen we gleaned from the nearly four hundred youth who were here for orientation last month.”

Lua nodded. “I agree; they’re very bright. If we can find fifteen every year and keep them here for a summer of special classes, then arrange scholarships so they can go to génadema and come back here during summers and other times for Bahá’í courses, we’ll build quite a strong community.”

“I heard from Estobaisu today,” said Behruz. “He called to tell us he had received permissions to teach from Andrunu, so he will be able to come to Melwika Génadema this fall to teach a course on ‘Concepts of God in the Bahá’í, Eryan, and Sumi Systems.’ He’ll try out part of it here next month with our students.”

“Excellent!” said Lua. “It’s more important to work Bahá’í material into the génadema than to offer specialized classes here, as important as they are. We aren’t creating a class of priests, after all.” She yawned. “I don’t want to interrupt your class any longer, and I’m pretty tired anyway. I have a very long day tomorrow at Ora Hospital; in

the last six months the number of people seeking medical help has doubled and it's quite a strain on them."

"And on you!" added Behruz.

Spondanu, the chairman of the North Shore Tomi, looked around the meeting. "Do we have any additional business?" he asked.

"I just got the updated financial report," said Sulubaru, Vice President of Prosperity Bank for the North Shore and the tomi's treasurer. He held up a piece of paper. "Profits for the year ending the 30th of Kaiménu were 10.6 percent; 101,000 dhanay."

"A bit better than the preliminary figures," said Chris, nodding. "That's very good. The Arjakwés Tomi got 8.4%, Lɛpawsona Tomi got 7.1%."

"That's after investments?" asked Lubéstu, second son of the Lord of Manuagras.

"Correct."

"Perhaps we should use some of that to open an additional factory."

"Then the old houses don't get their return on investment, including your father," replied Spondanu. "Shall we adjourn?"

"Yes," said everyone.

"Then we are adjourned," said Spondanu. He began to pick up his papers. "Lord Chris, do you need anything to make a report to Her Majesties?"

"Thank you, no, I have all the reports, and I took notes. You should feel free to report to them as well. I'm sure they will hear from various people."

"I'll probably have a chance at the general audience tomorrow. How does Queen Dukteréstó look to you?"

“Perhaps a bit tired,” replied Chris, carefully. “I saw her over a month ago during the Grand Court, and then last week in Sullendha. She asks sharp questions.”

“I’m sure. You see her often, don’t you?”

“Only over the summer. I stay ahead of her party by about three days to meet with the tomi boards. I don’t see her at every stop, either; perhaps every two or three stops. Sometimes I just see Estoiyaju.”

“Ah, yes, Estoiyaju. Thank you for attending, Lord. It’s always helpful to hear about the different tomis and what’s happening around the world.”

“I’ll add glowing reports about the North Shore Tomi to my comments as I travel, too. Next year we’ll break the one million dhanay revenue barrier! That’ll be quite an achievement.”

“We’re generating a lot of prosperity for the province. Thank you.”

Chris nodded and finished putting his papers into his satchel. Lubéstu walked over. “Lord, I want to thank you for everything you have done for this world and this province,” he said. “I have been fascinated by all the news about your projects. I try to follow them closely.”

“I regret that my service is limited.” Chris smiled; it was a ritual response, but he meant it.

“I’m sure. I have an unusual request. I was talking to my father this morning before coming to this meeting and he asked me to invite you to dinner tonight, if possible; or perhaps tomorrow night.”

“Your father? Lord Estobejnu?”

Lubéstu saw the surprise on Chris's face. "He has had a change of heart, Lord. Don't worry; he has no plan to poison you!"

"Really? Estobejnu has not exactly been generous to me."

"Manuagras has benefited immensely from the three thousand agris its people farm in Melita, and the Manuagras Grange is very successful because our people have a lot of experience in Melita. We have a factory too, as you know. He wants to talk about timber and . . . well, the future of the world."

"Really? I would be honored to visit your father, honored Lubéstu. Tonight is best because my wife is busy with the city's gabruli until quite late."

"Seven bells? Here's a card with our address." Lubéstu handed Chris a business card.

Chris looked at the address in Belledha and nodded. "I'll see you at seven bells, then."

"Thank you." Lubéstu headed out of the room, happy the invitation had been accepted. Chris closed his satchel and followed slowly behind, limping a bit because of the arthritis in his right hip.

It was six bells already and the Palace Hotel Belledha was busy because of all the people associated with the Queens' retinue who were arriving. As he crossed the lobby he saw General Roktekestær sitting in a luxurious chair next to General Perku. "Hail Lord!" Roktekestær said to Chris.

"Hail, honored Generals and Lords!" replied Chris, a bit uneasy to see them.

“Come sit a moment and let your leg rest,” said Roktekester, noting Chris’s limp. “Perhaps you can help us solve the latest crisis facing the unity of the kingdom; a crisis brought on by your approach, I might add.”

“What crisis?” asked Chris, sitting.

“You didn’t hear about Rébu’s speech?” said Roktekester, surprised.

“No, I’ve been in a day-long meeting. Is he in Sumilara already? He was pardoned just two days ago.”

“He said it took him longer to convince his Eryan wife to accompany him and to pack than to get to Anartu. Duke Lamuno sent taxis all the way to Moruagras to pick up all the exiles and their families! They rolled into Anartu mid afternoon, after a heroes’ welcome at the docks of Amurueqluma. I wish the queen had never pardoned them.”

“From Rébu’s speech, I take it he was the ringleader,” said Perku.

“I think so; we’ll know pretty soon, since he said he’s writing a book. We should have executed him.” Roktekester shook his head.

“What did he say?” Chris reminded them.

“That the days of military resistance were over and the days of electoral resistance had begun,” replied Roktekester. “That if Sumilara votes for independence, the monarchy won’t be able to hold onto the island. That the Sumi don’t need the Eryan and can achieve greatness and glory again.”

“And all we need to do is blockade the island and let them run out of light bulbs and steam engines, and they’ll come around,” replied Perku.

“I don’t agree. If they get determined, they’ll also get stubborn. They’ll use guerilla action against the garrison and proudly hold out.”

“I agree with Perku, more or less,” said Chris. “I wouldn’t start by blockading everything. I’d start small. Allow no exports of Sumi goods and charge them for a few essential imports; that would drain the island of silver and gold. Gradually reduce the range and quantity of imports allowed. Independence and glory are incompatible; if they want independence, let them discover the poverty that comes from it. But I should add that this world is interdependent and that means everyone’s voice must be heard, including the Sumis. If you want them part of the kingdom, they have to have the freedom to succeed, like everyone else.”

“And that’s what they have now,” agreed Perku. “I think every mainland city now has a Sumitown; even Belledha. The lower Arjakwés and Swadnoma have four thousand Sumis scattered about. Many mainland Sumis are intermarrying with Eryan and their kids will speak Eryan. They’re a remarkable people, but the only way they can make an impact is to be part of the kingdom. Stuck on their island, which lacks iron, copper, and coal, their opportunities will be very limited.”

Roktekester shrugged. “I hope you’re right. General Dontekester wants to march his garrison through downtown Anartu as a show of strength. When the Supreme Military Council meets tomorrow, most people won’t be content to ignore the troublemakers.”

“We can’t ignore them, but we must respond to them very skillfully, because we need Sumi public opinion on our side,” said Perku.

“Stress the economic practicalities of union, and don’t demand loyalty to the queens; just assume it,” said Chris. “And be sure to issue all statements in good, clear Sumi as well as Eryan.”

“That I agree with,” said Roktekester.

“And I must get to my room and rest a few minutes before my dinner appointment,” said Chris. “Have a good evening, gentlemen.” He rose, shook hands with both friends, and headed to his room.

He didn’t have much time to rest; he washed off a day of sweat and changed clothes, and it was time to leave. He grabbed a cane this time to help with the 800-meter walk to the northeastern end of town, where the bigger, richer houses were. He set out early to take his time and explore the city a bit. He needed the exercise anyway.

Bellédha had largely recovered from the prison revolt and partial destruction by fire twelve years earlier. Before that crisis, perhaps half the city’s houses had been decrepit, with scattered ruins of buildings that had spontaneously collapsed. The twelve-year transformation had made the new city unrecognizable. The street grid, dating back to the Sumi era and the Eryan army camp that followed, was still there, but hardly any old buildings remained; they had been torn down or refurbished. The average income had gone from 600 dhanay to 1800 per year and the city showed it. No one was walking around in rags that exposed their private parts.

Estobejnu’s house was large and attractive; the city was fifteen kilometers from Manuagras, a convenient daily commute by steam car. Manuagras, or “peasant fields”—manu could also be translated “man” or as “slave”—had once been a village of local Sumis enslaved after the area was conquered. The population now spoke Eryan but looked Sumi, except for the orange-blond ruling family, whose hair color belied their military origins. Seventeen years earlier when the Mennea family arrived, the population of Manuagras technically was still bound to the soil of the village, though Estobejnu had not enforced the 600-year arrangement. He had fought schools, improved transportation,

and democratization fiercely and had developed a simmering hatred for the Menneas. Consequently, Chris was quite nervous when he approached the front door.

He knocked using the fancy door knocker; it was the sort only the Sumis made. A moment later Lubéstu opened the door. “Lord, thank you for coming. You are right on time. Please come in.”

“Thank you. What a beautiful house.”

“Thank you, we’ve developed and beautified it in phases, just like the village. Come back and meet my father.” Lubéstu led Chris across a large parlor to a formal dining room. Estobejnu was not a traditional lord who sat on the floor on pillows; a large, beautiful mahogany dining table and eighteen matching chairs filled the space, with a beautiful table cloth, china plates, silverware, and napkins. A radio stood on a small table in the corner; Chris was surprised to hear Mitrubbéru’s Bahá’í program playing faintly. Chris immediately noticed that the lord appeared to be about the same age as him or older; his skin had wrinkles, his hair was white, and unlike Chris, he had only three or four teeth.

Estobejnu rose from the head of the table as they entered. “Lord Kristobéru, welcome to my home.” He extended his hands. Chris walked over, leaned his cane against the table, and they shook hands.

“I’m honored to meet you, Lord Estobejnu. Thank you for inviting me to dinner.”

“Thank you for coming.” Estobejnu pointed to the cane. “We have the same cane! Look!” he picked up his own oak cane with a mastodon-ivory head. “We’ll have to be careful not to confuse them. Please sit.” He gestured to the right-hand chair.

“Thank you.” Chris sat. “They are almost exactly the same, aren’t they? I like the carving on your handle!”

“The people in Dentastéa do exquisite ivory work.”

“My son bought mine from them, after going out with a group of them to count mastodons and mammoths. So the story of this cane is an opportunity to help people express their art and support their family, and the need to protect our animals so that our grandchildren can have beautiful ivory as well.”

“That’s a good story. Are you in town for the queens’ visit?”

“I arrived two days before her and will leave two days before as well. I am part of an ‘advance team’; I meet with the tomi board, various businesses, and make a few business deals. If I am lucky I meet with the queens to tell them what I see, then move on.”

He smiled. “It sounds tiring and fascinating.”

“Exactly. Challenging at my age, also.”

“Here, allow me to serve you.” Estobejnu stood, hobbled over, and filled Chris’s plate with stew, then filled his own and Lubéstu’s. “May our wives join us?”

“Of course, I would be very happy to meet them.”

“Rudhrané! Sodté!” he called. A moment later the two wives entered. Chris shook hands with both graciously and chatted a bit with them, then everyone sat again to eat.

“My oldest son is out hunting; I’m sorry you won’t meet him.”

“I’m sorry, too. You have quite a limp, Lord, worse than mine.”

“I fell off a horse ten years ago and broke my leg. I’m lucky to have it at all, actually; I got a very dangerous infection that lasted half a year, even with antibiotics.”

“Praise Esto that you are alive. My story is much less interesting; I have arthritis.”

“At least my leg doesn’t hurt all the time.” Estobejnu took a bit of rice and considered his next sentence. “As you may know, southeast of Manuagras is a large area of unbroken forest; at least 120 square kilometers. Route 1 passes through it between Manuagras and Akeldædra. I have heard about your timber company in Penkakwés; one of the lords there is my second cousin. I am wondering whether we could establish a similar company for that area.”

Chris nodded. “I suppose there are two initial questions to consider: is there a market for the timber, and can the company get permission to use the land. Regarding the first, some of that timber is big enough for lumber, but many of the trees are small and would be better suited for fuel. There is still a lot of flooded forest to cut by boat.”

“Not so much. There were some violent storms this winter and the waves knocked over many of the dead trees, which sank to the bottom. This is the last summer the fuel cutters will be able to cut forests along the coast. As for access: Manuagras was the first village established southeast of Bellædha. At that time, my family was given the entire area. All the other villages are colonies of Manuagras. That unused forest belongs to me, and I can get that confirmed in writing.”

“The Lepawsona Timber Company is owned by the province, two townships, and several individuals, including myself; the votes were split according to a formula we agreed on at the beginning. There are three other timber companies forming in the south and southeast with similar arrangements. All four companies are committed to more than just cutting trees; they are also committed to reforestation. The reason is because the demand for timber is steadily growing and right now we are cutting the forests faster than

they can grow back naturally. This is especially true now that the submerged forests are rotting away. It is expensive to replant and manage forests, but a managed forest will produce two or three times as much wood as a natural one, and it can be set up to yield more game as well.”

“What do you mean by ‘manage’?”

“A company needs a nursery to grow seedlings, or must buy seedlings from someone else. They are planted in rows a certain number of meters apart. The first year they need fertilizer and possibly water to get started properly. After that, brush needs to be removed every few years. When the trees get taller it may be necessary to prune a few or remove a few if they get diseased. For every five or ten lumbermen you need one to plant and manage, so it adds expense. But it guarantees a job to the worker’s children and a healthy forest that will be the home of abundant game. A forest, also, holds the soil in place and when it rains it prevents the water from running off and cutting gullies. Erosion and gulying will destroy an area; the later forests would be poor in quality and the land would not be good for farming or pasture.”

“So, if we wanted to start a Manuagras Timber Company, how would we do it?”

“Would you include a saw mill?”

“I see. My village already has a team of five or ten men cutting submerged timber, so I’d want to employ them. I should add that I’d like to own 51% of the company.”

“I see. I am not opposed to that arrangement. I would not want 49%; probably more like 20% or 25%, and I would want my tomi office in Bellédha to audit the books periodically. I can find other investors; I know of a son of John Miller who might be interested.”

“I see. So, how much?”

“You have workers and I have a tomi, so that’s a good start. We’d need one or two pickups, we’d need to rent some heavy equipment to clear a few logging roads to move the timber out, we’d want to hire the Geological Survey to give us a map and recommend where to put the roads, and we’d want to buy some of the best steel axes and two-man saws. Before we start we’d want to ascertain the market and make a plan; if we’re talking about 120 square kilometers, assuming we can harvest every twenty-five years, we’d want to clear no more than five square kilometers per year. All of that will cost maybe 20,000 dhanay. A tree nursery would add a few thousand. A good saw mill starts at ten thousand.”

“You know all the figures off the top of your head!”

“I’m starting three at once; this would be the fourth. The figures are based on our experience in Lɛpawsona.”

“Could we get started without all of this?”

“Yes, but it would be more chaotic. One cannot get a twenty-five year contract to supply timber, so one starts with whatever contracts one can get. The geological survey’s work will cost one or two thousand and it’s best to do the entire area at once. But the logging roads are cleared as needed and the nursery is built in stages.”

“I see. That makes sense.”

“What is your interest in the company, Lord?” asked Chris.

“My interest? I suppose if you had asked me twelve years ago I would have said one thing: money for my family. I am looking for a job for Lubéstu, since he is my second son and will not inherit my title to Manuagras. But my interest now, most

definitely, is to improve and develop the lot of my people. That would not have been a consideration ten or even five years ago, but now it is.”

“If I may ask, how has this change in your views come about?”

Estobejnu hesitated for a moment. “My two sons have both gone to génadema, and they have brought me some new views. Two years ago Lubéstu helped me learn to read with the new system, and since then I have learned some basic accounting as well.”

“That’s very impressive, Lord.”

“But that isn’t the entire story,” interrupted Rudhrané, raising her voice slightly. Chris was startled by that; women did not usually contradict their husbands in front of guests. Estobejnu looked at her crossly, but she stared back at him expectantly.

“It has been a process,” he conceded. “You know, Lord Kristobéru, sixteen years ago when I heard about Məlwika, a group of us petitioned the Queen to send in the army and wipe it out. Thirteen years ago, I favored the effort of the Kwolone to destroy it. When the first steam wagon rolled through Belledha, I feared it would end the isolation of my village and province and destroy my power over my people. When the telephone wires were laid through here, I heard of people cutting them, and I approved. Then my oldest daughter fell ill at her home in Məddoakwés and a telephone call notified us she was near death’s door, and a steam wagon got us to the city quickly, and she was already recovering in the hospital. That was the first benefit I saw from the new knowledge.

“Then Məlita was established and my peasants wanted land there as well. I was furious, but saw if I did not arrange a landed estate there I would lose them entirely. They went back and forth, I was angry, and my tax revenues and profits suddenly increased.

“Then factories were established in Belledha. I didn’t care, until I discovered my peasants were taking the buses back and forth to work there, and I was angry. When I saw some of their taxes coming back to me I was surprised. I favored a regional tomi and managed to get Lubéstu on the board, because he’s bright and trained. The tomi agreed to put factories in Manuagras; we now have a flour mill and bakery and we’re getting a fish processing plant this year. Meanwhile, my people—I won’t call them peasants any more—are earning three or four times as much as they used to earn, and so am I. They no longer shiver in the winter or at night. Their children no longer die of colds and poor food.

“The thing that shocked and angered me the most happened six years ago when we held the first election. I was sure there would be a revolution. But the people elected were not young hotheads, but respected older farmers and tradesmen. They did a reasonably good job in the provincial assembly. When someone came to me demanding that I resolve some land disputes, I called on the top five vote getters and made them a committee to handle the matter. Then they talked among themselves and asked me whether we could get the two other major streets in the village paved and another classroom added to the school, so I did that. Now my oldest son meets with them monthly.”

“He even prepares an agenda,” added Lubéstu.

“And . . .” said Rudhrané, pointing to the radio.

“Yes, the Bahá’í program. When I first began to listen to Widulubu’s attacks on the Bahá’í community last year, I thought the Bahá’ís were a very dangerous group undermining the morality of our society. I told the Bahá’ís in Manuagras to stop meeting

or I would raise their taxes. I listened to Mitrubbéru too, but didn't trust him. But then I heard Mitrubbéru sing and spoke to him briefly afterward and I was impressed by his kindness to everyone. Then the youth service volunteers came to offer all sorts of help and I turned them down. Now I regret that and see that Widulubu is spreading hate and, I think, lies.”

“We will respond to anything he says that is inaccurate, but in a kind way,” replied Chris. “We cannot control his behavior, but we can control our own.”

“So, Lord, what is the future of this world? And what is the future of lords in this world?” asked Estobėjnu, leaning toward Chris intently.

“They are related questions. Bahá'u'llah says, referring to entire kingdoms, that both a monarch and a consultative body are important. The monarchy brings a long-term perspective; the representatives of the people bring the diversity of views and needs of the general population. We assume the same principle applies at the provincial and local levels. So lords have an important role to play. The principle of consultation says that the lords and the people must bring their different perspectives together and merge them into one reality.”

“And what do we do when the merge does not happen?”

“Consultation does not guarantee success, and as we know, people are complicated and have many motivations. The Bahá'í texts say that people must be elected based on their experience, wisdom, and service, not based on what they say they will do. Decisions sometimes are a struggle.”

“And if no agreement is reached?”

“Bahá'u'llah does not say the monarchy can overrule the people, or vice versa. We have to resolve that issue ourselves. Right now on Éra the monarch can overrule everyone. Right now lords have no legal obligation to consult with the people of their villages. I felt the need to consult with the people of Melwika, Lord Miller agreed, and we held the first election almost thirteen years ago. The Council started with three elected positions, four appointed positions, and two lords. It gradually acquired more responsibilities. It is one reason Melwika is prosperous and stable.”

“So, what is the future of this world? Prosperity and stability?”

“That is my hope and desire. Civil Wars and the collapse of civilization have happened on Éra several times in the past. The new knowledge makes stability and prosperity possible, but does not guarantee it. We have to work hard to maintain them. I think that means having principles of behavior, such as justice, service, fairness to all, trying to elevate everyone, honoring everyone, respecting everyone, being open minded. Together, these are the characteristics of a state Bahá'is call unity.”

“I’ve never heard ‘unity’ explained so well before. Mitrubbéru’s talks and interviews are fascinating; I now listen to all his shows.”

“I think many people are listening to him one day and Widulubu the next.”

“But there’s such a contrast between them!” exclaimed Rudhrané. “Widulubu offers nothing new about the hymns and customs of Widumaj; he just insists the Bahá'is are wrong and attacks. Every show is an attack. Can he not offer something on which we can build a new world? The old world is gone and we need new guidance!”

Chris nodded. “I think that is true, my lady. So much is changing. In a world where everyone can read and write, you can’t refuse to listen to their ideas.”

“Including women,” she added.

“I wouldn’t worry about Widulubu,” said Estobejnu. “Ultimately, he is defeating himself.”

“So, lord, what future do you see for this world?” asked Chris.

“Before tonight, I would not have said that I see a world of prosperity, stability, and peace. But you have given words to what I think can be achieved.”

“Then I hope we will be able to talk further about the principles and values that make such a world possible,” said Chris.

Reread and edited, 6/16/13, 8/31/17, 11/30/24

387.

A Passing

22-23 Dhonménu, 17/635

Chris slowly trudged up the last steps of Luktrudema's ancient lighthouse. "Are you sure this structure is stable, Captain?"

Captain Skandéstu nodded vigorously. "Definitely. The Army engineers completed the reconstruction. It's a great tourist attraction, 25 meters high and on top of a fifty-meter hill. Are you sure you can make it, Lord?"

"Well, here I am." Chris climbed the last step, a bit out of breath, and smiled. "Not bad for 71, eh?"

"I think you have a very strong heart. Anyway, take a look." Skandéstu pointed out over the sea. "We've removed almost all of the forest within view; the exception is there." He pointed to a spot where the prominence of land below them jutted out into the sea. "The area off the point is full of rocks and shoals, so we couldn't remove the trees there."

Chris nodded at the white skeletons of old forest giants. "I see a few, but they're widely scattered."

"When the sea finished rising seven and a half years ago, that area was jungle, just like the mainland next to it. If you try to hike to the end of this peninsula, you'll find it hard going; the trees and vines are pretty thick. And now a few whitened trunks are all that are left. There were three or four times as many trees before winter, but the storms felled a lot of them."

“How’s the wood?”

Skandéstu shook his head. “Fit for making blue water gas, but not much else. We haven’t been able to sell tropical hardwoods from the sea bottom for almost a year and a half.”

“I had no idea the undersea forests were disappearing so fast. Three thousand square kilometers of trees. . . . and we harvested how much? A tenth of it?”

“Something like that. In another year the resource will no longer be economic.”

“What will you do then?”

“Sell the boat and go into timber cutting on land. Ora has already started to issue logging contracts to keep the steel mill supplied with charcoal. We’re still supplying the Bruagras blue water gas plant, but they know we won’t be able to provide them enough wood this winter. They’ve accumulated a year’s supply of wood over the last six years, so there’s time to identify areas in the Snowy Mountains where we can cut the timber they need.”

“They could import coal from Kërda and Mèlwika, too. Thank you, Captain, this is very helpful. Under sea forests are running out everywhere, so living forests will have to be used. But they have to be replanted, too. I’ll talk to Amos about forest land in the township and investments we can make to ensure the supply of wood.”

“Excellent, lord. Thank you for your interest. I planned to talk to Lord Amos later in the summer or fall about the situation.”

They slowly descended the hundred steps to the base of the ancient Sumi tower. As they neared the bottom, Chris added, “Captain, I am curious: do you and your men listen to the radio while you’re out on the sea?”

“Sometimes when we’re driving in or back out. Why?”

“I’m curious to know what people listen to. We have no idea what’s popular.”

“The first trip out is before the eclipse, so we listen to the show before *The World Table*, which we listen to during the eclipse; we usually lower the anchor before the eclipse begins, eat a very early lunch, and listen. In the afternoon we listen to Mitrubberu’s afternoon show and sometimes if we’re out late enough we’ll listen to his Bahá’í show, mostly for the music.”

“Not Widulubu’s?”

“No, he’s argumentative and that’s not good when the crew’s tired. Besides, he doesn’t play music.”

Chris nodded in thanks. They stepped out of the tower and followed the path back to Luktrudema, where they said their goodbyes. Chris found Liz at the house Thornton and Lébé had built some years back, but had donated to the art institute that the family was funding. “How are the artists?” he asked.

“Doing pretty good work; want to see?”

“Sure.” He followed Liz around the first floor and admired the various paintings and sculptures, then sat and had tea with the artists. It was good to sit.

“Let me drive; you look beat,” Liz said, when they got back into the rover.

“Okay. Skandéstu showed me the sea. There’s only one tiny area that hasn’t been cleared by the marine loggers, and it consists of a few scattered, skeletal trunks. The marine timber supply will be exhausted by this winter, not because we cut it all, but because it has rotted and fallen into the water.”

“What a waste.”

“There’s nothing we can do about it; it would have cost millions of dhanay to cut it all and store it.” He looked at the farmland—former jungle—lining the road to Pértatranisér.

“So, where will the western shore get its charcoal and gas?”

“Biogas has reached a limit; it meets all the summer residential demand, but only a third of the winter residential demand and very little industrial demand. This shore no longer has no coal; the one deposit we found is under the sea. There are still plenty of trees, but a conservation program will be needed to maintain the forests.”

“Sounds like you have your work cut out for you.”

“I’m afraid so. How’s the new gabruli?”

“I didn’t spend much time with them because they aren’t very organized yet; I got to the Art Institute early. Luktrudema is still pretty small for a gabruli. But they have bought two sewing machines, so sewing’s their focus right now.”

“That’s a good start.”

“It is. I also got a call from Rudhrané, wife of Lord Estobejnu, asking about a gabruli in Manuagras, but she really wanted to ask questions about the Faith. We talked about half an hour. How’s Luktrudema’s new grange?”

“It’s doing fine because they were always part of Pértatranisér’s, so they have plenty of tractors and other equipment.”

“I thought so. You really do look tired; it’s been a long day already. Tonight, after we have dinner with Amos and May and the kids, let’s retire early, relax in our room, and get a good rest, okay? Because I’m pretty tired, too.”

“Fine with me. I have a day-long meeting tomorrow with the provincial tomi board, then I have to prepare a report for Her Majesties about Rudhisér’s progress on its development plan. I think I’ll add a report about deforestation, if I can get the info.”

They fell silent. Liz drove; Chris looked at the tropical countryside fly by. The route was now paved, so the ride was smooth and fast.

When they drove into the courtyard of their house in Pértatranisér, everyone poured out to see them. They kissed the kids—Skandé was 15, Marié 12—Amos and May grabbed the suitcases from the back of the rover, and they all trooped into the air conditioning.

“We’ve got dinner ready,” said May. “How was Isurdhuna?”

“Oppressively crowded; 65,000 people are at the festival, 50,000 from outside the valley,” said Liz. “We got out of the valley before dawn the last day, while the roads were empty.”

“And this place will see 10,000 or more stop to shop, starting tomorrow morning,” said Chris.

“Everyone has stocked shelves and is bracing for the crush,” said Amos. “I walked around the shopping area this afternoon checking for bottle necks. We’ve expanded the camping area across the river.”

“Luktrudema’s got a bigger camping area next to the race track,” added Chris. “A lot of people are going there after pilgrimage. Ora, Néfa, Tripola, Melita, even Bellédha have created shopping packages to get people to stop for a few days. Before we left, Mitru said it looked like a lot of people would do that, too.”

“People are a bit more prosperous every year,” agreed Amos. “What’s household income up to, now?”

“About 2,200 dhanay before taxes,” said Chris. “It was 900 when we arrived. And the population has grown more than fifty percent. That’s what worries me; the economy is now almost five times larger. The flooded forests are almost completely cut or rotted away, so now we have to cut living forests. I need your help, Amos. I don’t think the forests can sustain so much cutting, but I don’t have the data to be sure.”

“Thornton’s the one to ask,” said Amos. “The survey probably has the data. The palace should commission a big study.”

“How much forest does Pértatranisér have?”

“Quite a bit. I manage 2,000 hectares, but there’s 5,000 more, farther up the slopes. Are you thinking of establishing a timber company here?”

“Yes, to introduce forestry management techniques to the western shore.”

Amos nodded. “Good idea. Our relations with the other Rudhisér townships has steadily improved and I think we could create a company covering a broader area, with more investors. Possibly the company could get the Vésa contract as well.”

“That’s thinking big,” said Chris.

“There’s a complete set of topographic maps in the génadema library,” added Amos. “Any possibility Dr. Thornton could come give some forestry courses at the School of Agriculture?”

Chris nodded. “I’ll try to persuade him. He’s setting up three forestry companies right now, so he’s the one to set up one or more here. Lébé and the kids could come and spend the fall semester here as well.”

Yes!” exclaimed Marié, who was exactly the same age as her cousin Kalé.

“It’d be good for them to get to know the western shore,” agreed Liz. “Thornton and Lébé could teach in several génademas.”

“I’ll call him in a few hours,” said Chris. “Wurontroba’s almost exactly twelve hours ahead of us, so they’ll be getting up soon.”

As Kékanu chanted the last few syllables of the last hymn in the cycle of Widumaj’s revelation, the audience rose to its feet to cheer. He bowed briefly to them, then exited the stage. The complete cycle had been chanted for another year. The world had heard his revelation; creation had been renewed for another four seasons of change.

He and the dozen other chanters who had split the three-day marathon returned to stage to bow again. In the royal box, Queen Dukterésto turned to her daughter and said, “This heat is getting to me; I must return to the palace.”

“It’s over; no one will be offended,” said Estoibidhé.

“Are you alright, Your Majesty?” asked Estoiyaju, ever concerned about the elder queen’s health.

“Yes, thank you Estoiyaju; I’m tired, but it’s because of the heat.” She rose and walked slowly out of the royal box, accompanied by Estoiyaju, who helped her down the stairs. The royal coach awaited outside the door.

“Shall I accompany you?”

Dukterésto shook her head. “No, that’s not necessary. Thank you, Estoiyaju. I’ll see you at supper. If I’m late, have someone wake me.”

“Of course.” He helped her climb into the coach, which was hot from the sun. He bowed and she smiled. The driver latched the door, jumped into the driver’s seat, and headed for the palace. Estoiyaju watched her go, then turned back to the royal booth to serve Queen Estoibidhé.

Dukterésto’s coach began to move away. The elder queen looked out the coach’s window at the crowd beginning to pour from the field, then turned east to see the tomb of Widumaj glistening white in the late afternoon sunlight. She took a deep breath and closed her eyes to nap. As she sunk into a restful sleep her heart skipped a beat, then stopped.

After dinner, Chris, Liz, Amos, and May enjoyed coffee and tea together in the parlor.

“So, May, how’s the summer institute going?” Chris asked.

“Very well,” she replied. “We accepted eighteen students, three advanced and fifteen introductory, and we’re giving them some pretty intensive courses. They’re asking great questions and making some good presentations on Bahá’í topics. By the end of the summer, they’ll have learned quite a lot. We need to run something similar for members of spiritual assemblies, cluster teaching committees, and Auxiliaries over the winter; it’ll help them answer the difficult questions that are coming our way more often.”

“Isn’t that true,” agreed Chris. “When Liz and I were in Bellédha, a very conservative lord invited me to dinner and shocked me by asking very intelligent and interesting questions about the Faith! It turns out, he has been listening to Mitrubbéru’s radio show religiously for the last year, and he has come around about many things, including the uplift of his village, Manuagras.”

“Manuagras?” said Amos. “Lord Estobęjnu? He has been a central enemy to development!”

“Not any more. He has two college-educated sons, they’ve helped him learn to read and write, he watched the changes with an open mind, and now he’s listening to Mitrubbėru. That happened two weeks ago. Since then, I’ve been asking people whether they listen to Mitrubbėru and Widulubu. Most people say yes, they listen to Mitrubbėru, and then add a comment that they used to listen to Widulubu, but now they don’t, or if they still do that they don’t like his tone.”

“But that could be biased because they know who you are, dear,” pointed out Liz. “We need a proper survey.”

“Exactly,” said Chris. “You have nothing like radio ratings, Amos. Is that something you can commission?”

Amos nodded. “I think we should. It wouldn’t cost too much. The big problem is figuring out how to obtain a random sample. We can’t ask the Bahá’is to help; that’d guarantee skewed results.”

“What about printing a survey in the newspapers and asking people to return it?” said May. “That would favor the urban literate population, but we could probably supplement it with some village surveys.”

“We could pay school teachers to administer a certain number in their village,” said Liz. “We can probably plug into that network.”

“Yes, that would do it. We could use the network of teachers who report weather data, or the network of photographers who get their photographic supplies from Melwika,” said Amos.

“I think it’s important,” said Chris. “There are obvious commercial applications; advertising rates could be adjusted based on audience, for example. But more important for the Faith, I think we’ll see that tens of thousands of people listen to Mitrubbéru’s Bahá’í show every day, and even more listen at least once a week. Once a week for a year adds up to sixty-two hours of exposure to the Bahá’í Faith. All those prayers, facts, and good impressions add up. This world is not like the vast majority of areas on Earth, where only a small fraction of the population knows about Bahá’u’lláh. I suspect everyone has heard of Him and knows a little something of Bahá’í teachings. We can’t base our teaching on what worked on Earth. I’m not even sure we can follow exactly the plans the Universal House of Justice lays down for Earth, either. Éra is already five percent Bahá’í. We’re five doublings from universal acceptance of Bahá’u’lláh. And almost everyone has heard something! We need an entirely new radio strategy, a new study class strategy, a new Bahá’í Studies Institute strategy, a new summer youth volunteer strategy . . . we need to be very innovative and bold.”

“I think that’s right,” agreed Liz. “We have to have more challenging and intelligent radio programs, on the one hand, and more soft, musically oriented ones, on the other. We have to reach a wider variety of people.”

“And the Bahá’í Studies Institute has to train people to answer difficult questions and respond to attacks,” added May. “But you’re not on the Central Spiritual Assembly any more, dad, so you can’t bring this to them.”

“I have an open invitation to meet with them any time,” replied Chris. “And I have more time than before to think of strategies and plans.”

Just then the clock on the wall struck out 8 o'clock. Chris looked at it. "I'd better call Thornton before he gets involved in classes." He pulled out his cellular telephone, punched Thornton's number, and put it on speaker so everyone could hear.

There was a pause. "Good morning, or evening, dad," said Thornton a moment later.

"Hey, Thor. Your mom and I are sitting in the parlor in Pértatranisér with Amos and May, chatting. How are you? How's Lébé and the kids?"

"We're fine. It's 8 a.m. here; I guess it's about 8 p.m. there. I don't have much time to talk; I have a forestry class. It's supposed to start now, but everything in Wurontróba's pretty informal. Lébé's on her way to Awstroba right now to give a class on basic nutrition to a women's group."

"I hope they're thinking about a gabruli!" said Liz.

"Yes, Lébé's working on that, and she's going to offer a class about the Wiki Bank and microcredit. The three forestry companies are all coming along, dad. The Wurontróba Timber Company has a board of directors—the same as the tribal tomi—and the Kwétékwone elders will finalize the membership of their Board next week. The South Shore appointment looks hopeless; you'll have to cut a lot of political knots that I can't cut. The Krésone now want their forestry company to be part of the tribal tomi, just like the grange. They claim the headwaters of the Ornakwés and a lot of the mountains are forested, but the border with the Kaitere is not defined, so that's an issue to resolve."

"Thanks for the update; the progress is impressive. Say, Thornton, we need a Pértatranisér Timber Company, too. The flooded forests are almost all cut or sunk; there's very little cheap marine timber left to harvest. Pértatranisér has 5,000 agris of highland

forest. I'm going to work on an arrangement for a Rudhisér Timber Company, too, and maybe we can set one up for Vésipa. Otherwise, the forests here will be cut down in fifteen or twenty years and we'll have a crisis. Amos and I were thinking you and the family could come here for the fall, you and Lébé could teach various courses at the génademas, and you could organize the timber companies."

"But what about the kids?"

"We have excellent schools here," replied Amos.

"True, and Kalé will be thrilled to go to school with Marié, but Jalalu starts High School this fall, and that'll be hard on him."

"It'd be just the fall semester," said Amos. "We use the Məlwika curriculum, so he wouldn't be too disoriented."

"Changing teachers and classes is pretty disorienting."

"He could always stay in Məlwika with us," added Liz.

"Maybe . . . dad, if we do that, I'm not coming all the way back to Məlwika for City Council meetings. It'd take too much time."

"You might want to come back occasionally anyway," said Chris. "You're chair of Geology and Director of the Geological Survey."

"True. I don't know. . . I'll think about it."

"Please do," said Chris.

Just then there was a lot of shouting in the street outside the house. Chris looked up, distracted, but he couldn't make out the words, so he turned back to the phone. But there was shouting at Thornton's end as well. "What the . . .?" said Thornton. Then he

added, “Dad! They just said over the radio that Queen Dukterésto has died suddenly in Isurdhuna!”

“What? Really?”

“That’s what they’re shouting outside!” added May. ““The Queen is dead, long live the Queen!””

“Oh, no!” said Liz. “Poor Estoibidhé!”

“Unbelievable,” added Amos. He headed to the radio.

“I better get off the phone, dad, this place is getting chaotic!” said Thornton.

“We’ll talk more later!”

“Okay, bye!” said Chris, closing the phone.

Just then the radio came on. It was tuned to channel 1 and Kεkanu himself was on, calmly recapping the life of Queen Dukterésto. “It must be true,” said Liz. “We should call, Chris.”

“I doubt we’ll get through.”

“We should try.”

Chris nodded and picked up the house phone. “Operator,” he heard a moment later.

“Could you connect me to the royal palace in Isurdhuna, please.”

“All those lines are busy, Lord Kristoféru.”

“When one opens up, could you connect and call me back, please? We want to extend our condolences to Her Majesty, Queen Estoibidhé.”

“Certainly, Lord.”

Chris closed the phone. Liz was looking very grave. “This will upset all sorts of balances. Two monarchs, one a follower of the traditional religion, one a Bahá’í. But now only the Bahá’í monarch will be left. There will be criticisms, complaints, and resistance.”

“It’ll be difficult on all of us,” agreed Chris.

“But a crisis is an opportunity as well,” noted Amos.

They listened to the radio. Dukterésto had reigned fifty years, from age 18 to age 68; in terrestrial years she had been 71, just like Chris Mennea. Kekanu fleshed out his biography with all sorts of personal anecdotes about the monarch, then began to summarize major events of her reign.

Chris’s phone rang. He looked at the screen; it was Lua. “Alláh-u-Abhá.”

“Alláh-u-Abhá, dad. I just got a call from Aréjé; she and Stauréstu are in Isurdhuna helping the hospital with the overflow of patients during the festival. Aréjé was summoned to the palace immediately with Widumajlébé, an Isurdhuna physician, and they pronounced her dead from a heart attack. They asked me to come immediately and assist in an autopsy.”

“Wow. We’re all in Pértatranisér; if you need to, stop by. We tried to call the palace, but were told by the operator that no lines were available.”

“I’m sure. I’ll pass your condolences on to the queen.”

“Thank you, honey, and drive carefully! We may see you; there will be a funeral.”

“There will, but I haven’t heard the details. I’d better go. Bye.”

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388.

Controversies

late Dhonménu, 17/635

Estoibidhé spent the night in a vigil by her mother's side. Sometimes she paced; sometimes she prayed; sometimes she cried; sometimes she was just in shock. Duke Kandékwes spent the night in a chair outside the royal bedchamber, when he wasn't comforting his children. The entire palace was silent and forlorn.

Not so Isurdhuna, which was awake and filled with grief. A huge crowd gathered at the performance field where chanters chanted the hymns of Widumaj traditionally associated with funerals. Several large bonfires were lit and crowds gathered around them. An angry group threw stones through all the windows of the Isurdhuna Bahá'í Center and set it ablaze, prompting Lord Yusdu to mobilize the police. Eryan funerals were usually associated with night vigils, so tens of thousands remained awake that night in the sacred city.

Shortly after dawn broke, Estoibidhé exited her mother's chamber and asked for a light breakfast. The family ate together in silence. As they finished, her eldest, fifteen year old Prince Mégékwes, said, "Mother, where does grandmother go? The priests always said the souls went to Skanda and lived together in perfect happiness and harmony, but we now know that Skanda is a planet about 13,000 kilometers in diameter with no oxygen in its atmosphere and with a lot of volcanoes and storms."

“The priests misunderstood Widumaj, I think,” replied Estoibidhé. “Widumaj said the souls went to a *kanda dha*, a ‘glorious place,’ not to *Skanda*, ‘the bright or glorious place.’ I think Widumaj was referring to the *kandatém réja*, the Abhá Kingdom.”

“Or maybe the whole thing is an old superstition,” sighed Kandékwes skeptically.

Just then Estoiyaju came to the door. “Your Majesty, when you are ready, I would have a minute of your time.”

“Enter please, Estoiyaju. Your eyes are bloodshot.”

“I spent the night in private contemplation and prayer, Your Majesty. How are you doing?”

“As best as I can. This is a terrible, terrible shock and blow. She was my pillar of strength and dearest confidant.”

“She guided you well for three years. You are now ready to assume the throne on your own.”

“May Esto guide and protect me. I prayed fervently for her soul all night. How can I help you? Please sit with us.”

“Thank you, Your Majesty.” Estoiyaju sat. “There are fifty thousand people in the campgrounds wondering whether to get on buses and head home or wait for the funeral. About a quarter of all the lords in the kingdom are here and wondering the same. We need to announce a plan for the funeral. If we take her back to Meddoakwés, we can have the funeral and cremation right away upon arrival, and her ashes can be laid to rest in the royal tomb.”

Estoibidhé nodded. “Thank you for your advice, honored Estoiyaju. I can count on you for the best and wisest advice. But in this case I am moved to contemplate another

plan. There are a dozen kings laid to rest here; our ancestors, and not necessarily distant ones. My great grandfather is buried here. Since we have so many people and lords here already, the funeral will be here tomorrow.”

Estoiyaju bowed. “Very well, Your Majesty. That also gives time for the autopsy. Dr. Lua arrived right before dawn and is resting here in the palace, as there was no room for her anywhere else, even the hospital.”

“Excellent. Please summon her; I’d like to see her right away. One other detail about the funeral, Estoiyaju. I have decided that my mother will be buried, not cremated. That is a custom we have followed in the past as well.”

Estoiyaju was startled. “Not for three hundred years! Poor people are buried; lords and royalty are cremated!”

“Not in this case. I want my mother buried temporarily in the tomb of her grandfather, then when we can erect a fitting monument to her we will move her to her own mausoleum. Summon Kekanu as well; I need his advice to plan the program.”

“Your Majesty, this will be a very controversial move, not the least because you are following Bahá’í burial practices that your mother never would have requested.”

“I agree, if we had asked her she would have requested cremation, and I would have followed her request. But we never spoke about her funeral. Now I deeply regret the oversight; somehow I thought she’d live forever. These are not just Bahá’í practices; they are the old customs of Kerda. They are the ones we will follow.”

“Very well, Your Majesty,” said Estoiyaju. He rose, bowed, and left the room.

“This is an unnecessary opportunity for your enemies, my dear,” said Kandékwes.

Estoibidhé sighed. “I know, but this is what came to me after a night of contemplation. I can’t burn my mother’s body or move it a long distance; those actions don’t feel right any more. Burying her here tomorrow is a logical choice.”

“I agree, this is the right place, but forswearing cremation is not the right action.”

“I suppose not.”

They said nothing further. Estoibidhé sipped her coffee and considered the funeral. Then came a knock on the door. “Dr. Lua, please come in.”

“Your Majesty, I am in a state of shock to hear about your mother’s passing. I am so sorry. My mother and father also extend their condolences. They have been trying to call, but it is impossible to get through.”

“Everyone has been calling, and I haven’t been taking any calls. I just spent the night with her, praying for her progress.”

“I’m sure she will be warmly and enthusiastically welcomed. Her actions have advanced this kingdom more than any other monarch’s.”

“So, you will be performing an autopsy. Will you be able to determine the cause of death?”

“Possibly, and we will be able to rule out some causes. There are already rumors, reported on the radio, that she was poisoned.”

“Poisoned!”

“Yes, by the Bahá’ís, so that a Bahá’í monarch could rule the kingdom. An autopsy should be able to refute that accusation. Aréjé told me that the coachman opened the door to the coach after driving her back to the palace from the performance grounds and thought she was asleep. She had a slight smile on her lips.”

“Yes, that’s what I heard.”

“Then you can be sure she died painlessly. It’s rare, but it does happen that a heart will just stop. She was prescribed medication for an irregular heartbeat.”

“Yes, but she decided not to take it here in the holy valley because the sacredness is supposed to protect you from illness.”

“If physical existence itself is an illness the valley protects one from, then it succeeded. We can be sure she is in a better place.”

“Yes, I know that, and as many have said already, she should have a great reward. She guided the kingdom through some of the most difficult and tumultuous transitions in history. Every city but Mæddoakwés and Melwika had unrest, Sumilara revolted, and a social revolution has changed life forever. She could have ignored the changes or fought them instead of guiding them.”

“Exactly true, Your Majesty. We will need to move her to the hospital in an ambulance. Stauréstu, Aréjé, and Widumajlébé are awaiting.”

“Very well. Follow me; I’ll take you to her chamber. We can call the ambulance from there.”

Getting into the Kërda Valley was difficult; the traffic was backed up for several kilometers in order to switchback down the escarpment. Chris drove Liz and Amos. They barely arrived in time.

The grand casket with the queen lay open in the Steja, the portico surrounding the tomb of Widumaj, with a line filing by each side. Lords were able to cut into the line; commoners had to wait for hours. Chris and the others had a few seconds to view Her

Majesty, who was beautiful in death. Shortly thereafter the lines were stopped and the service began, a series of hymns of Widumaj followed by an elaborate ritual by the priests of Isurdhuna to open the way for her soul to travel to Skanda. When it ended a dozen men picked up the casket and carried it several dozen meters to the mausoleum of her grandfather. They placed it into the stone crypt and closed the opening. Thousands lined up to pass the crypt; many threw flowers on it.

All dukes, lords, and their spouses were invited to the royal palace for a reception, so Chris, Liz, and Amos walked two kilometers to the palace; driving was impossible through the crowd. In the reception hall, a few lords glared at Chris suspiciously; he tried to smile back. “They think we’re taking over,” said Liz.

“They do,” agreed Chris. “Her passing is a tragedy, too.”

General Roktekester walked over to Chris. “It was a beautiful ceremony.”

“It was, Lord General. But it does not compensate for the tragedy of her early death. She could have lived a decade more.”

“She could. It makes me feel my mortality; I am two years her senior. I suppose I should retire. Perhaps the new Queen will have some ideas about that.”

“It’s too soon for her to make any changes, though.”

“Perhaps. What do you say to the rumor that the Central Spiritual Assembly consulted with her about holding a Bahá’í funeral?”

“It’s not true. The only Bahá’ís she has talked to are the doctors who examined Queen Dukterésto’s mortal remains, and they never discussed funeral arrangements. I heard that straight from my daughter.”

“I see. Can you pledge that the Central Bahá’í Assembly will never consult with her about matters of state?”

“My friend, I am no longer on the Central Spiritual Assembly, and I am not the Queen, so I have no control over her questions or their responses.”

Roktekester looked at Chris for a moment. “Fair enough, lord and friend. I suppose I’m getting too anxious about the future. These last few days have been very difficult for me. There has been scattered hooliganism in Anartu and Kalagaduru. That hasn’t been reported on the radio because everyone has been obsessed with the funeral, but the army has to deal with it. General Dontekester has reacted swiftly and rather strongly; perhaps too strongly, I fear.”

“The combination of Rébu’s pardon and Her Majesty’s passing has been unfortunate.”

“Especially because the army has no idea how this new queen will react to the situation! I haven’t been able to sleep because of the worry.”

“Right now, everyone could use a good night’s sleep before making difficult decisions.”

“Quite true. Traditionally, everything is shut down completely for at least forty days, but that’s not possible now. And this is a potential moment of weakness for the kingdom, to be exploited by enemies.”

“I will pray for you, General.”

“Thank you. I barely have time to pay attention to Ornakwés; fortunately the town has a very reliable mayor and town council. The harvest increased in volume slightly, but declined in value slightly. But manufacturing is booming.”

Chris nodded. “We’re on target to sell 1100 modular homes this year, and Miller Motors may sell 1,500 vehicles. Sales of radios, telephones, light bulbs, ice boxes, gas stoves, and flush toilets keep going up.”

Roktekester chuckled at that. “By the way, tell Thornton that this year’s festival and the funeral afterward have proved the importance of his proposal for a road from Melwika to Isurdhuna via the northern polar basin. This valley needs a fourth way in and out, and one that provides a shortcut from the eastern shore. When I get home I’m going to order a full engineering survey right away and I hope we can start clearing the roadway by the end of the summer. It will be a paved six-meter highway. I’m dedicating a million dhanay over two years to complete it.”

“Really? Have you mentioned all this to Duke Déolu?”

“I will in a week or two. He’ll be unhappy; he doesn’t want Khermdhuna to be on the road to anything, let alone to Kerda. But that’s not a rational reason to reject the project. The valley needs a northern entrance in the summer and the polar basin will benefit from the additional traffic.”

Just then Werétrakester approached them. Chris hadn’t seen the prophet for at least six months and was surprised to see that his hair was completely white and he walked with a stoop, even though he was barely sixty years old. Chris extended both hands. “Hail, friend prophet.”

“Hail, Lord Chris. So, what does this event bode for the kingdom’s future?”

“You are the prophet and seer, not I. I think we all worry about the same things; the transition from one monarch to the other and how the new arrangement will work. In

this case, I see fairly little to worry about because Estoibidhé has been managing the kingdom's affairs extensively for three years. Growth has continued."

"It has, but growth is not everything," replied Werétrakester. "A dream I had in the spring has continued to haunt me ever since. A mother eagle is out looking for food for her babies in the nest. She sees a mouse, but just before she dives to get it she sees a gold necklace lying on the ground. She scoops it up in her beak instead and brings it to her babies, then goes out again. This time a gold coin on the ground distracts her. Pretty soon the nest is full of gold, but the baby eagles are starving."

"But what does it mean?" asked Roktekester.

"That sometimes leaders quest for the wrong thing."

"That is true as a general rule, but I don't see how that applies to this queen," said Chris.

"Perhaps, but you are the one who focused on 'development' not I."

Roktekester looked at Chris worriedly. But just then a hush fell over the crowd. The queen had stepped onto a platform on one side of the hall.

"Thanks to all of you for coming," she began. "My mother has received a memorial that was glorious, fitting for her rank, and highly respectful. She has started on her journey to the glorious abode, leaving her grieving subjects behind. Ahead of her is a glorious reunion with her parents, husband, and beloved son, so tragically snatched from us three years ago.

"Adding to the weight of my grief is the grave burden of responsibility for this world. I thank all of you for your wise advice, conscientious efforts, and sacrificial work

for the kingdom. No leader bears the burden alone, and I am accompanied by many worthy companions and coworkers.

“I anticipate no sudden changes in course, no upsets, no radical departures from the past. Queen Dukterésto guided us well and set us on the right path. She has selected the stars to steer by. My job is to hold the wheel steady, regardless of the ill winds. I pray to Esto and his prophets that I will be guided to do so. Please pray for my strength and steadfastness.

“We are now in the midst of a forty-day mourning period for our departed monarch. During this period I will remain in Isurdhuna, so that I may commune at her tomb daily. After the mourning period ends, I will resume my tour of the kingdom, more alert than ever to my people’s needs and aspirations.”

The audience broke out into a powerful wave of applause. She nodded in thanks and stepped down from the platform.

The Queen got her first decent night’s sleep that night. The next morning she headed first to her mother’s tomb to pray—she planned to visit it every morning—and she asked specifically for guidance in how to run the kingdom. Then she returned to the palace for breakfast. Kandékwes pointed to the pile of newspapers. “We haven’t heard any other news for three days, and there’s a lot, especially in Sumilara.”

“Really?” Estoibidhé took the *Ora Beacon*, which had appeared that morning. She skimmed the long article about the funeral, then turned to an article about demonstrations in Anartu. “Why is the army marching through the city?” she asked. “That’ll just provoke the population.”

“And the army’s breaking up demonstrations in front of the castle and palace.”

“Yes, why isn’t the police doing that?”

“The army is in charge of protecting both, not the police.”

“But the police can do it just fine, and they’re Sumi. They should be dealing with demonstrations, if anything has to be done at all.”

“I would trust the army, my dear.”

“I’m not so sure.” She thought about the situation for a moment. “I want to talk to Roktēkēster about it. And Perku, he’s nearby. The other three can’t get here fast enough.”

“Talk to the Governor, too; he might have a useful perspective.”

“Perhaps. But so would Countess Ninti. I haven’t talked to her for several months. We’ve gotten along reasonably well over the last few years, and she would be flattered by a call.”

“She’s not in Anartu.”

“She’s not far away, though. I’ll call her right away. Can you ask Estoiyajū to summon Roktēkēster and Perku?”

“Certainly.” Kandēkwes pointed to the newspapers. “I’ll read all of them and let you know what else is noteworthy.”

“Thank you, my dear. We need someone to read everything for me and summarize. And we need a regular schedule of reports. Mother never would make reports a routine, but I have to do that.”

“I’ll call the Prime Minister. Do you want reports twice a week?”

She nodded. “Yes, that’s sufficient.”

Chris carried the heavy basket of tropical fruit to the breakfast table at Eva's house in Frachvala. "Mangoes!" exclaimed Eva, smiling. "They can be hard to get here!"

"Let's cut some up for breakfast, then," suggested Liz, picking up a knife.

"Amos's tropical fruit plantation produces so many of them."

"And it's a pleasure to share," added Amos.

"We're grateful." Eva pulled the blanket Chris and Liz had given her the night before more closely around her; it was still a chilly morning. "I love this blanket, Liz. The patterns are so beautiful."

"The Wurone women make beautiful blankets, and the wool is soft, not scratchy. Maybe Frachvala's gabruli should exchange with theirs."

"That's a good idea."

"We're very grateful to be able to spend the night with you," added Chris. "These are small tokens of our appreciation. Everything else was full."

"Two days ago when I was coming home from Isurdhuna, I saw lords camping next to their steam cars," agreed Modékvu.

"I just wish you could stay longer," replied Eva. "I'm sure you heard about the burning of the Isurdhuna Bahá'í Center, but two nights ago the windows of the Albagras Center were smashed."

Chris nodded. "We heard about that, too. People think that Estoibidhé will convert the kingdom to the Faith and they're trying to 'defend' the traditional religion. But violence of this sort will probably just turn off lots of people from the religion of Widumaj."

“True, but it also frightens people away from declaring themselves as Bahá’ís,” said Modékvu. “Even here in Frachvala, some of our neighbors think there are spies watching who attend Bahá’í meetings, and that there will be consequences if they do.”

“I’m sure you can give a talk tonight,” said Eva to Liz. “And the Bahá’ís will ask you whether Estoibidhé will encourage people to become Bahá’ís, too; even the Bahá’ís are speculating about that. If you can stay longer, we can arrange several other talks south of here. The southwestern side of the valley has become very receptive to the Faith.”

“We should be able to drive out of the valley tomorrow morning,” said Liz. “The eastern entrance has been made one way today: out. No one can drive in. The southern and western entrances are very slow. When we drove here last night, it was bumper to bumper to get to the western entrance.”

“Everyone stayed for the funeral, and now everyone’s leaving,” agreed Modékvu.

“I have to check my schedule; we might be able to stay,” said Chris. “Over the next three weeks, I was scheduled to attend six tomi and company board meetings, talk to a dozen provincial officials, and draft five reports for the monarchs about the economic development of five provinces. Now all those meetings must be rescheduled. That’ll cause chaos with my schedule.”

“But you won’t have anything tomorrow; we know that,” said Liz. “I think we should stay. I’d like to meet with the Auxiliary and the Isurdhuna Spiritual Assembly. The Central Spiritual Assembly will want a report. And as always, Chris, you’ll find deals to make.”

Chris nodded. “I can call Luktréstu and get him started rescheduling all my meetings. But I suspect most of them will be postponed forty days, until the queen resumes her tour of the kingdom.”

Just then his cell phone vibrated. He looked around; Eva and Modékvu knew about the cell phones, but Modékvu’s children were present and they didn’t. “I’d better go to the car and get more fruit,” he said. Chris rose and walked to the car, which was parked in the house’s central courtyard. He opened the phone and saw the caller id. “Good morning, Thornton.”

“Hi, dad. Where are you, Pértatranisér?”

“No; driving out of the valley was virtually impossible. All the hotels were full, too, even the Hotsprings Hotel we own a piece of! We stayed the night at Eva’s in Frachvala.”

“Oh; then it’s early there. I’m in Wëranopéla; it’s 3 p.m. here. I need your help, dad. The negotiations over the South Shore Timber Company have broken down. The lord here—represented by his head man because he’s still in Kërda—is insisting on a one third share of the company because Wëranopéla is the easternmost township and therefore makes the biggest claim over the forests.”

“The forests don’t belong to Wëranopéla; they belong to the province.”

“But the eastern border of the township is still disputed and the lord claims half the land to Wurontroba.”

“Then I’d adjourn the meeting until Lord Gugéngu can make a ruling and the courts or the queen can back it up. That may mean a delay of a year, but so be it. Possibly that’ll force a compromise, too. There is an official township border, right?”

“Yes, and it’s on all the geological survey maps. But while the western, southern, and northern borders are simple—because of other townships or the sea—the eastern border was never finalized, so the line is meaningless. This may be a bluff. I’ll try offering a compromise: the company headquarters will be in Wëranopéla. That’s logical, since it’s the closest township.”

“Play some hard ball. My investment is conditional on a reasonable arrangement. No township should have that much of the company. Wëranopéla could have a share larger than merited by the financial investment if it commits its township forests, and that’s a reasonable accommodation.”

“I agree. Okay, dad, the Lord of Ménwika will throw his weight around.”

“Call me back when you’re done.”

“Okay. Bye.”

It took Perku most of the day to reach Isurdhuna from Néfa. Countess Ninti, meanwhile, had attended the funeral and was still in the valley; Estoibidhé invited her to move into the palace for a few days and had a long talk with her about Sumilara. When the generals arrived, Ninti was present as well. Roktekester was visibly worried by that.

“My generals, please be seated at the table with us,” said the queen, after the generals kneeled before her. She pointed to chairs to her right around the round table where she, Ninti, Kandékwes, and Estoiyaju were already seated. “I have had some time today to read the newspapers and see there has been considerable trouble in Sumilara, mostly in front of the fort. Do you have a report for me?”

“Your Majesty, we didn’t want to burden you during these last few days of terrible grief,” explained Roktekester.

“Thank you; I greatly appreciate your concern. I am sure it has been very difficult for both of you, especially my Uncle Roktekester. These have been difficult days, and the difficulty has not ended. I am now visiting my mother’s tomb every morning and evening; I was just praying there not half an hour ago. As of this evening, I am in a position to be informed of military and other crises.”

Roktekester nodded. “Very well, Your Majesty. I have visited the Queen’s grave today as well and I plan to visit it daily while I remain in the valley. I miss her terribly as well.

“I received a report from General Dontekester early this afternoon, when it was evening in Anartu and all trouble had ended for the night. The demonstrations in front of the fort resumed this morning at 10 bells, Anartu time. When they began to throw stones, the army sallied out of the fort and broke up the demonstration. Thirty were arrested and thrown in the prison. This afternoon another group of fifty demonstrated. They didn’t throw any stones, just shouted slogans. The army sallied forth, arrested many of them—some fled—and threw them in prison as well.”

“How many prisoners do we have?”

“One hundred ten. The numbers have been growing, but we think we will soon arrest all the main trouble makers and the demonstrations will begin to shrink in size.”

“What are they demanding?”

Roktekester hesitated. “I’m not sure of the nature of their slogans. Dontekester didn’t say.”

There was a pause, then Ninti said, “I talked to Duke Lamuno a few hours ago. He told me they are demanding various things; independence for the island, withdrawal of the army, and release of all prisoners.”

“That sounds right,” agreed Roktækester.

“Would it not be less confrontational to let the police deal with the demonstrators?” said Estoibidhé. “The police are Sumi and the city jail is less formidable.”

“The plaza in front of the fort is royal land, not city land, so the police have no jurisdiction. A riot could attack the city jail and free the prisoners, but that is impossible if they are in the fort.”

The queen nodded. “I can give the police permission, however.”

“Your Majesty, you are in a very difficult position. As the reigning monarch you must make decisions about which you have no military experience.”

“That indeed is true, General; that’s why I am asking you for your advice and wise judgment, before I decide. You said the numbers have been growing; why is that?”

“I don’t know. I wouldn’t be surprised that, temporarily, anger at us is growing. But most people on the island don’t care, or are too frightened to act against us; we are too powerful. These demonstrations will pass.”

The queen nodded and turned to the other military man. “General Perku, what is your feeling about the situation?”

“I was speaking to a few officer friends in Anartu yesterday, but I have not seen the official reports. I have great respect for the judgment of General Roktækester, but I worry whenever I hear that we will win because we are more powerful and people are

fearful of us. That approach does not unify the kingdom; it merely holds it together through force.”

“Well put.” Estoibidhé turned to the head general of the army. “What do you think of that concern?”

Roktekester chose his words carefully. “I agree with the distinction between unifying the kingdom and merely holding it together, but in this case I think holding it together is the best we can do. The Sumis feel no loyalty to the royal house. Many hate us for a long and bloody history. The Sumi and Eryan have been in a state of war or tension for two thousand years. We can’t sweep that away.”

“They feel no loyalty to the royal house?” asked Princess Ninti.

“I apologize; I did not mean to suggest you were disloyal, princess.”

“But I am not the only one who feels a commitment to a united kingdom, General.”

“I concede that and apologize if I offended you. In my judgment, that number is a minority.”

The queen turned to Perku. “Is it a minority?”

Perku nodded. “Certainly, but it can grow, and we can take steps to foster its growth.”

“What would you recommend?”

Perku glanced at Roktekester. “Let the police handle violent demonstrations, and leave the peaceful ones alone.”

The queen nodded. “And the prisoners; take them to a Sumi court to determine if they were in a violent demonstration?”

“I suppose. If they were, fine them and release them.”

The queen nodded again; it was what she wanted to hear. Roktekester looked shocked. “Your Majesty, if we aren’t careful, our response will look like inattention or weakness, and that is a far more dangerous situation.”

“General, if the police had been allowed to deal with this situation from the start, we wouldn’t be in the bind we are in now. Can demonstrators throw rocks hard enough to get them over the fort’s walls?”

“No, Your Majesty. A few land on the parapet, but they do no harm. The bigger issue is whether the crowd will leave the plaza and break windows in town.”

“Any palace windows broken yet?”

“Not that I have heard of.”

The queen nodded. “Nor I. Very well, this is what I propose: I will make a brief statement in Sumi—I can be coached to speak a few sentences decently—stating that henceforth the city police will handle all demonstrations that become violent. The army will stay inside the fort, unless they’re out building roads; I want more of that in the next few months, General. All prisoners will be transferred to city jail and judges will release those who were peacefully demonstrating. Peaceful demonstrations will be permitted. There will be no rock throwing; the police can enforce that. My people can speak their mind. They can even bring me petitions. Anything else?”

Roktekester’s face hardened; he was controlling his anger. Perku added, “Your Majesty, we have 1,500 soldiers in Sumilara. The army has 5,000 altogether and 750 of them are Sumi, for Sumi men join at the same rate as anyone else. Yet right now only about 200 or 300 of the soldiers stationed on Sumilara are Sumi.”

“There’s a reason for that,” injected Roktekester. “Soldiers can’t choose their post until they’ve been in the army for ten years. We have avoided posting Sumis to their own island.”

“Until we had Sumi exiles at Kostekhéma, we put many Sumi soldiers there, and Tutane soldiers on the island,” said Perku. “But now most of the army is in Endraidha, except for garrisons, of which Anartu is the largest.”

Estoibidhé nodded. “What fraction of the Sumilara police are army veterans?”

“More than half,” replied Ninti. “When they leave the army, that’s where they go.”

“There, or the post office,” agreed Perku.

“General Perku, I want a study about allowing Sumi soldiers to be stationed on the island after a year or two of service. Can you prepare that in a month?”

“Indeed, Your Majesty.”

She looked at Roktekester. “I can see you are unhappy, uncle, and I understand. But let’s give this principled approach a try.”

He nodded. “Very well, Your Majesty.”

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389.

Water of Life

Late Dhonménéu, 17/635

Chris sat in his parlor in Pértatranisér sipping a cup of tea. Kεkanu had just dropped by. “Her Majesty looked very tired throughout the concert,” he said. “I saw her every few hours and it worried me.”

“Everyone has commented on how old and tired she looked,” agreed Chris. “She was still very sharp, though.”

“Yes, absolutely. I haven’t seen Estoibidhé since the funeral, but she seems to be doing pretty well.”

“I agree. Are you covering her speech to the Sumis?”

“I don’t know whether I dare! She spoke in Sumi; my audience is Eryan. The palace hasn’t released a translation yet, so it may look disloyal to provide one.”

“Perhaps, but I understand from Jordan—who listened to the whole thing and took notes—that she said her people were free to speak their mind and disagree with her or each other, so long as decision making remained democratic and peaceful and the ‘order of the kingdom’ were respected.”

“Interesting.”

“I’d call the palace and see what they say about a translation, or send them a translation and ask for permission to use it. If the people are free to speak their mind, the people should know they have that freedom!”

Kekanu chuckled. “I’ll give that a try. I am tired of the palace ‘advising’ me about how to handle subjects. Maybe this is a new era.”

“I think it might be,” agreed Chris. “What, honored Kekanu, would you change or add to your broadcasting efforts?”

“You ask interesting questions, lord.”

“That’s why I have so much money!”

Kekanu chuckled. “We now have channel 1 filled 24 hours a day. Half of that is repeated programming, but still, it is filled and we have sponsors for all of it. I’m not very interested in filling channel 2; it’d just compete with channel 1! But there is one thing I wish we had on the air, on either channel.” He paused to consider how he would phrase it. “Mitrubbéru is a very persuasive and warm personality where Bahaism is concerned. Widulubu is charismatic and biting critical; he presents an angry, discourteous, defensive version of the customs of Widumaj. That does not represent my feelings about my prophet or His teachings, lord. Widumaj needs another defender on the air; one more like Mitrubbéru.”

Chris nodded. “I have been very saddened by Widulubu’s criticisms and attacks as well. It presents the public with an unfair choice: if you are nice, you are a Bahá’í; if you are angry you are a follower of Widumaj. The vast majority of people on this world are neither Bahá’í nor angry.”

“Exactly, lord.”

“Start to look for a better spokesman for the customs of Widumaj, then. The priests in Melwika are very good; very charitable, and good teachers.”

“But not charismatic.”

“No, but you may not be able to find someone with all the desirable characteristics.”

“There’s still the problem of funding the program, though.”

“I’ll support it for a year, so that it gets off the ground, though I should do it anonymously. As a lord and a Count I have responsibilities that go beyond my faith.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes. I don’t want to pay for someone who will attack the Bahá’í Faith, of course.”

“I’ll look for someone who won’t attack the Bahá’í teachings, though they will comment on them, I’m sure. And I’ll look for other sponsors.”

“Good, that’ll work.”

Queen Estoibidhé watched the clock closely. Two p.m. in Isurdhuna was 8 p.m. in Anartu, when the military completed its daily report and dictated it by telephone to the palace. As she considered the time, Estoiyaju entered.

“The military report was early today.” He handed her a sheet.

She read. “The demonstrations are getting bigger again.”

“Maybe you need to make another speech in Sumi. They loved that.”

“It brought a lot of people around. But they aren’t throwing rocks any more; they aren’t even demanding for independence. They’re demanding removal of the army.”

“They’re clever; start with something achievable, hammer at it, and gain some momentum.”

“Yes, and that’s what worries me. It’s hard to make the army more popular on the island.” She thought. “Get General Perku on the phone for me.”

Estoiyaju nodded and walked to a nearby phone. He spoke to the palace operator and a moment later had Perku. “My good general, I have some questions for you,” the queen said, as soon as she had the telephone. “Have you been able to get a better count of the Sumis in the army?”

“Indeed, Your Majesty. There are 702 who called themselves Sumis and about 33 more who said one parent was Sumi. They seem to stay in the army an average of eight years; a bit less than the Eryan. Eighty-three have joined in the last year.”

“So, if we transferred all the Sumi soldiers to the island who have been in the army more than a year—if they were willing—we’d have 650 soldiers.”

“Correct. I think we need more soldiers than that on the island, though.”

“I didn’t mean to suggest we’d have a pure-Sumi garrison, but if it were half Sumi, that would be significant. The Eryan soldiers would know plenty of Sumi soldiers, would be more likely to treat Sumi civilians respectfully, would be more likely to learn some Sumi, would be more likely to have someone along who could translate.”

“Yes, certainly true. If Sumi soldiers could live on Sumilara they’d probably stay in the army longer, too.”

“Do you feel there could be loyalty problems?”

“No, boot camp takes care of that. Sumi soldiers are as loyal and reliable as Eryan soldiers.”

“Do you think a garrison of 1200 would be sufficient?”

Perku considered. “Or even one thousand. They’re there to hold Anartu until an invasion force becomes available; that doesn’t require many soldiers. They need to get around the island more, building roads and other facilities. The other argument to make, Your Majesty, regards the police. If there are no Sumi soldiers, there are no Sumi veterans to staff the police.”

“Good point, General. I think we’re thinking the same way.”

“There are a lot of ways to justify an army garrison in Anartu. Meddoakwés, Bellédha, Ora, Melwika, Néfa, and Tripola all have garrisons. The capital’s garrison used to be the largest one. Cities beg for garrisons. The average soldier in a city spends several hundred dhanay per year on food, drink, clothing, and such. The Anartu garrison adds a half million dhanay per year to the city’s economy.”

“Can you write up these ideas and send me the report right away? It’ll help me as I look for reasons to maintain the Anartu garrison.”

“Certainly, I’ll get the ideas and some numbers to you tomorrow morning.”

The bus from Gordha to Wurontroba stopped at Sértroba’s only intersection—the end of Route 77—to let off passengers. Arriving with the teenagers returning from Gordha high school and men returning from work were Lords Modobéru of the Késtone tribe and Ekwanu of the Mémenegone. They stepped off with their bedrolls and looked around the bustling village for the house of their host, Lord Patékwu.

“That one,” said Modobéru, pointing to the obviously larger house built near the center of the village and not far from the intersection.

Ekwanu nodded. “Busy place.”

“It is. Sértroba has what; 300 or 400? That’s about the size of our villages.”

“We’re a bit larger; 500,” said Ekwanu. “But we aren’t this big.”

“They have wires.” He pointed to a line of poles running down several lanes.

“Modern.” Ekwanu said the word ambiguously.

They walked over to the lord’s house and knocked on the door. Patékwu himself opened it a moment later. “My cousins, you made it! Please come in. You must be tired, let me get you some coffee or tea.”

“I’d prefer something stronger, but I suppose you don’t have that,” replied Modobéru.

“No; I’m sorry, not anymore. Come into my sitting room.” He led them into the house’s spacious, high-ceilinged main room, where another man awaited. “Do both of you know Lord Endranu of the Wurone?”

“Yes, a bit,” said Ekwanu, but Modobéru shook his head.

“I’m pleased to see you both, cousins,” said Ekwanu. He walked over with both hands extended. Tutane customarily addressed each other as cousins, even if they were strangers. The three men exchanged handshakes.

“Sit down; we have new chairs or traditional pillows.” Patékwu pointed and both arrivals sat on pillows on the floor, so the Bahá’í lords joined them there. “How was the trip?”

“Almost as long as riding a horse,” replied Modobéru. “We have a morning bus to Gordha to take our kids to the high school there, but there’s no bus southward until evening.”

“The bus to bring our high school students home. I can drive you home; the village has three pickup trucks.”

“We visited Lord Walékwes for a while and heard all about his complaints,” said Ekwanu.

“The complaints were also boasts, though,” said Modobéru. Patékwu nodded; Gordha was fifteen times bigger than either tribe. Modobéru looked at the front door. “I need to pee, lord.”

“It’s not out there; this way,” said Patékwu. He rose and led Modobéru out of the sitting room and into the central garden. The house’s rooms formed a rectangle opening onto a portico running around the edge of the garden. “This area is for guests. You and Ekwanu can have these two rooms. And here’s the toilet.” He stopped and opened a door into a small room that had a toilet and sink. “Have you used a toilet? When you finish, pull that handle to flush everything away.”

“Yes, I know toilets and sinks with faucets,” said Modobéru, irritated that the lord had felt the need to explain it to him. He entered and closed the door behind him. “More boasting,” he muttered.

Patékwu walked to the kitchen to see how dinner was coming and briefly considered whether he should show the gas stove to his guests, but decided not to. He returned to the sitting room the same time Modobéru did. The sun was getting low, so Patékwu flipped a switch to put on the lights.

“I was just telling Ekwanu about the Wurone Tomi,” said Endranu.

“Tribal companies have proved very useful; the Médhelone, Kwolone, and Kwétékwone have them as well,” agreed Patékwu. “In the Krésone Tomi, every

adult—man and woman—starts with an equal share of the ownership. The more work they contribute to it, or the more money they invest in it, the more they own. Workers get paid; everyone gets a share of the profits twice a year. Before we pay out the profits we have an owners meeting to decide how much profit we will plow into investments to grow the company, and how much we'll pay out.”

“Isn't that complicated to figure out?” asked Ekwanu.

“We have accountants to do it, and the Mennea Tomi sends accountants twice a year to audit the books and give us advice about how to track income and expenses better. The company has invested in pickups, tractors, a dam, irrigation canals, and a few small factories.”

“We're developing our farmland, building a dairy, installing a saw mill, developing a pig farm, expanding sheep raising, and expanding our blanket weaving,” said Endranu.

“And the running water?” asked Modobéru.

“That's not by the tomi; that was the village,” replied Patékwu. “We discussed what the village needed and that was one of the decisions the village made. But the biogas was installed by the company.”

“You have biogas?” asked Ekwanu.

Patékwu nodded. “But where does all the money come from?” asked Modobéru.

“How much has all this cost?”

“Tens of thousands over several years,” replied Patékwu.

“We've just started; we don't have all the things I mentioned, yet,” added Endranu.

“But we didn’t come with all of the money,” continued Patékwu. “We had some private grants and loans and quite a few government development grants. Do you know about Development Consulting?”

“I think so,” said Ekwanu. “They help you get grants from the palace, right?”

“Right. Your tribes should start a tomi. It can get grange grants.”

“But what would the grange or tomi or whatever do?” asked Modobéru. “We live in a mountain village. We have a little farmland, some pastureland farther up the slopes, forests that are almost impossible to cut because of the steep slopes, game we can help visitors hunt, and blankets that earn less and less every year because the price is dropping.”

“We have a small lead mine, but otherwise we’re in the same condition,” echoed Ekwanu. “Half the men in my village take the bus to Gordha to work every day.”

“At least you’re close enough for that,” said Modobéru. “I suppose we Késtone could do the same—except in the winter when the snows cut us off for a month or two—but it’s almost an hour by bus to Gordha each way.”

“We don’t have much, either,” said Endranu. “But the Wurone got outside help and they helped us figure out what we could do to make money. You have resources and possibilities; believe me, they can be found. Dhoru Mennea can help you figure it out.”

“He wants Bahá’í youth to come to the village and teach their faith, though,” objected Modobéru.

“Cousin, you don’t need Bahá’í youth to brainstorm about development,” said Patékwu. “They can come later to help with all sorts of literacy classes, though. We have a dozen of them here this summer, and Wurontroba has fifteen more.”

“Sixteen of our kids are on a Bahá’í youth program in Lɛpawsona,” added ɛndranu. “They’re teaching summer classes for children, planting trees for the timber company, offering Bahá’í classes for some adults, teaching literacy to adults . . . all sorts of things. They’re gaining skills and having fun, too.”

Modobéru was surprised by that. “Really? I heard your villages had become Bahá’í, but I didn’t know you had sent kids away!”

“Well, if youth come *to* your village, they have to come *from* somewhere!” replied Patékwu. “We have eight kids in Vésa this summer. Next year we can send them to your villages, if you’d like, and you can send kids here, Bahá’ís or not.”

“But you need to consider the Bahá’í Faith more seriously,” said ɛndranu. “The world has changed a lot and it’s still changing. It’s very confusing. But with the Bahá’í books and prayers we feel we have a direction, at least.”

“Not to mention money from Mennea,” said Ekwanu.

“Lord Chris will invest in your villages, too,” replied Patékwu. “But you have no plan for development, no goals, and thus nothing for him to invest in! The investments and the Bahá’í Faith are separate things. It is easier for him to invest in a place where he knows people and knows they share common values; that is true. But he invests in many, many non-Bahá’í things. And his family is dedicated to service. Dhoru will visit you and help make a development plan. Jordanu will help you find grants to make the plan happen.”

“I am not against a plan or investments; I think,” said Modobéru. “I still don’t know how I feel about all the changes; the money, all the clothes, all the food, all the *things* people seem to want and need. They are good, but they make us different.”

“They do, and the changes can be difficult,” agreed Patékwu. “When we debated installing running water to every house in the village—the village helped everyone get pipes inside their houses, not just to a faucet outside—some women objected. They enjoyed the time socializing with the other women at the water hole! Now they don’t see each other at the water hole. But they also don’t have to carry huge amounts of water every day, they have more time, and now they socialize at the village store or outside their houses or at the gabruli! So the change was good. It’s very convenient to flush a toilet. There’s no smell.”

“The kids have more time to do school work, too,” added Endranu. “They used to spend half an hour or an hour a day carrying water.”

“I understand your point,” said Modobéru. “But still . . . we follow the old gods. We love them and they take care of us. We can’t change that, cousins. Perhaps Bahu has smiled on you, but Endru has smiled on us.”

“Cousins, Endru still smiles on us,” replied Endranu. “Our ancestors used to worship Endru, Wëranu, Mitru, Saré, and many lesser gods and goddesses. Widumaj came along and said Wëranu, Mitru, and Saré were really representations of Esto, and He condemned the violence, warfare, and militarism associated with Endru, the god of war. But he never said Endru doesn’t exist or that Endru isn’t a representation of Esto. The *priests* said that. Even in the army, they still worship the strength, bravery, and power of

protection that  ndru represents. As Bah  is, so do we. We now feel we can sing the hymns of Widumaj, which we had not sung before, but we still sing the old hymns to the gods, because they teach us the same qualities of strength, honesty, loyalty, love, mercy, justice, and wisdom as Bah  u'llah teaches.”

“You still say them?” asked Ekwanu, surprised.

Pat  kwu nodded. “And we chant them with no shame when non-Tutane are present. If they are Bah  is, they understand; and if they are not, they will have to tolerate it.”

Modob  ru was so surprised he said nothing. He picked up his coffee cup and took a long sip.  ndranu added, “This summer Dhoru’s wife, L  b  , has been writing down all the old hymns in the old dialect. She wants to publish them as a book. Then the Eryan can read them, too. The priests will be furious; but that’s good, isn’t it?”

Modob  ru laughed; Ekwanu smiled. Just then Sar  krisel  , Pat  kwu’s wife, entered. “Lords, dinner is served,” she announced.

Modob  ru looked around. “Where?”

“We can sit here, if we want,” replied Pat  kwu. “Or we can go to the ‘dining room’ and sit at the table. It’s more comfortable.”

“Then let’s do that,” agreed Ekwanu.

Perku patiently scanned the list of Sumis in the army, counting the number of natives of Kalageduru. Sixty-three. He wrote it down, wishing he could get a competent secretary to do the compiling for him. He began counting the number from Silagisu.

“Lord General—”

Perku raised his hand; he couldn't have the count interrupted. It was his assistant, Bédhwéru, who had been busy making calls to various experts. “Fifty. Is it the report from Aryéstu?”

“No, but I got that earlier. It's—”

“What did he say?”

“He asked how you came up with your estimate of half a million, because it was pretty good. He said the soldiers spend an average of 150 dhanay per year, not 300, but the army spends 200 per year buying food and clothes and arms for them, half on the island. Fifteen hundred times 250 is 525,000.”

“Wow, and I said half a million! It was a good guess.”

“That's exactly what Aryéstu said. But you didn't include the multiplier that results when that 525,000 is spent by the people who earned it. Basically, that doubles their impact to a million dhany.”

“A million! That's quite a lot.”

“The island's economy is worth 35 million dhanay; losing a million would hurt.”

“The queen's looking for a way to make the army nearly indispensable on Sumilara. That's not quite it.”

“You'll have to think about it later, sir. I came in here to remind you that you are late for the dedication of the new water system at Boléripura.”

“Oh, damn, that's at 2 and it's 1:30! I'd better go fast. Call downstairs and get me a car with a head of steam!” Perku put down his pencil and jumped up from his desk.

“And finish the counting for me, okay?”

He hurried down the hall, down the stairs, and across the courtyard to the palace's vehicle pool. He now regretted accepting the invitation, but he was governor of Rudhisér—technically, he did very little of the work—he was lord of a neighboring township, and he had given permission for a local army unit to help with the excavating. The vehicle pool had a steam car that had returned just half an hour earlier and thus still had a head of steam, so he lit the firebox, set the alcohol stream on high to make more heat, and pulled out of the palace as fast as he could.

Néfa was a bit over twenty kilometers from Boléripura and Route 41 was concreted, though narrow and busy. He drove as fast as he could and pulled into the village with a minute to spare. He could see the crowd gathered around a platform at the base of the watertower, which was the most prominent feature in the village of 150 houses. In many ways it was a typical village. It was built on a beach ridge marking the former shoreline, settled when the rising sea drove the inhabitants from several older villages. They had scratched out a poor living for many years. Since then, two concrete roads, electrical and telephone lines, regular busses to Néfa's factory jobs and businesses, a grange that had diked the former salt marshes and converted them into rich rice paddy, and rich forest and marine resources had gradually transformed the village to a place of rising prosperity and manageable comfort.

Lord Khuméstomi—who had been elected by the settlers fifteen years earlier, so was deeply involved in the village—greeted Governor Perku warmly and invited him to the stage to speak. Perku had been so focused on getting to the event, he hadn't thought what he might say, so he gave a quick, basic speech about the day being another example of progress, and afterward everyone applauded enthusiastically. Khuméstomi thanked

Perku for the contributions of the army and the palace, praised everyone for their hard work, and singled out Primanu Boléripurai, the contractor, for his great contributions, which he nodded humbly for. Then the three men stepped forward to turn a wheel together and start the flow of water from the tower to the pipes. They turned the water on and everyone applauded.

“Congratulations on the job,” Perku said to Primanu. “This is your first in Rudhisér province, right?”

“Correct, lord governor. I was raised in this village until I was ten, so I wanted to come back here and help it first. My crew is still building systems in Klenvika, Udrapéla, and Dhékhðædra, and our next stops are Sumiuperakwa and Jérkenta. We’ll be back here in the fall.”

“So, you have four crews?”

“Three, usually, but because this village was so ready, and the army helped, I made an exception and stretched my resources. Boléripura’s a pretty simple system, too; 150 houses along a major road and two parallel lanes, sandy ground, flat terrain. The ditches were fast and easy to dig. Five of the soldiers who helped were from here and the other ten were their friends, so they were involved. Because the village is built at the mouth of the Rudhisér River and it is so powerful, we routed the sewage straight into the river. The village may send it into an artificial marsh eventually, though.”

“How long did it take?”

“Six weeks, start to finish. Thank you again for the soldiers, they really helped a lot.”

“The army is always delighted to help with projects of this sort. And you have how many coming up?”

“Three a month until we finish the entire world! Only 80 villages and cities have functional systems; the remaining 180 will take five years at that rate.”

“If the army helped out significantly, how much faster would you go?”

Primanu smiled. “Depends on how much help you give. I could easily do six villages at once instead of three if I knew I had a reliable local unit to organize the villagers and assist them in their work.”

“And how much is a system like this?”

“The tower, pipes, and sewage settling tanks for a village of 150 houses cost about 10,000 dhanay. If we have to pay for labor and build an artificial marsh, that figure would increase by 5,000.”

“Very interesting. Do you have any work scheduled for Sumilara?”

“No; I’ve postponed it because I don’t have the language.”

“The army can provide that, too.” Perku nodded. “I’ll get back to you. I think I have a huge job for you.”

“Great!”

Perku shook Primanu’s hands warmly, then spoke to the lord for a few minutes. Several villagers had requests; he listened to them patiently and took some notes. Then he turned to his steam car and drove back to Néfa as fast as he could. As soon as he was back in his office, he called the Queen.

“Your Majesty, I think I have an idea for you. The army could partner with Primanu Boléripurai to install water and sewage systems in every village on Sumilara. To

do so, it would want to bring all the Sumi soldiers back to the island, because they speak the language and can help organize their local villages to dig all the ditches.”

“Really.” She thought about the idea. “How much would it cost?”

“I don’t know, but he said a village of 150 houses costs 10,000 dhanay, plus 5,000 dhanay if all the labor is paid for. That’s 100 dhanay per household. Sumilara has 12,000 households and maybe a quarter are already served by water and sewer systems. If we have to install systems for 9,000 households, that’d cost 900,000 dhanay. I suspect, though, that at that scale it’d cost less, and the labor costs would be absorbed either by the local villages or the army.”

“Maybe half a million, then. Yes, that’s an excellent project. But it will also create jealousy and Sumilara will think we’re trying to bribe them. How much will it cost to do this for the entire kingdom?”

“The kingdom has about 90,000 households and maybe 60,000 need water and sewage systems, so that’s six million dhanay, and probably much less.”

“We could do that over two or three years!”

“Primanu said he’ll be busy for five years at the present rate.”

“Then that’s the thing to do, lord general! Speed up his timetable—most of the money comes from us anyway—and use the army to organize the labor.”

“Not just the army; the soldiers who came from each village will go back to organize their village. They’re the ones with the local experience, contacts, and motivation.”

“And the army is already busy with road building; if the village lanes were graveled by the army after the pipes and sewers were laid, that would be an even better

service. Yes, General Pɛrku, this is the project we want. The army will be heroes everywhere and will be indispensable one Sumilara. Can you give me a refined cost estimate? I want to announce this as soon as possible. The anti-army demonstrations in Anartu are slowly growing in scale. I don't want to wait very long.”

Patékwu and ɛndranu spent a long evening explaining to lords Ekwanu and Modobéru about all the changes their villages had made, including why they had become Bahá'ís and what changes that had wrought. The next morning they drove around Sértroba in a steam truck erratically driven by Lord Patékwu—who was not an experienced driver—and saw the dam, irrigation system, school, and factories. They met with the Bahá'í youth volunteers and heard about their experiences. They hoped to meet with Thornton, but he unexpectedly rescheduled his visit to Sértroba for the next day; he was finalizing the arrangements for the South Shore Timber Company. That night, reflecting on their very successful discussions, Patékwu felt it was just as well that the Tutane had done all the talking among themselves.

The four lords were eating breakfast on the third day of their visit together, with the radio going in the background, when they heard an announcement that the Queen was about to address the kingdom.

“Why now?” wondered Patékwu. “It's only 8 bells here. That means it's 5 a.m. in Mɛddoakwés. Only the western shore can listen right now!”

“And all the tutane; we can be grateful for that,” replied Ekwanu.

“If any have radios,” responded Modobéru.

Just then the announcer introduced the Queen. Her voice came over the radio strongly. “Greetings to everyone in the kingdom,” she began. “In the two weeks since the passing of our beloved Queen Dukterésto, I have visited her grave twice daily and prayed for assistance in developing a project to memorialize her properly. She loved her people and was deeply concerned for their welfare and advancement toward prosperity. Any project had to focus on those concerns.

“As a result of consultation with a number of experts, I am pleased to announce Project Water of Life, to be executed in her memory. Over the next three years, Project Water of Life will bring clean, safe, running water to every household in the world. Private firms are already doing excellent work toward this end; we will assist them to complete their work faster. The army will be the principal instrument for the project, its soldiers providing some of the labor and organizing effort to dig all the ditches needed for such a massive effort. To accomplish this, I have directed the army to determine which soldiers come from which villages and rearrange their work schedules so they can go to their home villages when they are being provided with a water and sewage system. This will require some transferring of troops; Véspans to Véspe, North Shore troops to Belledha, Sumis to Sumilara, etc.

“An additional role of the army will be to gravel all village lanes where pipes are laid. This will eliminate much of the mud that is ubiquitous in our smaller villages. Village squares and main routes are to be concreted when possible.

“The benefits of this project should be quite tangible to the rural peoples of this world. Clean water will reduce disease, especially among the young and old. Sewage systems will reduce bad smells and eliminate the human and animal waste that litters

muddy lanes. Villages will not only be cleaner, they will look cleaner, which will enhance local pride.

“The costs will be borne by royal taxes, which have increased as a result of the spread of factories and machinery. We will begin the effort immediately this fall in Rudhisér province, spreading it to Véspe and Sumilara in the winter. Army garrisons will need several months to receive training and for soldiers to be reassigned. Endraidha will be responsible for the western and southern shores, the Ora garrison—which will be expanded—for the western and northern shores, and the Anartu garrison—which will shrink slightly in size—for Sumilara.

“Let us all keep our beloved late queen in our prayers as we embark on this major project for the reshaping of much of our world in her memory. May Esto guide and keep all of us, and strengthen us in our service to the kingdom.”

Modobéru looked at Ekwanu. “Western shore, eastern shore, Sumilara; what about us?”

“They’ll include the Tutane, don’t worry,” replied Patékwu. “Maybe Kostékhéma will be responsible.”

“We have a dozen men in the army; it’d be nice to have them come back for something like this,” said Ekwanu. “I don’t know that I want water and sewer in our village, though.”

“No, this is good,” said Patékwu. “As the queen said, people will be healthier, and it is much more convenient. No one will have to go outside in a snowstorm to get a bucket of water.”

“And it’ll be easier to fight fires,” added Endranu. “We had a fire a few months ago and even though we don’t yet have piped water, we already had a water tower. We extended a hose from it to the fire and put it out.”

“Sounds like we’ll be creating a development plan, and this will be the first item on it,” said Ekwanu.

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390.

Accommodation

2d week of Abelménu, 17/635

The steam car climbed a gradual rise, and at the top Məlwika hove into view. Thornton smiled; he was almost home. It was welcome, even if it was for a short time.

He slowed; Route 2 was beginning to have houses along its edges. Horses, wagons, and bicycles competed for space, in spite of extra lanes for them. In a few minutes he reached the traffic circle just south of the city wall and went around it to West Street, which ran along the outside of the western wall. The greenbelt looked very pretty, with neatly mown grass, beds of low flowers, and sidewalks full of strollers. He turned right at a roundabout and entered Citadel Street, then passed through the gate to Citadel Square. The Mennea residence was a few meters beyond.

He parked the steam car in the garage under the tomi building and walked across the street into the house. It was almost eclipse time. In the great room he saw Chris, Jordan, and Behruz seated at the table.

“You made it!” said Chris. “I was beginning to think I’d have to attend the South Mənwika Council meeting for you!”

“I was delayed leaving Sértroba; Patékwu has some new ideas about a timber company and he wanted to talk to me about them.”

“He’s been full of ideas lately. Electing him to the Central Spiritual Assembly has really activated him. I can’t wait to hear about the development plans for the Məmenəgone and Késtone.”

“They’re still taking shape.” Thornton poured himself a cup of tea, added sugar, and sat. “Both tribes need a thorough geological survey of their territories. Until now they’ve refused to allow the survey to do anything more than a few quick passes. I’m sure we’ll find minerals and mining will prove to be an important part of their future. Until then they have to develop agriculture and timber. They both want a tribal company to serve as a grange and as a timber company.”

“More work for me,” said Jordan, shaking his head. “What do they have now?”

“The Méməngəgonə number 500. They have a small lead mine and a pick-up truck. They’re ten kilometers north of Route 1 and almost fifty kilometers east of Gordha, though a few of them have moved to the junction of their dirt road and Route 1. The Késtə number 450 and are eight kilometers off Route 1 and seventy kilometers from Gordha; their land is higher and rockier. They have no vehicles. Both tribes have basic agriculture, animal herding, and hunting; the Késtə more herding and hunting. Both have a one-room schoolhouse, a muddy connection to Route 1 lacking gravel, a phone line, an electrical line, and a Gordha bus run every morning with a return every evening for high school students and commuting workers.”

“So: a pick up truck, two tractors, two small sawmills, two biogas installations, maybe a small dairy for the Késtə . . . twelve to eighteen thousand each.”

“Now they both want water and sewer, assuming the Queen’s promise applies to them; they’re skeptical because she never mentioned the Tutə.”

“I’m sure it applies to them as well,” replied Chris. “The promise to gravel village lanes implies graveling their connections to Route 1, too.”

“That’s how Primanu understands it,” said Jordan. “He’s tearing his hair out, trying to figure out how he’ll double his operation. He has competition now, too; another company opened last week.”

“And we’re tearing out our hair trying to figure out how Jordan can expand his operation to plan all these projects and oversee them,” added Chris. “All the graduates with relevant experience were hired by other firms a month or two ago, so there are no candidates to fill five more positions we need to create.”

“Five? Wow,” said Thornton. “So, did the Queen do this to placate the Sumis or to better the lives of the rural population?”

“Both,” replied Chris. “It’s a brilliant move because it makes the army relevant to everyone. The demonstrations against the army in Anartu are muted and the Sumi lords are distancing themselves from them. The Eryan villagers instantly like her. I think we’ll see a lot more innovation from Queen Estoibidhé.”

“But the army isn’t happy,” added Jordan. “I was talking to my father in law this morning. Assigning soldiers to garrisons nearer to their home villages is the opposite of the army’s policy, which is to create a national army, not regional militias. Assigning Sumi soldiers to Sumilara will be fiercely opposed. Furthermore, soldiers don’t want to dig ditches.”

“But I bet they’ll do it in their home villages,” said Thornton.

“Yes, they will, and they’ll do the work less enthusiastically in the villages of their friends,” agreed Jordan.

“Dad, I need a visit from you,” said Thornton. “The Mémeneḡone and Késtone would welcome a visit. They even want Bahá’í youth teams! I promised to call the central

office about that. All the timber companies need a visit by you to feel oriented and confident.”

“Do you have the South Shore Company wrapped up?”

“Yes, Lord Ekwiséru accepted having the sawmill and company offices in Wëranopéla in return for giving up his claims to half the province’s timber lands. But we have to commit an extra ten thousand, because they want a bigger company. The Kwétékwoné, Wuroné, Krésoné, Mémenégoné, and Késtoné companies will cost us 25,000 more in investments.”

“That’s a lot,” said Chris.

“No, we can accommodate it,” replied Behruz. “We’ll cut the money for the Fisher-Tropsch process. That project really hasn’t worked out. We don’t have the technology base for it.”

“Are you sure?” asked Chris.

Behruz nodded. “I’m sure. It’s not going to be economically viable for some time; that’s now clear to me. We can make hydrocarbons more cheaply from coal tar and from Khermdhuna’s tar pits. Alcohol fuel’s working fine in steam cars; supplementing it with octane and related hydrocarbons isn’t necessary.”

“That frees fifty thousand,” said Chris. “Alright, Behruz, thank you. I was beginning to wonder, especially since alcohol fuel was working out so well. Thor, I can probably visit them toward the end of the month. Once the queen starts to move again, I’ll be busy, especially since she plans to shorten the rest of her tour. Looks like there will be a fall legislative session, and most likely she will propose new legislation.”

“Like what?” asked Thornton.

“I don’t know any specifics. But whenever I meet with her, I hope to propose a new category of nonprofits: trusts.”

“Oh?” said Thornton.

“If we can get the right law passed, I would prefer to shift as much of our family assets to a family-owned charitable foundation. The money doesn’t belong to us; we use it to serve. Right now we’re paying 45% tax on most of our income. I’d rather make it tax free charitable income so we have more money to give away as we see fit.”

“What about the génadema?” asked Behruz.

“We should give assets to its endowment instead of donating every year. That way we won’t look so wealthy. We need to reorganize its structure; it’s too informal.”

“Sounds like we have a lot of things to do, then,” said Thornton.

General Dontekester tried to use the wait to calm himself down. Roktekester came in and spoke supportive words; he seemed to be on the general’s side. General Perku appeared a moment later and said very little, which made Dontekester nervous. Then they were all admitted to Queen Estoibidhé’s presence.

She was seated at her throne very formally; that made him even more worried. They entered and kneeled.

“Rise,” she said. She gestured to a nearby table. Let’s sit and be comfortable.”

They all went to the table and sat; Estoiyaju was already seated there, pad and quill pen at hand, pointing to chairs where everyone should sit. Dontekester got the seat to the queen’s left, Roktekester to the right, and Perku second on the right; that seemed encouraging.

“I’m glad we will have a chance to discuss the situation on Sumilara together,” the queen began. “Integrating Sumilara into the kingdom is one of my highest priorities. I can’t begin to emphasize how important it is to achieve peace there. General, could you summarize the situation over the last five days.”

Dontekster nodded. The queen’s announcement had been four days earlier. “Demonstrations have indeed quieted from the time before your announcement. But in my analysis, this is a temporary achievement. There was a powerful editorial against the army in the newspaper, the *Sumi Herald*, four days ago. That was the day after your message. Hatred is undiminished. The will to resist is undiminished; on the contrary, it has been encouraged by the announcement. The people of Sumilara are fundamentally opposed to our rule. They remember their golden age and seek to reverse the arrangement and dominate us again. They are exporting as many people as they can to our cities and newly settled areas. They are developing their technology as fast as they can. They are translating the new knowledge with remarkable speed and without any delays. The demonstrations will not end; they will continue and grow in strength again.”

“And what strategy do you recommend?”

“Your Majesty, the governor has been too close to Duke Lamuno and does his will more than ours. He needs to be replaced by a consistent loyalist. Free my hands and there will be no demonstrations, no editorials against you, no trouble. Fourteen years ago the army rolled over Sumi resistance and they need to be reminded that it can happen again.”

“General, perhaps you misspoke. There have been no editorials against the monarchy.”

“I apologize if I misspoke, but an editorial against the army *is* an editorial against you.”

“General, I have issued a series of orders in recent days: to transfer all Sumis who have served in the army two years or more to Sumilara; to dispatch army units to every village and city on the island to help build new water and sewer systems; to reduce the garrison in Anartu from 1,500 to 1,200. What is your informed view about them?”

“Your Majesty, I think all three are serious errors and I beg—I implore—you to reverse them. Sumis have proved loyal soldiers in Ora and Kostekhéma, but we have never sent any into combat against Sumis. I cannot imagine they will remain loyal under those circumstances. If we build up the island, we just strengthen them. I was not opposed to graveling and concreting roads; they help the army get around as well and open the entire island to our movements. But biogas, blue water gas, telephones, electricity, newspapers, voting, clean water, génademas . . . these will prove to be fundamental errors. Let the new knowledge trickle onto the island ten years after it is established on the mainland. Keep them behind us and they will remain dependent on us. And they will never dare revolt.”

“I see.” She looked at Dontekster. “Are you prepared to execute the orders I have given?”

“I . . . Your Majesty, this entire approach to the Sumis is the epitome of danger to your own rule, certainly to the rule of your successor. I would urge you to leave military matters in the hands of the army. I requested this meeting to urge that point on you personally.”

“Then I thank you, good General, for this opportunity to exchange views. I believe you have made the principles of operation that you advocate very clear. I see the entire approach in sharp relief.”

Dontekester nodded. “Thank you, Your Majesty.”

She rose from her chair, so the others rose as well. “I need to speak to Roktekester about this report. May you have a safe return to your post, General.”

“Thank you, Your Majesty.” He and Perku left the room.

Once the door was closed, Queen Estoibidhé looked at Roktekester and Estoiyaju. “What do you think?”

“He’ll come around, Your Majesty,” said Roktekester. “These are common prejudices and they have been gradually fading in the army. He has served you well and will execute your orders.”

“That’s not what he said, uncle. When I asked him whether he’d execute the order, he essentially said it was wrong and that I should not interfere.”

“He . . . did essentially say that, but I know him well.”

“He has always followed orders,” agreed Estoiyaju.

“I agree that anti-Sumi feelings have been gradually waning in the army. But I cannot have someone with such strong prejudices in charge of Sumilara. I need someone whose example will reinforce, not weaken, my orders.”

Roktekester shook his head. “Please don’t reassign him. He’s as high up as he can go, except for appointment to the Supreme Military Council. Anything else will be—”

“Where’s he from originally? Néfa? He’s the brother of Lord Albanu.”

“Correct.”

“There’s at least one unsettled township there, north of Luktrudema and Boléripura. He could be lord there, or general in charge of the Néfa garrison.”

“Perku’s in charge of Néfa garrison right now.”

“Perku. Yes. Estoiyaju, summon Perku.” Estoiyaju headed out of the room; she turned to Roktæster. “Uncle, I need your support. We are trying a new approach in Sumilara. Over the last fourteen years we have been moving toward an accommodation where the Sumis are an ordinary part of the kingdom, contributing their talents and strengths like everyone else. They vote, elect a provincial council, elect representatives to the consultative assembly, and get the new knowledge the same time everyone else does. We just released the leaders of the last rebellion; that was a decision not by me, but by my mother. Dontæster is not the right person to continue this approach. We need to make the army an instrument for the development of the entire kingdom, building things everywhere for everyone. That requires rethinking the nature of the army.”

“I think you may have ideas to take the army farther than I have, but I have been taking the army on the general path you outline, Your Majesty. I am open to the approach you have in mind, but hope you will seek the advice of the army’s Supreme Council.”

“Yes, indeed, I will. Thank you, uncle.”

Estoiyaju walked into the room with Perku. The general went down on one knee. “Your Majesty.”

“Rise, General Perku. I have a new assignment for you. Henceforth you will be the general in charge of the Anartu garrison, charged with making the army a positive force on the island. I have great confidence in you in this new role.”

“Thank you, Your Majesty. I am in shock! My family, as you know, lives in Néfa.”

“Indeed, and they can continue there; you can get to Anartu from Néfa in two or three hours, right? General Dontekester is henceforth assigned to the Nefa garrison and will be lord of the unsettled township north of Boléripura. I ask you to work closely with the governor of the island and with Lord Lamuno, who has been cooperative but powerless. If you are able, learn some Sumi.”

“Your example inspires me, Your Majesty. I will head for the island tomorrow, if that is your will.”

“It is. Thank you, General Perku.”

Thornton was out late that night at the monthly South Ménwika Council meeting and collapsed into bed as soon as he got home. He rose early, walked around town, and headed for the Geological Survey, where he had to catch up with various developments, make some decisions, and plan a thorough survey of the Késtone and Mémeneḡone lands.

Not long after he left the house, Auxiliary Sudguné Domo-Meḡdhunai arrived to talk to Liz. Chris was still sitting at the table reading the newspaper, so they included him in the conversation.

“We’ve had two people declare since the passing of the elder queen,” Sudguné began. “In one case, the person went to the Bahá’í Center and said, ‘I’ve thought about it and decided to recognize Bahá'u'llah as a divine widu.’ The other person said basically the same thing to a Bahá’í who knocked on his door. Both of them have been listening to

Mitrubbéru's radio show. Both cited the fact that the monarch is a Bahá'í as a reason to accept Bahá'u'llah."

Liz frowned. "But that's really not a reason. Do they have faith in Him?"

"That's a good question. Sort of. They recognize His station as a Manifestation, but they aren't sure what that means, and it's not clear they're willing to live by His laws. They say yes, but when you tell them what some of the laws are, they have second thoughts."

"Ask the Central Spiritual Assembly," said Chris. "We may see more and more of this because almost everyone has listened to Mitrubbéru. The enemies of the Faith have done us a favor. People know many of the basics."

"But not all," replied Sudguné. "Recognizing Bahá'u'llah and being His lover is not the same thing. We already have too many recognizers and not enough lovers."

"True, but we can't keep recognizers out because their love doesn't seem strong enough," said Liz.

"I wonder whether Mitrubbéru should start talking about the laws and obligations more," said Chris. "So far, he has avoided that and stressed the positive aspects of the Faith."

"I like to keep the door open as wide as possible, but I'm beginning to think he has gone too far, that way," replied Sudguné. "We don't have enough active Bahá'ís as it is! If the radio teaching produced one hundred new believers but only ten active believers, we'll drop to a ten percent activity level."

"But we will have more active Bahá'ís," replied Chris. "And that's what we need."

“Maybe we should create a second level of membership,” suggested Sudguné.
“Where people will participate in the Faith in some ways, but not others.”

Liz shook her head. “But we have that already. Anyone can take the study circles and other classes, can be a tutor, can run children’s classes or animate a junior youth group. Many Bahá’ís are devoted to Bahá'u'lláh but have little interest in any of these activities, but they pray and tell others about Bahá'u'lláh and live a good Bahá’í life.”

“Perhaps we should delay the enrollment of someone if we feel they need to study more.”

“We can do that, but I’d be careful to keep people out because we feel they aren’t ‘faithful’ enough.”

“Lady Liz, do we want a Bahá’í community that embraces the majority of the population where a tiny percentage is active and committed? What if a large, undeepened majority votes people onto Assemblies who are dishonest or unscrupulous?”

“We don’t want to turn people away,” said Liz. “If the society starts to follow Bahá’í principles, that will move everyone in the right direction, Bahá’í or not. The larger the percentage that accepts the Faith in some sense, the better.”

“I just don’t know how I can continue spearheading door to door efforts, Liz,” said Sudguné. “Because too many people are becoming uncommitted Bahá’ís. I originally thought that all we needed to do was involve them in the Ruhi study circles and all would be well! But that hasn’t worked, either.”

“Trust the Assembly,” said Chris. “We really don’t know how to create a community with universal participation, but if we pray, consult earnestly, and preserve unity, we’ll figure it out gradually.”

“And remember if someone wants to be a Bahá'í, they don't just assent to believing in Bahá'u'llah; they should also assent to obey His laws,” said Liz.

“We haven't been mentioning that, but maybe it's time we did,” replied Sudguné. “That would help; people would think about the commitment more seriously, and we could hold off enrolling them until they were a bit more deepened. You're right that unity is the key, and the Central Spiritual Assembly is our center of unity. Okay, I'll write up a detailed report and get it to you, Liz.”

“And I will forward it immediately to the Assembly,” Liz promised. “Think of solutions, not just problems. We may agree with you about the problems, but the Assembly needs to find solutions!”

Thornton was in the geology building all morning meeting with staff and reviewing the latest quadrangle maps; they now had almost all of the inhabited areas of the world mapped in detail and had started working their way away from the sea and the rivers into unsettled or sparsely settled areas. It was lunchtime before he left the building. His work in Melwika was just about finished; after lunch he could drive back to Lébé and the kids in Wurontroba, three hours and three time zones to the southeast.

He headed to the Bahá'í House of Worship first to say a few prayers quickly for all the work with the Tutane tribes. Then he came out and crossed the gardens to head home.

A man stood in the gardens looking at the temple and the génadema nearby and Thornton paused to look at him, because he seemed familiar. He was in his mid or late

thirties, with dark Sumi skin and black hair tinged with a bit of gray. The man saw Thornton and stared a moment.

“Dhoru Mennea,” he finally said.

Thornton looked more closely, puzzled, then recognition dawned. “Kwéteru.”

“It is I. We haven’t talked in many years.”

“We’re both much older.” Thornton walked over and extended both hands.

Kwéteru shook hands. Thornton smiled. “What brings you here?”

“I wanted to see Mɛlwika and the génadema. I am now a free man and can go anywhere.” He shook his head. “Absolutely unbelievable. When I left, this spot was brushy semidesert and Mɛlwika had less than a thousand. Now, with 21,000, it’s Éra’s biggest city. The genadema alone is twice the size of the old town!”

“That’s true. We now have 3,000 students here. And think: you were our first faculty member who wasn’t part of the family.”

“I was, and the first person to use your computer. Does it still work?”

“It does; the *aliénés* have repaired it for us a few times.”

“Very fortunate.”

“So, you have children?”

“Yes, four. Two boys and two girls, aged 10, 9, 6, and 4. My wife, Snékhésé, is Ghésloné.”

“Does she like Sumilara?”

“No; she doesn’t know the language and finds all the foods and customs strange. My friends think she’s a barbarian. It’s difficult. I talked to Randu a few days ago about

teaching at his génadema in Eryan and Sumi. If we lived in Arjdhura, it'd be more comfortable for everyone."

"How's your Sumi dictionary?"

"I think we'll get a first edition published next year. I'm finishing a Sumi-Eryan dictionary, too; everyone says it's badly needed." He looked around at the campus again. "The things that could have been."

"That's true, you could have been here the whole time."

"But Sumilara had to try for independence. It was unavoidable."

"Do you have regrets?"

Kwéteru shrugged. "If I did, I'd be repudiating my Tutane wife and half-tutane kids. So . . . I'm torn."

"An independent Sumilara doesn't do you any good."

"It's a beautiful dream, though. I suppose the die is cast; we're part of the kingdom and have to be."

"It sounds like the Queen wants to make sure the island gets a fair shake."

"Her little Sumi speech was pretty impressive; she has a knack for languages. People loved it." He said the last sentence with a note of ambiguity in his voice.

"Her accent was pretty good. I think she wants fairness for Sumilara."

Kwéteru changed subjects and languages. "That's right, you speak Sumi now."

"Not that well. Jordan's the real expert. His wife is half Sumi," Thor replied in Sumi.

“Another mixed family; another reason for the island to be part of the kingdom,” said Kwéteru, switching back to Eryan. “I’m staying on top of the mountain in Sumiwika. They have a nice temple up there. I hear your dad helped pay for it.”

“Melwika has three temples and we helped pay for all of them!” He pointed. “Have you been inside the Bahá’í temple?”

“No; can I go in?”

“Of course, it’s open to anyone.”

“I’ll take a look some time. I’d like to see Lébé and May; are they around?”

“Lébé and the kids are in Wurontroba and May’s in Mëddwoglubas right now. I have to drive back to Wurontroba in less than an hour, if I’m going to get there before dark. You should go to the museum and the library, and maybe the Hall for the Humanities.” He pointed out three buildings. “And go knock on the door of our house to say hello. I’m sure they’d love to see you.”

“May’s usually in Pértatranisér, right? I’ll have to get there some time and catch up with her.”

“We’ll be there this fall, too. Maybe we’ll see you there.”

“I hope so. Thanks, Thor.” They shook hands warmly. Then Thornton went on his way.

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391.

Sumilara

Early Brénmenu, 17/635

Thornton slowed the steam car as he turned right off of Route 2. He pulled out his cell phone and called Amos.

“Hey Amos, we just entered Pértatranisér. Can you have Fithu open the gate into the garden, please.”

“Okay, see you in a minute,” replied Amos.

Thornton closed the phone and drove slowly up the street, which was busy with car and wagon traffic. He turned left, then right into the alley that led to the house’s main vehicle entrance. “Wake up, we’re here!” he exclaimed.

In the back seat, Jalalu, Kalé, and Jonkrisu stirred; they had slept the last few hours of the five-hour trip. As he drove into the courtyard, Amos, May, Skandé, and Marié began to wave in welcome. Thornton pulled the steam car into a parking space and they all began to climb out.

“Alláh-u-Abhá!” exclaimed May to them. She came around to the passenger side and embraced Lébé. “So good to have you here.”

“We’re glad to be here for the next three months,” said Lébé, embracing May.

“Welcome, welcome!” exclaimed Marié, embracing her cousin Kalé, who was exactly the same age and very close.

Thornton opened the trunk, which was packed full of duffle bags of clothes and other possessions, and people lined up to take the bags. He passed them out, then

everyone trooped into the house and out of Pértatranisér's oppressive humidity. The cool interior was a welcome experience, maintained by a half tonne of arctic ice that melted every day. They headed upstairs to the bedrooms. "The usual rooms?" asked Jalalu.

"Yes, that's easiest," replied Thornton. "Except you'll have a bedroom to yourself, because Rostamu won't be here."

Jalalu nodded; he enjoyed being with his cousin, Jordan's younger brother, but also looked forward to a private room. The fourteen year old walked into his new bedroom and looked around.

"It's not so bad," said Thornton.

"I guess." Jalalu wasn't going to be placated that easily; he was furious he'd start ninth grade in Pértatranisér.

"Don't worry, you'll make friends quickly, and the material covered will be the same as in Melwika."

"That's because the Melwika teachers wrote all the textbooks," said Jalalu.

Thornton and Lébé walked into their room to put down their bags of stuff; Amos brought in Thornton's two heavy briefcases. Then they all went down stairs. "It's just after our breakfast and not quite time for your supper," observed Amos.

"We'll postpone 'supper' until lunchtime," said Thornton. "I'm going to try to stay up until 6 p.m., which is 3 a.m. Melwika time; as long as I stay in the daylight I should be able to do it."

"Your office at the Agriculture Géndha has big windows and lots of light," said May. "It was a bit of a tussle to arrange it. The head of the school kept saying 'forestry is not part of agriculture, so it isn't appropriate.'"

“Whoever said it was?” said Thornton. “But it is related; more than he thinks, in fact. I’ll talk to him.”

Amos looked at Jalalu, who looked sullen. “So, a week before high school begins.”

“I know. And I really want to be in high school with my friends.”

“You will be in three months,” replied Lébé.

“How’s your guitar playing?” asked Amos.

Jalalu brightened a bit. “I’ve gotten a lot better in the last year. I really want to learn how to play rock tunes.”

“Well, that may be easier than you think. I have a proposition for you, if you’re interested.”

“Sure; what?”

“I’ve got an electronic engineering class that starts next week with six students, and three of them want to make an electric guitar.”

“Really? Like the kind used by rock bands on Gædhéma?”

“Exactly. Here’s my proposition to you: you come join the class as an assistant. Sit in on all the meetings and help in the lab. You’re pretty good with your hands; you’ll enjoy the lab work. I’ll give you a special final exam and if you pass, we’ll get you high school credit for the class. And you’ll get an electric guitar, either the prototype or a copy we’ll make later.”

“Really? Okay, deal!”

Amos smiled, pleased. “I thought you’d like that.” He looked at Thornton, who smiled back; they had hatched the plan by phone the day before to make Jalalu’s visit more fun.

“When will the course meet?”

“After your school’s over; I’ll arrange that, too. You’ll have to complete your usual courses. But depending on how you do, you’ll get either 1 or 2 génadema credits, and that’ll help in a few years when you start génadema.”

“None of my friends will have that!”

“I think you’ll like engineering and mechanical subjects,” said Thornton. “You’ll be good at them.”

“And this’ll be good for your music as well,” said Lébé.

“Art and engineering,” agreed Jalalu.

“Not just any engineering,” said Amos. “Electronic engineering. There’s still very little of that being done, and it’s all done either here or in Èndraidha at the army school. Electronics means better radios, microphones, telephones, automated telephone switching systems—we’re getting close with that—and some day, calculators and maybe computers.”

“So, it’s important.” Jalalu smiled.

Lébé turned to May. “How’s the women’s géndha over here? And how’s the Bahá’í Studies Institute at Mèddwoglubas?”

“They’re both doing well. The géndha’s expanding to seventy-five residential women starting next week, plus a hundred more who are commuters from Ora and Néfa whose parents don’t want them being the only woman in a classroom full of men. Add

the women in the géndha in Məlwika, the commuting women there, and scattered women in other génademas, and I'd say there are 500 to 600 women taking génadema courses worldwide; about fifteen percent of all students."

"The percentage is coming up, at least."

"Exactly. I'd guess that a quarter of the women are Bahá'ís."

"That many?"

"Yes; a lot of the parents willing to send their daughter away to school are Bahá'ís."

"What percentage of all students are Bahá'ís?" asked Thornton. "A sixth? An eighth?"

May nodded. "Maybe an eighth. The Bahá'ís are a twentieth of the population, but they understand the importance of education. As for the Institute, it's having the usual growing pains of any new institution, but I think we did pretty well for the summer. We gave two weeks of deepening classes to a couple hundred youth volunteers and invited fifteen of them for intensive training all summer. They all want to go to génadema and we'll be able to arrange scholarships for all of them. We're already planning a detailed program for Ejnaménu for college credit and a more elaborate program next summer for even more students."

"And the building will be finished in another month or two," added Thornton. He rose. "I think I'll walk to the géndha and see how the office looks, if that's alright with everyone."

"Come back for lunch," said Lébé.

“I will.” Thornton hurried back upstairs to grab one of his two heavy briefcases, then came down and stepped out the house’s front door.

He had time, so he took a circuitous route so he could see Pértatranisér better. He started by walking west, even though the géndha was east. In a dozen blocks he came to the city’s industrial park, where factories made mattresses, textiles, rubber products of all sorts—the city was famous for rubber—pastas, jams, canned food, small metal products, and wood products. A large bus station provided accommodation for commuting workers from neighboring villages; a pipeline a meter in diameter carried industrial waste along the river two kilometers to a special industrial waste treatment plant, which poured its final, still-toxic results into a canal that conveyed it into a narrow salt marsh along the shoreline, where it sank into the accumulating sand.

He then walked eastward along the river walk, a concrete sidewalk for pedestrians and bikes that ran along the river’s south bank behind the houses. Pértatranisér had been born south of the Atranisér, but the city of 7,500 now covered the northern bank almost as extensively. The houses that he saw were comfortable, even prosperous; the original one or two rooms had been greatly expanded, sometimes second stories had been added, fresh stucco or paint had been applied, and everyone had water, gas, sewer, and electricity. The back gardens, sometimes visible through gates, were verdant and productive, and he could hear chickens or pigs in some of them. The planet, in spite of all its advances, was still fairly poor and agricultural. His eye had been trained for aesthetics as a result of his work on Mēlwika’s master plan, so he could see lots of ways to make the riverwalk much prettier, converting a practical route into an attractive feature of the city.

The riverwalk passed under several bridges, including Route 2, the major north-south highway for the western shore. Once east of the road he took a ramp up to the commercial complex, which now had the world's largest Home Improvement store, plus thirty-five shops, five restaurants, one of the world's three supermarkets, a huge public bath, a hotel, and a large intercity bus station. Buses came and went constantly, feeding several hundred out of town shoppers into the complex every day, which did three million dhanay of annual business. Thornton crossed it slowly to look at the new shops and enjoy the coolness of the interior, which required twenty tonnes of ice per day. South of the commercial complex was the high school, followed by four educational institutions: a branch campus of the Ora Institute of Technology (formerly Mitrui Génadema) with Amos's engineering lab; a branch campus of Rudhisér (formerly Néfa) Génadema; the Women's Géndha; and the Géndha for Tropical Agriculture associated with Tripola Génadema. The four main buildings formed a quadrangle, but additional buildings were being added to form subsidiary quadrangles.

He entered the agriculture building and spoke to the receptionist, who gave him a key to a second story corner office, 202. He went up and opened the door. It had a desk, several nice bookcases, a ceiling fan, and two very large windows to let in natural light. A row of palm trees reduced the sunlight that entered, which was fortunate because Pértatranisér was right on the equator and humid most of the year. He turned on the ceiling fan immediately and began to unpack.

"Welcome," a voice said. Thornton looked up and saw a man of about thirty standing in the doorway.

"Thank you; I'm Thornton Mennea."

“I presumed. I’m Tritu Taksu, Director of the Géndha.”

“I’m delighted to meet you.” Thornton walked to the man and shook hands. “I’m very grateful for the chance to work out of the School of Agriculture. Its reputation keeps growing and growing.”

“Thank you, we’re doing our best to build it. Our graduates have acquired a reputation for giving farmers good advice.”

“So I’ve heard. Your work with peanuts has been very good.”

“So they say. I hope you’ll be comfortable here.”

“I’m sure. Is the classroom on this floor, or the first?”

“You’ll use room 103; it holds twenty-five students. I wish you weren’t giving your courses as radio courses; then we could use room 101, our largest.”

“I only want forty students, tops, and the cap here is twenty. If enough want to take the course, we may have to run it twice. How many courses do you run?”

“Usually eight per term, sometimes more if we have to run math or humanities courses. You’ll only be here in the fall terms?”

“Correct; then I’m returning to Melwika.”

“Good to know.” Tritu nodded, looking relieved.

“I’m not after your job or anything like that. I have a permanent commitment to Melwika and South Ménwika and to the Geological Survey at the génadema there. I’m here because I’m helping to organize forestry companies for much of the western shore and they need people trained in forestry.”

“I hope there’s no plan to convert farmland into forest, because right now we still need more farmland, not less.”

“I quite agree. We will steadily need more farmland. The western shore has a strip of prime agricultural land over 100 kilometers long and 15 or 20 kilometers wide. But east of it is another strip 15 or 20 kilometers wide of good quality forest. It needs to be managed; think of the trees as a crop, which they are because they provide fruits, nuts, rubber, pitch, and wood. We’re going to need all those forests and more in the future for wood, paper, and fuel.”

“I see the connection with the agricultural géndha, then,” said Taksu.

“Good. It’s not a conventional agricultural producer, but it follows many of the same principles.”

Taksu nodded. “By the way, there are mail boxes at the end of the hall, and you already have mail and a telephone message from yesterday.”

“Really? Who would call me here?”

“General Perku.”

“Oh, thank you; I should look, then.” Taksu led Thornton down the hall to a mail area, and sure enough, there was a note to call Perku inside. The phone number was 31-0210; 31 meant Anartu and 02 meant the military base. Intrigued, he walked back to his office, closed the door, and called. It took a moment for the call to reach Perku’s assistant, and he put it through to the general himself.

“Lord Dhoru, thank you for calling me back. How are you?”

“I’ll be tired in a few hours; I just reached Pértatranisér from Melwika. How can I help you? Do we have an agreement about a Rudhisér Forest Company?”

“Yes, I think that’s wrapped up. You can check with Awskandu, who is taking over as Governor of Rudhisér from me. But when we last talked he said he would finalize

the paperwork to declare the forests beyond the townships in the Néfa Basin to be property of the province and therefore available for lease to a joint public-private company. But that's not why I called. Sumilara needs a Forest Company as well; I just learned that the flooded forests are rapidly falling into the sea and sinking to the bottom and that within a year there won't be any marine timber left. This island's appetite for wood is insatiable, the plateau forests have been shrinking for farmland and the highland forests are susceptible to erosion and volcanic damage. Forest resources have to be marshaled very carefully. Your two courses, I see, are radio courses. Any way you can add a stop here once or twice so we can recruit students for the courses here? We need them."

Thornton hesitated, but knew he couldn't say no. "General, they are just about full; I'm limiting both to forty. But I suppose I could open another section, especially if we can get some help. There are some excellent geologists on the island and they know ecology already, like Ekur and Eraru. If one of them could serve as the local faculty member, taking attendance, helping answer questions, and translating, that would make it possible. We'll also need to translate the notes into Sumi, which will cost."

"We'll pay for that, and for the extra section, Thor. We need the course. Amurueqluma's only two hours from Pértatranisé, just like Tripola or Belledha. If you're already committed to giving a class in either of those cities, Amurueqluma's not any farther."

"True. I . . . suppose I can do it, General."

“Thank you. We’ll work on getting at least one, preferably two local Sumi instructors to organize classes that can go to Amurueqluma when you deliver a class there. You’ll be taking questions by telephone, right?”

“Correct, for half an hour after every class. It’s toll free, so a teacher of a one-room schoolhouse in a village can take the course over radio channel 10, call in with questions, then get to the nearest big town for one or two face to face classes to meet me. The final work will be a take-home exam and a research paper. I’ll need some help grading, since my Sumi’s limited. But there will be detailed mimeographed notes for every single class and they’ll be relatively easy to translate into Sumi, so the content can be done there.”

“Excellent. I’m trying to arrange for as many as half of the radio courses to be available in Sumi version, so the island is as included as possible. I’ve only been here three weeks, but I’ve already made some changes.”

“Good. I’m so happy the queen changed the commanders there. Dontækester never allowed things to calm down; his actions kept resistance going.”

“I agree. The army is already scheduled to start on a water and sewer system for one village next month, and it looks like we’ll be adding classrooms to schoolhouses. Governor Modobéru wants Sumilara to develop the best educational system in the world. It fits the culture here, too; it can be done. If we can pull that off, the rest of the world will want to keep up!”

“That’s true. Is the army cooperating with you, though?”

“I’ve put the Majors on notice that they will be replaced if they don’t cooperate fully and have already reassigned one to the mainland. He’s being replaced by Major Aisendru. You must know him; Jordan’s father in law.”

“Yes, I know him; a fair-minded man.”

“I’m looking for Sumis or Eryan married to Sumis whom I can promote, since they often have less prejudice, and it turns out many of them have children or wives who are Bahá’ís! How did that happen?”

“When the Faith came to Sumilara, there was no literature in Sumi, so Eryan speakers were the only ones who could be attracted. They were usually children of the army or of officials who had Sumi wives; bilingual and bicultural.”

“Of course. I understand. We may have many opportunities to work together because the army is seeking partners. I’ve coordinated the start-up of a lot of projects in Rudhisér, Delongisér, and Vésa. I hope to start a lot of them here as well. I’ll be in touch with you and your father, I’m sure.”

“Good, we look forward to that, General.”

“Excellent. Let my assistant know when you can come to the island. Thanks. Bye.”

“Good bye.” Thornton put down the phone and wondered sadly how he was going to add Sumilara. A second section of both courses meant six more hours a week in the classroom, plus more grading. Visiting the island meant several entire days more traveling. The course was currently scheduled for Dwodius and Kwéterdius in the morning and he didn’t want to tie up two more days. If he taught the Kwéterdiu class on Tridius as well, he’d have one additional traveling day and more time for questions. That

was the best solution. But it would have been better if the second section had been scheduled months in advance!

Estoibidhé finished chanting the Hymn of the Lamp, her favorite and a favorite hymn to chant at graves. She looked at her mother's new tomb, which had been developed further since her visit the day before; every day they added a statue or pillar. A Bahá'í quote came to her mind: *I have made death a messenger of joy to thee. Wherefore dost thou grieve?*

"It's been forty days, mother," she said. "It's time for me to move on, but I'll be back in a few months. Please help me, mother. I need it."

She rose, circled the grave one more time, then headed back to the waiting coach. It took her to the palace, where the vehicles were packed and ready to go. Within half an hour she entered the royal steam car and headed for Néfa.

It was a busy day of meetings with lords, the provincial assembly, and a few individuals. It was dark before the royal car took her to the palace in Ora. The next day was a near-repeat of the events in Néfa, except it included a meeting with Chris Mennea just before supper. He entered her reception room and found her seated at a comfortable chair. He bowed.

"Your Majesty, it's good to see you again."

"Thank you, Lord Chris, it's good to see you again as well. Please, come sit with me." She gestured to a chair next to her, lower but quite comfortable.

"Thank you." He sat. "So, the forty days have ended."

“Indeed, and now I’m making a very fast tour of the kingdom; a day in Néfa, two here in Ora, a day in Réjéivika, one in Mëddwoglubas, and two in Tripola, a day in Ændraidha, one in Mëdhpéla, one in Gordha, then home to Mëddoakwés. I’ll be home in ten days and I yearn for it.”

“I can imagine. It’s been a long time.”

“Exactly. The autumn session of the Consultative Assembly has been postponed but will start soon after I return. So, what do you have for me?”

“Reports.” Chris handed four of them to her. “I’ve attended Tomi Board meetings in Néfa, Réjéivika, Ora, and Tripola in the last month. The provincial tomis in all four provinces have grown between five and sixteen percent over the last year and all have made a profit for their investors. The Rudhisér Tomi is investing heavily in beer making, but they’re expanding their facilities related to agriculture and textiles. The Vésipa tomis continue to concentrate on iron and steel production and products, but they’re turning to timber as well, with the near-exhaustion of the drowned forests. The DeLongisér Tomi remains the smallest, but the population of the Long Valley grew fourteen percent in the last year and the tomi there expanded sixteen percent, so that’s respectable. They’re concentrating on agriculture. The South Shore Tomi’s holdings are the most diverse, with agriculture, light manufacturing, timber products, and dairy represented. They’re also partnering widely, especially with village lords and granges. They’re a major participant in the South Shore Forest Company, which will manage the province’s forests and maximize their production of wood. All the details are found within.”

“Thank you.” She leafed through the South Shore Tomi’s report quickly and paused to scrutinize the financial table at the end. “Good, solid profits.”

“Indeed, and they’re making them the right way; workers are paid decently, the industrial park just south of Tripola has a pretty good pollution control system, and five facilities they are investing in are scattered about in villages to provide local employment. The South Shore is poised to get some new infrastructure, also. The road to Wurontroba will be widened and graveled next year, and a new set of transformers will be added to its power line. The wider road will allow trucks from Gordha to get to Tripola much faster over a much shorter route, which will make it easier for Gordha to export beef and other products straight to the southern and western shores. The transformers will allow the electrical line to carry power from the Gordha dam more directly to the southern and western shores, improving the availability of power and the flexibility of the entire electrical system.”

“It also means Wurontroba, which was once obscure and out of the way, will now be conveniently located.”

“Indeed, Your Majesty. The road and electrical connections between Melwika and Isurdhuna via the north polar basin will do the same thing to the basin villages next year and the year after.”

“Roktekester has told me about that plan. Tell me about all the ‘Forest Companies’ you are setting up. How are they going?”

“Fairly well. The first one was set up two years ago in Lepawsona, outside the village of Sullendha. The plan is that the province and townships place management of their forested lands in a company that they jointly own, often with some investors. The company cuts the forests in a sustainable way and replants so that there will always be trees to cut. This also prevents soil erosion. The company produces and maintains a

network of narrow one-lane logging roads that provide hunters and wardens access to the forest as well. They cut some sick trees, thin some areas, and conduct occasional controlled burns to remove underbrush. The management and replanting sides of the operation adds costs to the timber cutting and processing sides, but guarantees them a future. My fear is that some provinces will decide not to create a sustainable forestry plan and will be able undercut the profits of the ones that do, forcing them to cut back on replanting and forest management.”

“Would legislation help?”

“Indeed it would. It may be essential if we are to protect this world’s future. As the economy grows, demand for timber and firewood will double, triple, then quadruple. We could literally cut down every tree on this world. We have the ability to do it.”

“That’s the frightening side of the new knowledge. What about coal?”

“We have coal reserves, but we still don’t know how large they are. Mēlwika is built near the largest coal reserves on the eastern shore and will consume them completely in ten or twenty years at current rates of consumption. The coal is poor quality, also. Kerda and Kaitera have coal and we may find some in Delongisér.”

“We need to manage the forests properly. There are some areas near Sumiupērakwa that have been completely cleared and they look terrible. Lord Chris, I will need a proposed law in two weeks.”

“Two weeks, Your Majesty?” said Chris, surprised.

“I’m putting together a proposed bill for the autumn session of the Consultative Assembly. It will accelerate the plans for health care, set up a pension for anyone over 75 years old—we’ll move it to an earlier age later—establish a minimum wage and a

36-hour work week, and ban child labor except in family businesses. We're still considering other measures. I'd like to add forestry management to the bill."

"I can give that to you. It would be good to add some pollution regulations as well. Many provincial tomis are lax with the pollution policies we've set up, and the result is the poisoning of land and water."

"Talk to Aryéstu or Weranolubu; they're putting together the bill with the help of Kandékwes. I'll be writing to the Central Spiritual Assembly in another week or so. I am asking all groups of religious leaders—the Central Spiritual Assembly, the priests in Mèddoakwés and Isurdhuna, and the Sumi hierarchy in Anartu—to put together plans for the spiritualization of our society and present them to me. I may try to meet with representatives of all of them regularly. But those ideas need to be ready by the harvest session of the consultative assembly next summer. One other question, lord. What approach would you take to Sumilara?"

Chris thought for a moment. "I'd prefer to get back to you about that, Your Majesty. I am impressed by the speed and effectiveness of the approach you are taking, though. The criticism of the army was completely cut off."

"A Sumi-dominated army garrison, loyal to the kingdom and providing services to the island, should solve the problem. I'm speaking to Princess Ninti and Duke Lamuno weekly; they're helpful. Duke Lamuno will soon have more authority over the island. I want to learn more Sumi, as that will unite the kingdom as well. But so far I've had no luck getting a tutor for myself and the family."

"The best teacher I know is Nina Maradar, wife of Randu. She's very good. She teaches Sumi at Melwika Génadema."

“When we get back to Mèddoakwés we’ll ask her, then. Thank you, lord, for your consistent service to the kingdom.”

Chris bowed his head. “It is my honor, Your Majesty.”

A week of adjusting to the time zone and climate of the western shore was followed by a plunge into the fall term. Thornton taught his two courses back to back. Students took the courses over the radio in practically every province and called a toll-free number to ask questions. Thornton scheduled the sixteen regular two-hour sessions and six special sessions of each course so that he spent two each in Mèddwoglubas, Bellèdha, Tripola, Amurueqluma, Sullèndha, and Sumiuperakwa; the rest were split between Pértatranisé and Ora. The schedule was a pain, but it helped 55 students acquire the basics of forestry quickly, and the travel allowed him to help with the organization of the forest companies.

A letter arrived from Rébu the first week of the term, asking whether he could visit for a day. A discreet call to Perku revealed that it was not an issue, so he was invited for the first day of Génménu. May was particularly enthusiastic to see their old friend and met him in the courtyard.

“Fourteen years, Kwéteru! Or maybe I should say Rébu; which do you prefer?”

He chuckled. “I went through a Rébu phase, then a Kwéteru phase when in exile, and I guess I’m Rébu again. How are you doing, May? Still as radical as you were?”

“No, I’m middle aged and responsible now.”

“I guess I am, too. You were my model radical, you know.”

May was startled by that. “No, I didn’t know; or maybe I should say I didn’t want to believe it! You caused a lot of trouble.”

Rébu smiled. “The first big Sumi revolt in three centuries.”

“Come sit and have tea with us. But first let me introduce the children.” She pointed to all five—her two and Thornton’s three—and named them, then May and Rébu left the courtyard to head inside. The samovar was ready for them, so May poured tea for Rébu, Thornton, Lébé, Amos, and herself. “Tell us about what happened after the Battle of the Palisade.”

“That was a crushing defeat, as you know, thanks to your technology.” Rébu eyed Thornton nervously. “The radio, the rover, the explosives; we didn’t stand a chance. And then your medicines saved the lives of hundreds of wounded who would have died, and they were released rather than being crucified; that made quite an impression. Pretty soon there were a hundred of us living in the mountain jungles north of Lord Gilran’s plateau villa. We tried to recruit guerilla fighters, but the Sumi were not used to thinking that way and our numbers dwindled as people went home. Finally six of us entered into negotiations to surrender and got reasonably good terms; a life of exile. As it turned out, life became thirteen years.

“Kostekhéma was very hard; it was cold, strange, barbaric, and hostile to us. The food was bad and once we were allowed to rent a place in the village the money was very tight. But we were able to teach courses and then later I got contracts to translate the Eryan encyclopedia into Sumi.”

“The palace knew you were being paid,” said Thornton.

“I know. They ended the pension we had been getting! But between translating and teaching I earned enough money to get married and support a family.” He shrugged.

“My sons are 8 and 5, my daughters 6 and 3. It’s much more expensive to live on

Sumilara, but I've been given a teaching position at Ninurta Génadema and it pays fairly well. So far, Arjdhura hasn't worked out; it doesn't offer the philosophy and language courses that I teach. My wife may have to adjust and learn Sumi after all."

"The kids will learn it quickly," said Thornton.

"They already have."

"What do you think of freedom for Sumilara now?" asked May. It was an idea to which she was sympathetic.

Rébu smiled. "I was one of the people pushing the anti-army campaign, but the Queen was smarter than we expected and it has fallen apart. The island has a significant amount of autonomy, so I think I have to sit back for a year, get a feel for the culture and society, and consider strategy: both what we will push for and how."

"It's hard to know," agreed May.

"If I were you, Rébu, I'd concentrate on developing Sumi language and culture," said Thornton. "Those are your strengths, and that's where Sumilara can go quite reasonably. The island has an elected legislature, its own police forces, and it's an integral part of the kingdom. It will only become more economically integrated over time. The island can't be economically self-sufficient."

Rébu scowled "Can't be? Why not?"

"Well, it *can* be, but at a permanent high cost that would deprive the island of any economic advantages it has. Sumilara has no iron or copper; it has to import them. But even if you found local supplies, making your own cars would cost about twice as much as cars made in Melwika. The same is true of light bulbs, telephones, and a thousand other manufactured items. It simply isn't worth making them on your own, especially

since the island has long enjoyed a trade surplus with the mainland. Sumilara's future lies in expanding its exports and becoming richer and more Sumi *within* the kingdom."

Rébu looked at Thornton. "I suppose that's our fallback position, but I hope we can do better than that. I'm no economist, though."

"Rébu, Thornton's right," said Amos. "Sumilara's strategy for *three hundred years* has been to produce high quality exports. That has only accelerated; the island has three industrial parks and they produce parts for export. Maybe five percent of the parts for Miller Motors are made there, so the mainland is dependent on Sumilara as well. I bet ten percent of the island's jobs are export related and most of the wealthy have invested in export businesses. They will resist efforts to pull Sumilara out of the kingdom."

"I've already encountered that."

"I have a project we could collaborate on," said Lébé. "I just spent the summer in Wurontroba and Sértroba, where the Bahá'ís—both tribes have converted to the Faith—shared with me all their traditional hymns to the gods, including to Endru. I'm assembling a book of the hymns to publish. I'd love to see a similar book of Sumi religious myths and hymns published, in both Sumi and Eryan."

"And in Eryan? The priests will be furious with you," said Rébu.

"Perhaps, but the time has come when many people will appreciate both Tutane and Sumi hymns and myths. The génademas have been teaching history and philosophy. They've been working toward teaching religious studies, but there are no materials in Eryan about the Sumi religion. It's time people are able to read, appreciate, and sometimes accept Sumi ideas."

“The Tutane volume will encounter only minor resistance,” added May. “The Tutane have become objects of interest to the public in the last few years, rather than symbols of terror; they’ve come to symbolize an earlier Eryan way of life. And the hymns Lébé collected are really very interesting. They illuminate some statements by Widumaj about sacrifice, for example. Some of the tutane hymns clearly predate Widumaj; they preserve the old grammar and case endings. Others have dropped the case endings, but the hymns are written in a certain hexameter form that, without the case endings, is defective. If you restore the old grammar, the hexameter rhythm becomes regular and correct!”

“Really?” Rébu laughed. “That’s amazing. Have they found any hymns in Mædha?”

“The city in Delongisér?” said Thornton. “There’s a fragment of one written on a temple wall. There are also old, moldy bark books that were found in several locations, but they’re virtually unreadable and crumble when touched, so no one has tried to decipher them. Not yet.”

Rébu nodded. “Well, I have to finish my dictionary project, but after that I would be interested in publishing Sumi religious materials in Eryan translation. That’s an excellent, worthy project and I’d love to collaborate with you about it.”

“Good,” said May. “Maybe we’ll be able to resume our collaboration again, after a lapse of fourteen years!”

Reread and edited, 6/17/13, 9/1/17, 12/2/24

Whirlwind

Mid Génmènu, 17/635

Queen Estoibidhé pulled her sweater around her shoulders more tightly. It was unusually cold for mid Génmènu—early November in Earth terms—and for some reason the palace’s heating system hadn’t kicked in enough. It was late afternoon and reviewing financial records was exceedingly difficult for her anyway.

“Estoiyaju!”

A moment later a young man entered the chamber. “He’s still at the hospital, Your Majesty.”

“Still? Oh, that’s worrisome. Could you call and find out how his daughter’s doing? I do not want him to return; I want him to stay with his family. And could you make me a cup of tea?”

“Yes, immediately Your Majesty. By the way, I saw Duke Kandékwes walking across the courtyard from the Assembly hall, so I believe he will be here in a moment. And his Excellency, High Priest Wèranodatu has an appointment with you in five minutes.”

“Show my husband in immediately and keep Wèranodatu waiting. Thank you, you’re quite efficient. Your name is. . .”

Wèpokestèr, Your Majesty.”

“That’s right, ‘slayer of evil,’ son of the great widu. Do you know when Wèrétrakestèr is due in the city? I need his help with the Consultative Assembly.”

“Tomorrow, I believe.”

“So, do you have his gift of prophecy?”

“Definitely not, Your Majesty! I’m a numbers man; I believe in things I can see and count. I have a degree in accounting and business from Gésélékwes Maj Génadema.”

“Really! What did your father say about that?”

“I was very worried about telling him and I went to see him in his cave in Kërda. Before I got to tell him, he said “Wepokɛstɛr, I had a dream about you the other day where I saw you surrounded by ledger books! So I told him my plans and he nodded.”

The queen laughed. “Isn’t that amazing! So, what are you doing here in the palace?”

“Estoiyaju hired me just yesterday to keep track of the expenses of the staff and of your needs. I ran a pasta plant and flour mill in Ejnopéla for two years and got bored; it had twenty employees, but it wasn’t what I wanted to do. I decided to try service in the palace for a while.”

“Good; I’m glad you did. Here.” She handed him the printed financial summary. “After the tea and the call to the hospital, look this over and tell me what you see.”

He nodded, took the summary, bowed, and headed for the door. As he reached it, Kandékwes arrived. Wepokɛstɛr looked at the Duke. “Will you have tea with Her Majesty?”

“Yes; cream and sugar,” replied Kandékwes. He walked in; Estoibidhé walked to her husband and they kissed.

“So, how is my Consultative Assembly?”

“Not very consultative, my dear. The House of Lords has wrapped up for the day. There was lengthy discussion about the Omnibus Bill, mostly dozens of questions about why something was this way instead of that way, and why not do it that way instead. I talked briefly with the speaker of the House of Commons. It was quite contrary today. Markeru was particularly opposed to the pollution and forest conservation laws, denouncing them as rules for the rich.”

“Ironical; the rich are the most opposed, because they protect the average people. What’s your assessment?”

“It’s going to be very difficult. We may be doing too much too fast.”

Just then Wepokester entered with a tray with two cups of tea. They took them and started to sip. Wepokester added a bit of cold water to the queen’s so that it would cool, and Kandekwes added more cream to his.

“I don’t want to give up on these laws if at all possible. Weretrakester is coming in two days and I know he’ll favor them. These are laws to help the people. He’s very persuasive.”

“We need to talk to Kekanu, too. He’ll support them. I have three men in the House of Commons who are working on members we think will come around. We have two weeks of deliberation ahead of us; plenty of time to educate.”

“Good. What’s the stance of the Sumi members?”

“They favor the forest conservation laws; the island may soon be short of timber. Most think the pollution laws are unnecessary because they’re surrounded by an ocean that can absorb it. Their attitudes toward the child labor, minimum wage, work week, and work safety laws are mixed. They’re skeptical, like everyone else.”

“And the new non-profit incorporation law?”

“No one’s even thinking about it, yet.”

“I see. I have such a huge pile of things to read today, it’s daunting! Aryéstu’s worried about a real estate bubble; house prices have gone up ten percent just this year. Prices for shoes and textiles have started to fall and he says it’s excess competition. But he’s not sure what we can do about either problem.”

“I’m not even sure why these things are problems. Anyway, let me drink the rest of my tea, so the priest can see you.” He downed the last gulp of his tea and rose. He headed for the door. Wepokēster stood there with a message.

“Estoiyaju thanks you. His daughter had twins prematurely today, but lost one of them. She lost a lot of blood and the doctors are worried about her condition, but they are optimistic.”

“Thank you. That’s terrible! Please call him back when you can and assure him of my prayers for her steady improvement. But right now I need you to usher in the High Priest, then sit and take notes of the conversation.”

“Me?”

“Yes, you. Estoiyaju usually does it, but he’s not here, and his secretaries don’t seem to have the brains to do it very well. I have more confidence in your abilities.”

“Thank you, Your Majesty, I’ll do my best.” He stepped out to fetch Wēranodatu and a moment later returned. The High Priest of Mēddoakwés, son of the disgraced former High Priest Jēsunu, was in his late thirties. The queen sat in her throne-like chair next to a comfortable couch where guests could sit near her.

“Your Majesty.” Wēranodatu fell to one knee and bowed.

“Rise, Your Excellency. Please, come sit next to me. How are you and your family?”

“We are well, Your Majesty. I’m so glad to see you again. The last time was at the beautiful but tragic funeral of your dearly departed mother. You appear to have recovered well from the grievous event.”

“Thank you, I am managing, now, though I miss mother terribly. Your Excellency, could you chant the Hymn of the King for me in her honor, and then chant the Hymn of Healing for Estoiyaju’s daughter, who is fighting for her life after a very difficult childbirth.”

“I would be honored, Your Majesty!” Weranodatu straightened out, closed his eyes, composed himself, and began to chant. He had a powerful but unusual voice; not unpleasant, but unexpected in timbre. Estoibidhé closed her eyes, meditated on the words, and prayed for guidance.

The two hymns took several minutes. “Thank you, Your Excellency, they bring me great comfort. I gather you wish to speak to me about the letter inviting the priests of Mæddoakwés to offer me recommendations about ways to spiritualize our civilization. The letter, I assure you, is genuine. I have no desire to harm the priests or their reputation, only to seek their wisdom.”

“Your Majesty, for centuries the High Priest of Mæddoakwés has had the privilege and responsibility of advising the monarch. I am—we are—honored to serve in this fashion. This privilege was occasionally granted to a widu as well, such as Werétrakester. It was never granted to the priests in Isurdhuna, who maintain the tomb of Widumaj and perform many sacrifices, but do not even know the hymns right. It was unthinkable that

Sumi priests and philosophers would be approached. And as for asking advice from the Bahá'ís, that's . . .” He shook his head. “Impossible.”

“Your Excellency, this is a new day and I wish to seek advice from any and all sources.”

“Then you dishonor us, Your Majesty.”

“That is not my intention. Times have changed. We now have a consultative assembly where many voices can be heard. The priests have a few seats in the House of Lords and none in the House of Commons. This is a way to bring balance.”

Weranodatu shook his head. “But do you really want our advice? Judging from the last few months, I think I know what you want. The Bahá'ís will give it to you. Werétrakester thinks in ways similar to them. But do you want advice about how to make bigger and more efficacious sacrifices? How to bring the people closer to Widumaj? I think not.”

“I will set no restrictions on the kinds of advice to offer, your Excellency, and I think the hymns provide a basis for many insights that I might not otherwise obtain from Bahá'ís or widus. While I have accepted Bahá'u'llah as a great widu, that does not mean I love Widumaj any less. I say his hymns for my mother every day, as well as Bahá'í prayers. I do seek your wisdom.”

“Then recall the invitations to the others.”

“I will not do that.”

“Then we want the last word. Meet with the others first.”

“Fine, I'll do that. The order of the meetings is not important.”

“Not just the order; the way the meetings are done. We want extensive coverage in the *Royal Standard*.”

“We will make sure all the meetings are covered in the *Royal Standard*, and the meeting with the priests in Mēddoakwēs should receive special coverage because of your historic importance.”

Weranodatu nodded. “Good, that is what we want. Maybe the paper can interview us.”

“That’s fine. None of the priests in Mēddoakwēs are known to the outside world, and they should be.”

“Can you grant us a radio channel?”

“You should talk to the ministry that handles the channels. Right now they are all allotted and if we create a new one, the radio receivers won’t be able to pick it up. I am sure if you want to do a one-hour show every day or two, the time can be found.”

“Excellent. Thank you, Your Majesty.”

“Have you looked at the proposed laws being discussed in the Consultative Assembly, your Excellency? I have heard that the priests oppose them.”

“We see nothing in the hymns that would support all these laws, so we see no reason to support them. Widumaj has given us all the guidance we need to improve this world. He says to learn the hymns, sacrifice, and carry out one’s duties. Men must work hard in the fields and in businesses; women must manage their houses; children must obey their parents and do their chores. Widumaj has prescribed everything we need to maintain a balance in relations. A happy society that receives Esto’s favor will result. I think you know this, Your Majesty.”

“Your Excellency, Widumaj says nothing about how many trees we should cut, but don’t you think He would be displeased if we cut down every single tree on this world and it was barren of all trees forever?”

“If he says nothing about the problem, perhaps it really isn’t a problem? There are always seeds and saplings.”

“So, does Widumaj tell us absolutely everything we need to know about everything?”

“Well, perhaps not everything; otherwise there would be no need for monarchs or priests, would there? But the outlines of our duties are clear. If you want to ‘develop’ the kingdom spiritually, that is what one does.”

“Then write it up as a proposal; a plan. I look forward to considering it for the spring session of the Consultative Assembly. I’d like to receive the proposals in the winter and meet with the representatives in Plowménu.”

“Very well, we will have a plan ready for you.” Wëranodatu nodded to her. “Thank you for this opportunity, Your Majesty.”

The queen rose, so Wëranodatu did the same. He walked to the door and left. Once it was closed, Estoibidhé turned to Wëpokester. “Let me see your notes.”

He rose, walked to her, and handed her the pad of paper.

“You have good, clean handwriting, and you’ve caught most of the details of the conversation. Very good; you’ve done well.”

“I am still shocked by his attitude and tone toward you, Your Majesty!”

“I understand. Perhaps I am a bit shocked as well. The priests have a ways to go before they can understand their situation as it really is.”

Thornton slowly folded his huge paper charts and put them in his satchel. He turned off the microphone and made sure the telephone line was closed. Exiting the classroom, he turned off its lights and headed down the hallway.

The eclipse was nearly over; Mēlwika was in darkness, except for the electric lights illuminating it. Thornton stopped at the door and pulled his coat on tightly before stepping outside to head home. It was unpleasantly cold, unlike Pértatranisér. His stomach growled and he was uncertain whether to call the hunger pangs the need for breakfast or supper. He had left Pértatranisér, nine time zones earlier in time, eleven hours earlier. He was trying to get all his business done in Mēlwika when he would normally be awake in both cities, then return to Pértatranisér before jet lag set in.

He had two hours before attending a South Mēnwika Village Council meeting, so he headed home to see everyone. He entered as the sun was reappearing; he could hear Kēkanu's show ending. His mother, Behruz, and Jordan were sitting around the table.

“You made it!” said Liz. “When did you get here?”

“Six hours ago, but I've been in the Geology Department reviewing the final reports of our expedition to the Mémēngone and Késtone lands, meeting with staff, and giving my two forestry courses.”

“You must be exhausted! When will you sleep?”

“It's not that bad. There was a Bahá'í génadema student in Pértatranisér who wanted to come here for a few days, and he has a driver's license, so I paid him to drive me here. I told him to take his time, so he took five and a half hours to get here and I got about five hours of sleep. I'll drive back tomorrow after sunrise here. I have to stop in

Sullendha to meet with students and talk to the Forestry Company people, and in Belledha to meet three students, and in Sumiuperakwa to meet four more and give them a special class, then I'll drive back to Pértatranisér."

"That sounds crazy, Thor, especially when you consider how dangerous driving has become. You have to be careful. You have a family."

"I know, mom, but driving isn't *that* dangerous, and there's no other way to get around. I have all these students to see." He turned to Jordan. "I'm surprised to see you. How's business?"

"Business is fine; we're as busy as ever. But there's some good news." He smiled. "Tiamaté and I are going to have a baby."

"Really? Congratulations! When?"

"Six months; Dhébelménéu. We're very happy."

"And I will be a grandfather," said Behruz, hopefully.

"That's great. It'll certainly change your life, for the better and for the worse."

"It's another stage in life. We hope and pray there won't be a miscarriage this time."

"I'll pray for you."

"How are your classes? Sounds like they're keeping you pretty busy."

"This experiment with giving the classes over the radio and trying to meet with all the students at least once seems to work, but it's exhausting. Next time, they'll have to gather in fewer places, come to me, or do without a meeting. I'll be in Tripola next week and will see how the various southern forest companies are doing. The western shore will soon have four, and I think Kerda may form one as well."

“That’s all the provinces, right?”

“Except Arjakwés! I’d like to see a few more Tutane tribes form them, too. We may manage forest conservation without legislation.”

“As long as the companies stick to the policies.”

Just then the door opened and Chris came in. “Hey, dad!”

“Thornton, it’s good to see you. I’m surprised; but you have a council meeting tonight.”

“Exactly, in fact I have to go pretty soon. You look pretty tired.”

“I am.” Chris limped slightly as he walked to his chair and sat. “It’s been a long and frustrating day.”

“The consultative assembly?” asked Liz.

Chris nodded. “People are oriented more around power than around what is right. They want more influence and want to diminish the influence of others. Her Majesty looks weak, right now, so a lot of people want to defy her, whether the legislation they’re opposing is bad or not.”

Liz shook her head. “Why do people think she’s weak? Because she hasn’t broken any heads?”

“I suppose. Regardless of how clever the rearrangement of the army’s priorities was, it still looked like caving into Sumi pressure. If the Queen won’t stand up to the Sumis—and she’s even given Duke Lamuno more influence over the island, while weakening the army’s—who will she stand up to? That seems to be the gist of the comments.”

“I don’t think that’s what the people think, though,” said Liz. “Maybe legislators do, but they’re a minority.”

“I agree,” said Thornton. “My students think she cares about the people.”

“She’s popular,” agreed Jordan.

“Then maybe *Melwika Nues* should commission a poll,” said Chris. “I agree; the consultative assembly is looking at the whole thing from the point of view of power and influence, but the voters choose them and they have to represent the people’s best interests.”

“The Queen knows that, too,” said Liz. “Today Kεkanu interviewed several people who would benefit from the new laws. He works closely with the palace to support legislation.”

“That’s true, but time is running out,” said Chris. “The session has less than two weeks left. That’s not much time to persuade legislators. I was meeting with a group of them during the eclipse to figure out who would talk to whom, and we’re pessimistic.”

“It sounds like time for some prayer,” said Liz.

Thornton didn’t sleep well that night; he managed a two-hour “afternoon nap” at midnight, *Melwika* time, but was unable to sleep very long. He returned to the Geology Department for several hours more work, prayed at the House of Worship at dawn, had breakfast about the time he’d be going to bed in *Pértatranisér*, then set out on his westward drive, counting on coffee and sunshine to keep him awake.

Sullendha had suffered a very hard freeze the night before, but the forestry center gave him a thorough inspection tour of everything and he spent two hours with students.

Then he headed for Bellédha. The capital of north shore province was even colder; it had had a light snowfall the night before. He met with his students there as soon as they could be found—he had arrived rather close to dawn and had to wait—then he headed for Sumiuperakwa 70 kilometers to the southwest.

The small town of 1,700 people, center of the very small province of Jérnstisér, was much warmer—it was at 40 degrees latitude—but Thornton passed through a violent thunderstorm and blinding rain to get there. “Watch out, it must be coming this way,” he said to Minroktu, head of the town’s génadema and high school, as they walked to the classroom.

“The weather forecast says rain later today. How were you so sure?”

“This is the time of the year the marine gyre gets started. In the summer the east to west equatorial winds dominate and the land is warmer than the sea, so air flows outward from the sea when the air over the land warms up and rises. The western shore gets heavy rain and the eastern shore is hot and dry. But now the land is cooling off and the sea is retaining its heat, so the sea is warmer than the land. Cold polar air pools in the north polar basin, then breaks out and flows southward over Bellédha, the low point in the rim. Coriolis bends it westward, so it passes over the western shore. Then it sweeps across the sea along the equator and northeastward over the eastern shore, bringing warm rains during the winter.”

“And sometimes nasty weather here, especially this time of year,” noted Minroktu.

“It’s a bad thunderstorm. I had to go twenty kilometers per hour for a while.”

Minroktu pointed at a classroom; Thornton nodded in thanks and entered. The génadema was really two classrooms in the high school where up to a dozen different courses were offered every term, mostly by visiting faculty or via the radio. His students were ready and had lots of questions, so he pulled out the notes he had already discussed, covered the walls with them, and went through them sheet by sheet to make sure everyone understood the major points. The power went out once, but came back a minute later.

After an hour it was time for a quick break. Thornton looked out the classroom's ample glass windows and saw that the sky had grown very, very dark. The wind was picking up and scattered raindrops were falling. "This is even worse than it was when I drove through it two hours ago."

"It's warmer here now, and the south wind has picked up," said Wérokunu, a particularly bright student who was probably going to become the manager of the province's forest company. "We usually get a bad storm every year or two in the late autumn."

"So I hear. You know, that cloud almost looks dark green."

"It does; it's really thick."

The windows began to rattle as the wind picked up in sudden gusts. Leaves were whipping off trees and blowing around; branches were bent sharply. Then Wérokunu, startled, pointed. "Look, a whirlwind."

"What?" Thornton looked at the blackish-green cloud and saw a funnel extending down from it. "That's a tornado, and it's coming this way!"

"Tornado?"

“A whirlwind, *sterbay*.” He repeated the standard Eryan term, as Wérokhunu hadn’t taken a meteorology course. “This is very dangerous. The children must get away from the windows; they may get broken.”

“We’d better hurry and warn them. This building has sixteen classrooms for grades 7-12; you do the bottom floor and I’ll do this one.”

“Good idea.” Thornton looked at the students in his classroom. “Everyone downstairs into the first floor corridor! If that whirlwind hits this building, the windows will explode and the roof may peel off!”

That galvanized the five students. They all headed out into the hallway, shouting to classrooms as they went. The classrooms facing north immediately began to evacuate; the teachers in the ones on the south side of the building headed north to see, then told their kids to head downstairs as well. A mad dash for the safety of the first floor began.

Downstairs there was confusion, then suddenly the lights went out; the town’s power lines had torn up somewhere. Kids began to cry and teachers made them get away from the windows.

There was a roaring sound. Thornton stood in a doorway looking out the first floor windows from a safe distance and was shocked to see the tornado roaring right down Route 1, splitting Sumiuperakwa in half and ripping up its main structures. The lord’s house, the only two-story structure, collapsed into a cloud of debris. The two stores and the elementary school took a direct hit and collapsed. The whirlwind came straight toward the high school and suddenly the windows exploded outward as the exterior air pressure dropped.

There were crashing sounds overhead and debris poured down the stairway at the end of the corridor. The whirlwind had passed right over them.

“By Esto, it’s tearing right through the saw mill!” exclaimed someone on the south side of the building.

Thornton headed toward the exterior door to look outside, but suddenly a downpour began and sheets of rain descended. One exit was partially blocked by debris anyway. He walked into a classroom to see out through the smashed windows. His car had been parked outside the entrance but was now completely gone.

“My God,” he said in English, Eryan failing him for the first time in a decade.

“We’ve got injuries over here!” someone was shouting from a nearby classroom building, and several teachers ran inside. A gust of wind had sent two desks across the floor and a child had been hit.

“The elementary school took a direct hit,” said Thornton.

“There are 200 children in that building!” said Wérokunu. “This is terrible, terrible!”

“The telephone’s out!” exclaimed Minroktu. “We can’t call anyone!”

“No one here can help, anyway!” replied Wérokunu.

“I can call,” said Thornton. He reached into his pocket and pulled out his cellular telephone, which he almost never showed to anyone. “This is a radio telephone; I arrived here from Gædhéma with it.” He dialed the operator in Pértatranisér. There was a pause.

“Operator.”

“Operator, connect me to . . . gee, I’m not sure who. This is Thornton Mennea. I’m in Sumiuperakwa and a whirlwind just came right through the center of the village,

blowing houses, stores, and schools apart. There are probably dozens and dozens of injured people. We need help.”

“I can connect you to the Governor’s Office in Néfa. We don’t have a connection to Mèddoakwés at the moment; it died a few minutes ago. Your whirlwind must have ripped out the wires. We also had a power failure, but the power came back up. Hold on a moment, Lord.”

There was a pause, then a ring. “Auskandu.”

“Auskandu, this is Thoru Mennea. I’m in Sumiuperakwa and a whirlwind just came right down the center of the village. It’s pouring rain right now, but before the rain hit we saw the lord’s house, the two main stores, and the elementary school hit by the whirlwind. I’m in the high school, where it ripped off part of the roof. It tore through the saw mill, too. This village needs ambulances and army units.”

“Thoru, how are you calling me?”

“I have a special radio telephone with me. The electricity and telephones are out, here. You can reach me at Pértatranisé 8812. Please dispatch help right away.”

“I’ll call the hospital and the army base. Any idea how many injured people there are?”

“No. Here in the high school there are several minor injuries. We’ll have to wait for the rain to stop to assess the entire town, but I am sure there are dozens injured, maybe hundreds. This was big, Lord.”

“I see. This is a terrible tragedy and disaster, then. I’ll call the army and the hospital right away. Does Jérntisé have an emergency plan?”

“I don’t know, we’re cut off and in the dark here.”

“Alright, I’ll authorize Rudhisér’s plan, then. Keep my office informed of the situation.”

“I will, but I should hang up now because the battery on the telephone won’t last very long. I’ll call back when I have more information.”

“Very well.”

Thornton said goodbye and closed the circuit. “We need to get to the police station, help them assess the situation, and get the information to Governor Awskandu.”

Wérokunu nodded. “The rain has almost stopped. Minroktu’s checking the top floor of the school; there are some serious injuries up there. Everyone hadn’t gotten downstairs yet.”

Thornton looked outside at the slackening rain. “Let’s assess the situation here, then head to the police station once the rain stops.”

The palace heard about the disaster within minutes when the Néfa army garrison called. “What time is it there?” asked the Queen.

“It’s now the time of the eclipse; mid morning, I think,” replied Estoiyaju, who had returned to the palace, now that his daughter was out of danger. He turned “Wεpokester! Find out what time it is right now in Sumiuperakwa!”

“Seven hours behind us, Lord.”

Estoibidhé nodded. “There’s lots of daylight, then. Call Kεkanu. The *World Table* has just begun. Have him call Dhoru Mennea and get an interview over the air; that will alert the entire kingdom of the seriousness of the matter.”

Just then the phone rang. Wepokester answered it. “A report from Sumiuperakwa; many dead and injured children in the elementary school. Lord Yimu is very seriously injured and must be evacuated. The chief of police is in charge of the village.”

Estoibidhé shook her head. “Call the army and all the hospitals. They’re going to need every ambulance in the kingdom for the seriously injured. The army must send its mobile field hospital immediately. I want all our tents sent; it must be cold there now and many houses are damaged. Let’s go down the hall where there are more telephones; we’ll need every phone we can get. And I want to call Chris Mennea.”

“Why, Your Majesty?” asked Estoiyaju.

“His family has radio telephones; we need them. Dr. Lua has to go to this disaster. And we need volunteers immediately.”

“The Bahá’ís.”

Estoibidhé nodded. “No one else can mobilize people and items faster because they’re in every village.”

“We should call the temples too, though.”

“Yes, I agree. You call them, Estoiyaju, and challenge them to match the other religious groups in helping. Call the main temple in Anartu, as well; they’re part of the Kingdom, too.”

“I’ll ask Perku to do that.”

“No; Countess Ninti. This is something she can do, and she has time. Perku will need to send troops.” The queen turned to Wepokester. “Call my husband and tell him I must go to Sumiuperakwa immediately, then arrange for my limo.”

“Your Majesty, you’ll just get in the way!” said Estoiyaju.

“On the contrary, I need to be there to direct the emergency personally. We have no system for handling this; every general, Duke, and Lord with a possible role will want to help. I need one of the Mennea phones because they’re much better than the army’s radio telephones. I know, I’ve used one.”

“We need to turn on *The World Table!*” exclaimed Wepokēster. “Kēkanu’s interviewing Thornton Mennea and the police chief!”

“Does everyone know the Menneas have these little phones?” asked Estoiyaju. He followed the queen into the next room where the radio was on.

“Three dead and six injured, and we’ve only checked a dozen houses so far,” the police chief was saying. “I think half the houses here are damaged. Because of the saw mill’s contracts with the Arjakwés Prefabricated Home Company, many people had prefabs here, and they weren’t properly anchored, so the whirlwind turned them over or tore them open.”

“Was the law requiring tie-downs being enforced?”

“Sadly, no.”

“Can you describe the main street?”

“The whirlwind came right down it and destroyed every building. Route 1 is impassable to vehicles because it’s covered with pieces of buildings. The destruction is incredible; there’s nothing to compare it to. It’s as if a giant came down the street, ripping houses apart and throwing the pieces around.”

“And the elementary school?”

“Broken apart like a smashed egg. We already know of a few dead and injured there.”

“We had better call you back later and save the battery,” said Thornton.

Estoibidhé turned away. “Now everyone knows. I’m calling Chris Mennea.” She picked up a telephone and asked the operator to connect her.

It took surprisingly long; all the Mennea phones were tied up. Finally Chris answered. “Your Majesty? How can we help?”

“We need Dr. Lua, Melwika’s ambulance, as many doctors as can be ready in an hour or two, and as many of your little radio telephones as you can spare. I’m going to Sumiuperakwa personally. I want to leave in an hour or two so that I can get there before daylight ends.”

“I see. We can provide you with . . .four phones, will that be enough? I was just talking to Jordan. He wants to help.”

“Excellent, he is welcome. I can’t leave here without the phones because I won’t have adequate communications.”

“I’ll drive them to the palace personally. I’m in Melwika right now; the House of Lords adjourned early today.”

“I already got a report. Thank you, Lord Chris. Also, call the Central Spiritual Assembly. I want as many volunteers as can be arranged to help with clearing and rebuilding.”

“I’ll call on my way down.”

“Thank you. Goodbye.” She hung up the telephone. Estoiyaju and Wepokēster were both talking on phones at once, but Kandékwes had hurried in. “Can you come?” she asked. “I need your advice and support.”

“Of course, my dear.”

“I’ll bring Wepokæster along as well; Estoiyaju is needed to coordinate things here in the palace. Before we go, issue an order adjourning both chambers of the Consultative Assembly for three days in response to this disaster.”

“Alright. Just the three of us?”

“And Jordanu. We’ll all have telephones and can summon anything else we need.”

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Popular Acclaim

Mid/late Génmènu, 17/635

Ninety minutes later, the queen left Mèddoakwés in her limousine, accompanied by two police cars, sirens wailing. Jordan was with her; the four of them took turns making calls because Melwika and Pértatranisér only provided one connection each.

An hour later they stopped in Belledha to pick up aerial photos. Okpétu had photographed the destruction and had landed at Belledha so that the pictures could be developed more quickly. Jordan had a lot of experience examining aerial photos and started assessing damage. “Looks to me that a third of the structures are essentially destroyed and a lot more are damaged,” he said as they approached the village.

“How much property damage?” asked Estoibidhé.

“If the average structure costs 2,000 dhanay and 100 are destroyed, that’s 200,000 dhanay. Add another hundred thousand for repairing damaged structures. . . plus two schools might total a hundred thousand more. . . then there’s the saw mill and furniture factories.”

“At least half a million,” said Estoibidhé, nodding.

Wèpokester pointed to a smashed grove of trees near the road. “It went through there.”

“Incredible,” replied the queen, shaking her head.

“It looks like a pretty wide path of destruction,” added Kandékwes.

They slowed as they approached the edge of the village. A barn on the east side of the road was blown apart; one on the west side suffered minor damage only. Past the barns the houses started, and the pattern was the same: the tornado had traveled down the eastern side of Route 1, then had crossed it and traveled down the western side. They stopped at the edge of the village where the road surface began to be covered with debris. There was a large collection of ambulances, buses, and trucks parked there as well.

Wepokester hurried out of the limousine and opened the door for Estoibidhé. Once she stepped out, the shout “Her Majesty!” ran through those congregated there.

“Please continue your work,” she said. “I’m here to help.” She turned to the policemen stepping out of the accompanying vehicles. “Please stay back, so I can talk to people.”

They nodded. Kandékwes stepped out and the two of them walked into the ruined village. Jordan and Wepokester trailed a meter behind, the police five or six meters farther back. The Queen stopped at the first house, which was still standing but had had its roof ripped off. A woman sat inside the door.

“Good woman, what will you do?” asked Estoibidhé.

“Your Majesty! I . . . I don’t know what I’ll do, yet. My daughter was in the elementary school and my husband is there, digging through the debris. Most of the village is at the school, Your Majesty.”

“That’s where we’re going. Do you have any roof left?”

“One room still has a roof, but my brother’s house is still standing. My son is there. He was able to walk away from the school, praise be Esto.”

“I rejoice in his safety. The army is bringing tents; they’ll start arriving tonight. How can we help Sumiuperakwa?”

“We’ll need a lot of help to rebuild, and many prayers for the children.”

“I’ve already been praying. Half the way here I was praying.”

“I’m sure Esto hears your prayers, Your Majesty.”

“I will pray for you and your daughter. What is your name? What is her name?”

“I am Brébedenté and my daughter is Aisdukter. She’s eight years old.”

“I am honored to meet you, Brébedenté, and will remember you and your family in my prayers. This terrible tragedy could not have been prevented, but we will learn everything from it we can so that we can minimize the loss in the future. The palace will help rebuild this village and it will be more beautiful than ever. I pledge that.”

“Thank you, Your Majesty.”

Estoibidhé extended her hand to Brébedenté and they shook hands, then the queen hugged her. A crowd was gathering by the door, so the queen turned to the others. “What have you lost?”

“My house, Your Majesty.”

“My son is in Belledha Hospital with a broken leg.”

“My husband was in the factory and was killed when the roof fell.”

“My store was destroyed.”

“And my barn.”

“I am very sorry about your husband,” said Estoibidhé. “As you know, I lost my brother three years ago and my mother three months earlier. These are very difficult and grievous losses. Material losses can be recovered.”

“But none of us had insurance, Your Majesty.”

“You have the best insurance of all; each other, and the taxes you have faithfully paid to the crown. Now you can help each other rebuild, and the crown will help with the materials. Sumiuparakwa will rebuild before winter strikes. I pledge that to you.”

“Thank you, Your Majesty.”

She moved on to the next house, where a toothless old man told her how the roof had blown off and no one inside had been harmed in the least. The next house was a heap of debris, however, because the old man’s roof had landed there. Three people had crawled out of the ruins.

The fourth house down was covered with people removing bricks and boards; a baby was buried somewhere underneath. The queen and her party helped lift debris while she listened to the story. Wepokester took notes of names. A journalist who was roving the ruins took pictures of her with the crowd.

They continued past the lord’s totally smashed house and the small commercial district of two stores and several shops and offices, all reduced to heaps of debris. The heaps were unguarded, but no one was looting; everyone knew everyone else, and everyone was busy helping somewhere. They passed a dozen more completely or partially demolished houses, then came to two contrasting structures: the Bahá’í Center on the left side of the street, missing its roof, and the partially built village temple on a low rise on the right side. The unfinished temple had been completely leveled and the debris was abandoned. The Bahá’í Center, however, was swarming with activity; a tent was stretched over part of the missing roof and the inside was thronging with people speaking with the accent of Khermdhuna. The queen entered. A dozen men were

affecting temporary repairs to the roof; a dozen women were busily cooking in the kitchen, which was open to the sky.

“Alláh-u-Abhá,” she said. “When did Khermdhuna arrive?”

“Alláh-u-Abhá, Your Majesty,” replied a woman. “I am Marié Doma-Khermdhunai, wife of Lord Pédrú. When we heard about the disaster we obtained three buses from the bus company and one hundred fifty volunteers came down. We got here an hour ago.”

“Where are you staying?”

“We thought most of us would stay here, but the roof’s blown off! There’s room in the high school. If there isn’t, we’ll drive home tonight and come back tomorrow. It’s only 90 minutes to get here.”

“May Esto bless you! This is what our kingdom is about! Thank you.” She extended her hand and went around and shook hands with all the women in the kitchen, then with the men.

They continued to the ruined elementary school, where several hundred men and women labored to clear debris. The roof had lifted off, then collapsed back onto the building, burying classrooms with broken wood. Two bodies lay nearby covered by sheets; families were usually claiming bodies as soon as they were brought out, so they did not represent all the dead. As she arrived, a very badly injured eleven year old was being delicately extracted. The queen watched as the child was deposited in a waiting ambulance, which turned up a side street and headed southward toward Néfa via debris-free alleys.

“Your Majesty, how did you get here so fast?” exclaimed a man nearby.

“I came as soon as I could,” she replied. “What have you found?”

“Eight dead children, Your Majesty,” said the man, sadly. “We think that’s everyone, but we won’t be sure until we remove the rest of the debris.”

“Allow us to assist, then.” She turned to the pile of debris and began lifting a piece. People stood, shocked, for a moment, then joined in. Within a few seconds they were working harder than ever.

Estoibidhé asked no questions while she worked; she watched instead. People who had been walking by stopped to help. A few older people who had been squatting in their doorways walked over to assist, and soon the crowd had doubled in size. In twenty minutes they had removed the biggest pieces that could be covering people and tossed them on a pile. It was clear that no one else was buried in the school.

Estoibidhé’s hands were nicked and dirty; her dress had a tear. She smiled when everyone turned to her at the end of the work. She held her hands up so people could see and they all applauded her. “No, don’t applaud me,” she replied. “This is really a small assistance. I am here to see what has happened to my people, to grieve with them and to give them hope. Through Widumaj, Esto has taught us that we should ‘love my servants as you would love me, and serve all to the extinction of your life.’ In your faces today I see the traces of Esto. In your love for each other, your service to each other, your love for your village and for your fellow human beings, I see Esto today. In this work to clear the school I see Esto’s will at work in the world. In this terrible tragedy I see his test of our mettle, and I see many evidences of victory.

“In a terrible event we can see either good or bad, but if we look for the good, we can seize it and bring it forth, make it bigger and more powerful, and in our own ways gain victory over the pain. That’s what we must do as we move forward tomorrow.

“Sumiuperakwa will be rebuilt. You supply the labor; the palace will supply the building materials. You have a fine woodworking plant here; we must get it running right away. Meanwhile, the stocks of construction timber all around the kingdom will be drained. Sumiuperakwa’s plant will replace it later. Both schools will be rebuilt. From this event, a more beautiful Sumiuperakwa will emerge. We will all be proud of this place, these people, and the stronger community we build.”

The crowd erupted in applause when she finished. Many came forward to thank her and she began to shake hands, something monarchs rarely did, but it felt fitting, and she thanked people for their efforts as she moved into the crowd. It gave her a new vision of the monarchy and its continued power.

Just then someone shouted “Army trucks! The army is coming!” People turned southward and saw a convoy of six trucks moving up Route 1, the lead vehicle using a snow plow to push debris aside. “It’s the first wave!” said Estoibidhé. “The army is here to help with cleanup!”

“May Esto bless them!” replied someone.

“Esto save the queen!” added another.

Kalané Wesénakwénu shivered as she stepped out of her car in Klendëdra, a village twenty kilometers west of Bellëdha. The polar air pouring southwestward from the north polar basin, which had triggered Sumiuperakwa’s tornado two days earlier, was still

strong and freezing cold. She hurried the last few meters to Orn  s house and knocked on the door.

The sixty year old widow opened her door. "Come in, dear, get out of the cold. How are you?"

"Quite well, honored, and you?"

"This cold makes all my joints ache terribly. How are your kids?"

"Very well. I brought some tea, so we can make a pot, and some loaves of fresh bread."

"Lovely. I have the water ready." Orn   pointed to the gas stove in the corner. She took Kalan  s coat and hung it up. "I don't know how many people will come by today; it's cold. But I have a few payments for you already." Kalan   nodded. She sat on the floor and pulled out her ledger book for Kl  nd  dra and handed Orn   the tea. The widow put the tea in the pot and poured water on it, then turned to a cash box nearby. "Here; this one says 'W  ranu' right?"

"Indeed it does, and '1 dhanay.' He was behind in his payments to Wiki bank, so I guess that catches him up." She flipped to the page about his loan, which had been 25 dhanay to buy a milk cow. She recorded the payment. "How's his cow doing?"

"Very well; half of the milk goes to his family and half is sold."

Kalan   nodded. The cash box had quite a collection of change, but had only three other slips of paper. She recorded their payments as well. "Shall I take your 1 dhanay?"

"Sure."

She pulled it out as well, then held up the total so Orn   could see it. "How's the telephone business going?"

“It keeps growing. I’m amazed. Two or three years ago, no one ever called anyone, but now with kids and relatives in Mēlita or Mēlwika or Bēlledha, I have two or three people a day stopping by, and three times that number on Primdius. Someone will write and say ‘I’ll call Orné’s at 2 bells.’ Of course, sometimes they’re late, so I have people hanging around, but that’s alright.”

“They can help with messages.”

“Especially the kids. I’ll get two or three messages a day and the kids next door can write pretty well, so after school one of them stops by, writes down the messages I received, and runs around the village delivering them. If I deliver the messages I’ll sometimes get a call later on from the operator saying ‘you have a message’ and I get another one! We don’t get paid, but usually someone gives me a gift for the service within a few days.”

“So you’re managing, financially?”

Orné sighed. “I suppose. It’s much better than before the telephone, that’s for sure!”

“Good, that’s what these Wiki Bank loans are for.” Kalané looked in the cash box. “Looks like you have enough for a clock.”

“I should have eight dhanay, twelve dontay. Can you bring me a clock next week when you come by?”

“Sure; they’re pretty cheap in Mēlita. If I forget, it’ll be the week after.” Kalané sipped her tea. “If no one else stops by soon, I’d better get going. I’ve got to visit seven more villages today.”

“You’re so busy.”

“I have to visit about ten villages a day, and even then it costs a lot to collect all these little loans.”

Just then someone knocked on the door. Orn  walked to the door and admitted a young man. “Mit tu, son of Mitru, come in and meet Kalan  W s nakw nu, Vice President of Wiki Bank. Kalan , Mit tu is a very responsible young man and his father is a very wise farmer here in the village.”

“I’m pleased to meet you.” Kalan  rose and extended a hand to the young man. “So cold, today.”

“It is, and I feel very sad for the people in Sumiup rakwa. The storm came through here too, but it wasn’t very powerful. I guess the cold air poured down, built up here, then forced its way south.” He sat on the floor on the pillow next to Kalan  and accepted a cup of hot tea from Orn .

“Have you been through Sumiup rakwa?” Orn  asked Kalan .

Kalan  nodded. “I started my trip today in J rk nta; it’s about fifteen kilometers southwest of Sumiup rakwa. I was supposed to spend half the day in Sumiup rakwa itself because we have twenty loans there, but we’ve given everyone a one month extension on the payments.”

“How kind. Is it really bad?”

“Unbelievable! A third of the village was reduced to splinters and a third more was broken. Twenty-one died. Everyone is in mourning or busy ripping down and building up.”

“How will they manage?” said Orn , shaking her head.

“There are 150 volunteers there—mostly from Khermdhuna—and 500 soldiers. More than half the soldiers are Sumis from the island because General Perku is in charge of the emergency. They’re removing debris and helping to rebuild houses.”

“Where will the kids go to school?”

“The high school lost half of its roof and that can be replaced in a few weeks. They’ll double up the classes until spring when the elementary school can be rebuilt. The palace is pouring in aid.”

“Thank Esto for the Queen!” exclaimed Orn . “I go next door to listen to *The World Table* every day and I go to the store to hear the news in the evening. She’s there, walking amid the debris, helping people, comforting them . . . it’s quite incredible!”

“She’s a queen for everyone,” agreed Mitretu. “And she cares for everyone.”

“And she’ll protect us from the Old Houses!” added Orn . “The leeches. How much Wiki Bank money comes from the palace?”

“I think a third of it, and a third is from the Menneas. The rest is from depositors, and a lot of that is small village deposits.”

“Esto bless the Menneas and Esto bless the queen,” said Orn . “And they’re all Bah   s, aren’t they?”

Kalan  smiled. “Indeed, they are. The Menneas are very interesting people; I know their grand daughter in law quite well. They believe in service to others. But they also believe in making money, even in getting rich if it’s done fairly and legitimately. Money isn’t an evil; it’s a necessity. But if people become attached to it, get greedy, get corrupted by it, then it can cause great evil.”

“Well spoken,” said Orn .

“There’s a small Bahá’í community here in Klendëdra,” said Mitřetu.

“I know a few of them; I’m a Bahá’í,” replied Kalané. She turned to Mitřetu. “So, what sort of loan do you want?”

“Just five dhanay. I want to buy some traps. The forests north and west of here have a lot of fur bearing animals: mink, rabbits, even beavers, though there aren’t so many beavers any more. I’m seventeen, I finished tenth grade, but now I want to get married and probably get a piece of farmland, maybe down in Swadnoma. I figure if I trap all winter I can earn about a hundred dhanay from the meat and furs and that’ll give me the money I need to get a farm started.”

“That sounds like a good plan. And your father doesn’t have it to loan to you?”

“No, because my mother has been very sick and the medical bills have pushed us to the edge of penury.”

Orné nodded; she knew it was true. “That’s why Wiki Bank is here; to help people get started,” said Kalané. “And you can read pretty well?”

“Yes, I finished tenth grade.”

“Excellent. Let me pull out a booklet and go over our program with you, and I can give the booklet to you afterward. Orné keeps track of loans for us in Klendëdra and holds meetings about them.”

“Until we can get a woman’s gabruli and a grange started!” added Orné.

“I think we’ll have a grange next spring,” said Mitřetu. “But I know how the program works. I have a list of people who already have loans who will work with me, including Orné.”

“Good, you did your homework,” said Kalané, with a smile.

At the end of the third day in Sumiuperakwa, Queen Estoibidhé drove back to Meddoakwés. At the end of a fitful sleep—which occurred mostly in the capital’s morning—the Queen rose, inspired by an idea. She had Estoiyaju announce a speech to the Consultative Assembly at the end of the afternoon.

Skanda had mostly covered the sun when she entered the chamber. The entire audience rose to greet their monarch. She headed to the front and stood before the microphone. Her speech would be carried live over the radio right before and at the beginning of the *World Table*, the world’s most popular radio show.

“Three days ago, our kingdom suffered yet another natural disaster,” she began. “It was not of the scale of a major volcanic eruption or a huge flood, but it was devastating to our fellow residents of this world, and since we are all neighbors, we all have arisen to help.

“The disaster reminds us yet again that we are all interdependent on each other. No part of this world is immune from earthquakes, floods, volcanic eruptions, wind storms, locusts, or plagues. These events highlight the purpose of government: to coordinate assistance when it is needed, to bring compassion to the victims, heal the sick, comfort the grief-stricken, and help everyone rebuild so that normal life can resume. This lesson was driven home to me when I walked amid the ruins, heard the stories, and promised that all of us would help.

“I have pledged half a million dhanay to Sumiuperakwa. Rather than award it straight from the royal coffers, I would prefer to allot it to the consultative assembly so

that it may appropriate the money for our friends in Jérnstisé. This act will demonstrate the collective will behind the assistance.

“The trip has also reminded me of the importance of so many of the reforms the Assembly is deliberating. Sumiuperakwa needs forestry legislation so that its sawmill doesn’t strip the hills around the village of their trees, causing soil erosion, flooding, and degradation of future forest quality. I met many, many victims of the whirlwind who are now in hospitals all around the kingdom. They need comprehensive health care now to cover the costs of their recovery. I met Skandé, a 76-year old widow living with her grandson and his wife and three children. When the whirlwind destroyed their house, the grandson was crushed under the falling debris and killed, as was one of their children at the elementary school. Skandé needs the old-age pension the legislation creates to help support her granddaughter in law and great grandchildren, who are her only family.

“Skandé’s oldest great grandson, Mitru, is twelve and a very bright lad who is doing extremely well in seventh grade. Without this legislation he will be forced to drop out of school and go to work, which will limit his possibilities later in life. He needs the legislation that enforces a ban on his employment until he is fourteen. Once he starts to work, he needs the minimum wage legislation to protect him from abject poverty. He needs the legislation requiring time and a half for overtime. Mitru’s growing prosperity will guarantee that he can afford to buy the goods his friends and relatives are making.

“All of us know people like Skandé and Mitru. Our kingdom is experiencing not just new knowledge or new prosperity; it is also experiencing new compassion. This legislation represents that compassion and Sumiuperakwa reminds us how much it is

needed. I hope the Houses of Commons and Lords will pass the various bills swiftly.
Thank you.”

The members of the two Houses rose to their feet and applauded enthusiastically. In Pértatranisér, Thornton, Lébé, Jordan, Amos, and May were gathered in the parlor listening to the intensity of the applause over the radio. “Sounds like she has swung them over,” said Thornton.

“Or arm-wrestled them over,” said Amos.

“I’d use a wrestling analogy; she has them pinned,” said Jordan. “It was quite extraordinary watching her in Sumiuperakwa for the last three days. She visited every single devastated household, talked to them, and gave them courage and encouragement. She didn’t shower people with gifts. She did bring money and typically gave out ten dhanay. But her main impact was psychological; people felt her empathy.”

“I’d say that was true here, too,” said Amos. “All the radio and newspapers covered the disaster, and she was the center of many of the stories. If we could take a scientific poll, we’d find that her popularity has soared.”

“And it wasn’t bad to start with,” added Thornton. “This has done the Faith a lot of good, too.”

Amos nodded. “Definitely. She was always quoting hymns of Widumaj, yet everyone knows she’s a Bahá’í. She has made the Faith look like a mainstream alternative, and one that’s more modern as well.”

“The priests are helping that by saying Sumiuperakwa was struck by the tornado because five percent of the population is Bahá’í,” added Jordan.

“Their credibility is a problem,” said Amos.

“What happens next?” asked Jordan.

Amos shrugged. “I think that’s predictable: the assembly will pass all the legislation. They have no choice. The queen has discovered the power of public support.”

Reread and edited, 6/16/13, 9/1/17, 12/2/24

394.

Spiritualization

Early Belménu/late Dec. 17/635

Thornton went to the big room in the front of the house where Jalalu was practicing the electric guitar that Amos's class had made. He was amazed he could hear it faintly all the way back in the house's main parlor through several sets of closed doors. With every door he passed, it grew louder and less pleasant.

When he entered the practice room, he was overwhelmed by the sound. Jalalu saw his dad and stopped playing.

"What is it?"

"Are you coming to breakfast? You got up, came straight here, and you've been playing for an hour now."

"Well, I *love* this song."

"What is it?"

"*Layla* by Eric Clapton. It has some great electric guitar at the beginning."

"Great?" He decided he'd better not hurt his son's feelings by continuing the thought. "Just come to breakfast."

"Can I use your computer after breakfast to record another song?"

"No more rock!"

"Oh, dad! It's called *Someone to Love* by Jefferson Airplane." Jalalu pronounced the English words carefully, but his Eryan accent made them hard to understand.

“Your mother was ready to kill me when she heard *White Rabbit*. We don’t have any of that drug stuff here.”

“I know, and I don’t want to take drugs, dad, but . . . it’s really interesting to hear what a drug trip is like.”

“It’s a rather peculiar set of English vocabulary to learn, don’t you think?”

“So what! I can learn the ordinary stuff from you, grandma, aunts and uncles, not to mention high school English.”

“Which, surprisingly, you aren’t doing very well in! Put down the guitar and come to breakfast with me.”

“Alright.” Jalalu put it down and turned off the power to the amplifier and speakers. Thornton watched and reflected that the equipment was big, bulky, and primitive compared to the stuff he vaguely remembered from high school on Earth, seventeen years earlier. But it was completely unique on Éra. He wished his fourteen year old would settle into more ordinary interests, especially since they could jeopardize the Faith’s reputation in such an incredibly conservative culture.

“So, can I use your computer today?” repeated Jalalu as they headed toward the breakfast table.

Thornton sighed. “I suppose, but not very long, and after I use it quickly.”

They reached the dining room and sat at the table with everyone else. It was Primdiu and breakfast was later than usual.

“Was he playing *White Rabbit*?” asked Lébé.

Thornton shook his head. Amos turned to him. “We had a frost last night.”

“Really? Has that ever happened here before?”

Amos shook his head. “Néfa gets a frost about once every ten years. But we’re right on the equator; you can’t get any more tropical.”

“Was it heavy?”

“It was. A lot of palm trees were damaged, and the citrus crop. The winter vegetable and corn crops were wiped out.”

“That’s bad,” said Thornton.

“It’s been over a month since the whirlwind marked the shift into a winter climate pattern a bit early. I called Ora; they had a frost down there, too. I think some of northern Véspe was spared. They say this is the worst in fifty years.”

“I wonder what’s going on? Maybe I should email Philos.”

“I thought he had fallen silent.”

“Other than the routine shipments of medicines and industrial tools, he has.”

Amos pondered that. “Better check the weather forecast for the north and south shores before driving back to Melwika. I’d go south; it’ll add an hour, but the weather is generally less harsh.”

“Do we have to go back, dad?” asked Jalalu.

“Listen to you! You didn’t want to come here and now you don’t want to leave.”

“You can take the electric guitar,” said Amos.

“Thanks, Uncle Amos! I think I can fix it if it breaks, too. But I have friends here who like rock music and none in Melwika.”

“I’m sure you’ll convert some,” said Thornton. “Melwika has more kids who might be interested.”

“I suppose that’s true. Lots of cousins, too.” Jalalu began to think which of his mother’s nephews would be interested.

“Grandpa John will be interested, too,” said Thornton, which caused Lébé to scowl at him.

Thornton’s cell phone rang. He glanced at the caller i.d.; it was his father. He switched it to speaker. “Hi dad.”

“Good day. How are all of you doing? Are you coming home tomorrow?”

“That’s the plan. What’s the weather there?”

“It’s snowing right now, but it’s supposed to stop in a few hours. I’d be very careful. Leave before dawn there so you can get here before sunset and take Route 2, not Route 1.”

“That’s the plan. How are the roads?”

“Slippery; be careful. If you get the chance, go to Home Improvement and buy extra blankets. There’s a gas shortage because of the prolonged cold spell and the house is very cold at night.”

“I’ll do that later today,” said Lébé.

“We have the same problem here,” said Amos, raising his voice so Chris could hear him. “The water gas plant at Bruagras is working at full capacity day and night and very little of its gas gets south of here. Ora’s system is working at full capacity and very little of its gas gets south of Meddwoglubas. Tripola’s suffering the most because its plant can’t meet the demand and there’s no spare gas to come south.”

“Every gas production unit on the eastern shore’s working at full capacity for the same reason,” said Chris. “The price of firewood has doubled. I’m worrying about animal

herds and have already made a few inquiries in Melita and on Sumilara about spare straw. Since assistance with development grants is slowest in the winter, Jordan plans to coordinate assistance with animal fodder. Say, Thor, your mother wants to talk to you.”

There was a pause as Chris passed the phone to Liz. “Hey Thornton, you’ll be back here just in time,” she said. “We got a phone call this morning from Lord Duku of the Késtone tribe. He’s the son of Modobéru, who was lord until his sudden passing two months ago. Do you remember meeting him?”

“Yes, he’s maybe 30 years old and has a *dwoyeri* in a wide variety of subjects—a bit of everything from nursing to agriculture and geology.”

“That’s right. The village has a nurse, Endrodukter, who spent a year at Melwika Génadema and two years studying at the Gordha Génadema, where she became a Bahá’í. The Késtone have a dozen Bahá’ís, but she’s the only one who’s a bit deepened and active. Anyway, since the village is snowed in, Duku called a big meeting in the one-room schoolhouse. It was attended by seventy-five men and Endrodukter. Its purpose was to discuss the future of the village. Modobéru was fascinated by his visit to Sértroba, but was not inclined to make any changes. Duku wanted a green light for change. Endrodukter said, essentially, ‘While we’re at it, let’s change our religion, too.’ They agreed to hear her out. She made a simple and pragmatic case: Bahá’u’llah’s teachings are the new knowledge and values the Késtone need to advance and become prosperous. The gathering heard her out and agreed.”

“So, they became Bahá’ís?” said Thornton, amazed.

“They voted; it was 60 to 6, with 10 abstentions. But the village basically considered it to be unanimous, so they all want to be Bahá’ís. We have 450 new Bahá’ís. I need to get there and take Lord Patékwu from Sértroba along, so we can assess the situation.”

“And I think we can predict they’ll be in hardship because of the severe winter,” added Chris. “So we’ll need to help them.”

“Which makes everything complicated,” said Thornton. “But if the village is cut off, how will we get there?”

“I’ve contacted Roktekæster,” said Chris. “The army’s struggling to keep the road to Gordha open. But he said that in about a week he should be able to open the side road to Késtontroba. They need to think about their decision a while, anyway.”

“And I have an audience with the Queen in three days anyway,” added Liz. “So I can’t go right away.”

“Okay,” said Thornton. “I’m not teaching next term, so I have some flexibility. I can go.”

It was going to be a busy day in the palace. Queen Estoibidhé dressed regally but comfortably, for it was the day preliminary plans for the spiritualization of the kingdom were due from three groups of religious representatives. Kandékwes attended to ask questions; Wepokæster took notes, as Estoiyaju had no interest in the entire exercise. At ten bells the first delegation arrived: the great Sumi philosopher Tanaravi, High Priest Dumuninurta of Anartu, and High Priest Shiimti of the Oracle of Zalena. Nina Maradar, who had agreed to tutor the royal family in Sumi, was present to translate.

The three entered the queen's private meeting room with great solemnity; Shiimti was particularly old, but carried himself with dignity, even if he was bent over with age. They all descended onto one knee.

"Please rise and sit!" replied Estoibidhé immediately in Sumi. She pointed the startled men to three chairs near her. "I'm afraid I can't continue in Sumi," she said in Eryan. "I am learning 'the sweet language' but have far to go."

The men listened attentively to the translation as they sat in their chairs. "I am immensely impressed you are trying, Your Majesty. We've never had an Eryan monarch learn our language," exclaimed Tanaravi.

"I hope the next one will be fluent and the one after that will have Eryan and Sumi blood. That is my wish. I apologize you had to come to Mëddoakwés in such wretched weather. I may come to Anartu next month to escape the snow."

"Anartu has remained warm, but the plateau has had frosts," said Shiimti. "Your Majesty's request about 'spiritualization' remains most puzzling to us."

"Perhaps I can clarify it, then. I asked the bearers of the customs related to the divine to present to me a report about how we can spiritualize the masses of this world. Spiritualization means making them, and their society, spiritual."

"Your Majesty seems to be asking how to achieve the impossible," replied Dumuninurta. "I think you know some of our sacred stories about the gods. The gods and goddesses themselves are not always spiritual! Consider the story of Enlilu's rape of Tiamaté."

“But that doesn’t mean we can’t aim to improve society, and improve it by raising the morals of the people,” said Tanaravi. “I think education will help immensely. They can be taught the importance of following the Way of Heaven, how to seek the Way—”

“The Way!” spat Shiimti. “What is ‘the Way’? This is an idea of the philosophers. It’s too abstract for the people. The people need to seek spiritual advice for their future; that will spiritualize them!”

“What, from your oracle?” replied Tanaravi with a scowl. “Two women inhaling sulfurous volcanic fumes and speaking riddles in a trance? That will spiritualize them?”

“Sumilara is most fortunate to have a network of priests in every village,” said Dumuninurta, interrupting their argument. “The priests have been the traditional experts of reading, writing, and our accumulated knowledge. Most village schools include priests. Our island is so progressive because of their learning and their encouragement of the new learning. I’d expand the network of priests.”

“I am indeed impressed by the Sumi priests,” agreed Queen Estoibidhé. “But they are already supported strongly by local and provincial taxes; even by royal taxes.”

“You asked what more you can do, though,” replied Shiimti. “Most temples—including our oracle—are old and need to be expanded and beautified.”

“So does the philosophy section at Naralon Library,” added Tanaravi. “It already supports six philosophers and a dozen students. We’d like to expand and translate our works into Eryan as well. That would have been impossible 15 or 20 years ago. But we have had Eryan coming to the island for centuries to study philosophy with us; indeed, much of Eryan philosophy as taught in Isurdhuna is actually from the Naralon Library.”

“I think Eryan philosophy owes debts to Widumaj and Azizu, also,” commented Kandékwes.

“They’re so monotheistic,” said Tanaravi ambiguously. “We have inhaled the fragrances of Anandu, the follower of Fo, as well.”

“What suggestions do you have, then?” asked the Queen. “So far I have heard a request for more money for priests, temples, oracles, and philosophers.” She looked at them; none of the three replied immediately. “I particularly want ideas. Rather than one report from all three of you, you can submit three separate reports, if you’d like, or one report with three sections. But all the sections should offer principles that change behavior. For example, honesty: how can we make people more honest? What are we doing now that makes it harder for people to be honest, and what can we change? Recommendations for how to spend money should be last, not first.” She looked at them as they digested her request. “Can you come back in six weeks with that?”

“Yes, Your Majesty,” replied Tanaravi.

“Thank you, and thank you for coming, then,” she said.

The three rose and left the room, Nina accompanying them. After they closed the door, Kandékwes said, “Well, that was disappointing.”

“It was. But I want to ask everyone and move them toward ideas. Who knows, if I do this every two or three months, in a few years we may have a consensus on a few things.”

“Like education,” said Wepokēster. “That was one thing they said; one principle of sort.”

“Yes, exactly,” said Estoibidhé.

Wepokester rose and walked out of the room to bring in the next party: three Bahá'í representatives, Dr. Stauréstu Aywergui, Lord Estodhéru Doma-Mëddwoglubasi, and Liz Mennea. They entered and descended onto one knee, then bowed.

“Welcome and Alláh-u-Abhá,” said Estoibidhé. “Please come sit with me.” She gestured to the same chairs.

“Alláh-u-Abhá,” they replied. “I hope Your Majesty is staying warm,” added Stauréstu.

“The palace is doing its part to conserve gas, I’m afraid,” she replied. “So, what do you have, where spiritualization is concerned?”

“We have studied the Bahá'í writings together extensively and consulted with the Central Spiritual Assembly for several hours,” replied Lord Estodhéru. “We have identified a number of relevant foci of education and action. The first is the oneness of humanity; the Bahá'í texts identify it as a central teaching that the population must understand to be spiritualized. This means, first, that the oneness and equality of Eryan, Sumi, and Tutane must be taught, understood, accepted, and acted on. It also means that equality of men and women must grow as a principle in our hearts, minds, and actions. Further, it means we must learn to accept various populations that we still have difficulties accepting and loving, such as the mentally disturbed and the physically and mentally handicapped. We must also reconsider our attitudes toward the very young and very old.”

Estoibidhé was visibly startled. “Oneness of the Eryan, Sumi, and Tutane I understand, but I had not expected these other groups as well!”

“The principle of oneness is very broad and encompassing,” said Stauréstu. “They have immense implications for legislation and especially for school curricula. A commission of teachers needs to be formed to consider how to implement these principles across the entire curriculum, not just in specific classes dedicated to them.”

“That’s radical.” Estoibidhé nodded. “What else?”

“That’s one cluster of principles, based on the oneness of humanity,” said Estodhéru. “There are four other foci. The second is what one could call virtues: honesty, trustworthiness, fair mindedness, service, compassion, love, inclusiveness. They can be taught in schools. There are many hymns related to them, so the hymns can be used to shape lessons, at least for the Eryan majority. Our public schools could do a lot more to teach morality.

“A third focus we have identified is what we call ‘consultation’: open mindedness, listening to people, treating one’s ideas as gifts to others, trusting the collective decision making process, silent voting, etc. These have more Bahá’í content, but can be expressed universally. If these principles could be implemented, they would change the discourse in our society, making it fairer and more open to new ideas. Perhaps even more important, they would make the masses knowledge-generators, identifying problems and proposing solutions that could be tried and improved on incrementally.

“A fourth focus is what we call ‘social’ teachings and is often found in ‘Abdu'l-Bahá’s *The Secret of Divine Civilization*. A ‘divine civilization,’ is a form of spiritualization as well. These include a stress on education and learning; voting; acceptance of modern science and medicine; an emphasis on agriculture and village life;

and creation of the village 'storehouse' `Abdu'l-Bahá advocated, where the needs of the poor would be met locally.

“A fifth focus is service. Spiritualization of society means creating a society where people voluntarily serve each other.”

“And how would all these ideas be implemented?” asked the queen.

“A combination of education and legislation. In some cases the education has to be first, so that the laws make sense to the people. Teams of experts would be assembled to develop educational materials for use in schools and materials that can be printed in newspapers or used over the radio. Education also must include action, which means serving others in ways that express the principles is the key.”

“What would be the role of Bahá'ís in all this?”

“We would be involved like everyone else. In some cases we are experts because of our teachings or experience. In other cases, others are the experts at how to implement these principles effectively in the society that exists today.”

Estoibidhé smiled and nodded. “This is the kind of advice I was hoping to get. Can you write a report about it?”

“We have one.” Estodhéru handed her a ten-page typed report. “I gave you the fast summary, but the details are in here. We've included quotations from the Bahá'í texts, but we've usually provided them as footnotes, so the arguments flow clearly without them. That makes the paper clearer to non-Bahá'ís.”

“I will read this with great care. What I'd like to do is get comments back to you about it and perhaps get a second draft of this report.”

“We stand ready to serve, Your Majesty.”

“Thank you.” She rose. “I am very pleased. This will be a great help to me, I am sure.”

“We’re thrilled to assist,” replied Estodhéru.

Estoibidhé shook hands with all three and escorted them to the door. Wépokéster hurried outside to prepare the last delegation. They entered on the heels of the Bahá’ís.

Werétrakéster nodded to his son and smiled. Weranodatu held himself proudly in his blue robe. Isursunu, high priest in Isurdhuna, looked more humble. All three descended onto one knee and bowed.

“Rise, and come sit with me,” said Estoibidhé. “I’m delighted to see the three of you, and I understand you have met extensively to prepare a joint report. That’s very encouraging.”

“Or perhaps it's one report in three parts,” said Werétrakéster. “As we have very different ideas.”

“Indeed,” said Weranodatu. He turned to Isursunu, who was to start.

“For the last five years we’ve been developing hymn halls in many places across the realm,” Isursunu began. “We have five in Kerda, one each in Vésa, Rudhisér, and the north shore, and the temple in Melwika operates like a hymn hall. The difficulty has been developing the local support for them. But we think the palace can help solve that problem significantly. If we could open a hymn hall in every village, or every group of villages, it would go a long, long way to spiritualizing the population. They would have access to a place that keeps and teaches the hymns of Widumanj. The halls would also be a major bulwark against the spread of other ideas and ideologies. There has been a slide toward atheism in Ora, in particular. Every existing temple will need a large hall where it

can conduct hymn services; the existing temples are set up for sacrifices by small groups, but not hymn singing by hundreds.”

“Most cities now have theaters,” said Estoibidhé. “Have you tried conducting hymn services in them to see how many would come? Otherwise the hall might be too large or too small for the people wanting its services.”

“No, we have not tried that, Your Majesty.”

“You might want to. How much would this plan cost?”

“Probably ten million dhanay, spread over several years.”

“What else?”

“Here on the eastern shore we haven’t tried hymn halls, but we have trained priests to serve as teachers,” said Weranodatu. “Not all priests are interested in such service, but the younger ones increasingly are. If every hymn hall had a priest-teacher who was also able to perform sacrifices, they could have a huge impact on our society and spiritualize it to a very great extent. They could serve as part time teachers of the hymns in the schools, and part of their salary would be paid by the school.”

“How much are we talking about?” said the Queen.

Weranodatu looked straight at her. “We’d have to train about 100 priests initially, and their schooling would cost a total of 500,000 dhanay. Their salaries of 6,000 dhanay per year each would total 600,000 dhanay, but 2/3 would come from the local teaching budget and from sacrifices.”

“You’ve been trying to train priests to serve in villages for years and they haven’t gone, except a few,” said Kandékwes. “How do we know they’d go now?”

“We have to keep trying, and if we give them a hymn hall to run, they’d have a better reason to go,” explained Wëranodatu.

“Besides, such a network of hymn halls, supported by royal taxes, would tie the customs of Widumaj to the palace ever closely and would reinforce royal power,” said Isursunu.

“But do we want hymn halls to serve as a system to strengthen the monarchy? I thought the purpose is spiritualization,” objected Estoibidhé.

That startled Wëranodatu. “Your Majesty would not have to exert control over the hymn halls; she could leave them alone,” he ventured.

“My concern is what they will teach,” said Wërétrakešter. “The hymns are an ocean of wisdom, but each can be interpreted a thousand ways. The classic example is Widumaj’s exhortation to sacrifice for others, which I have always said means personal service for others, but which the priests say means one sacrifices ones chickens and goats on their behalf at the temples.”

“I’m willing to concede it could mean both,” said Wërandatu.

“But what will the priests in the villages teach?” persisted Wërétrakešter. “I am in favor of teaching the hymns much, much more. The entire public school curriculum could be reformed based on them and they could be worked into many subjects much more thoroughly than they are now. But why should just priests teach them? Why not all teachers?”

“They can include the hymns in their lessons as well, but the priesthood is a gift of Widumaj to this world, so it must have a special role in educating the people,” replied Wëranodatu.

“The network of priests and hymn halls you propose strike me as an imitation of the Bahá’í Centers,” said Kandékwes. “But I see a major difference: it will cost ten million dhanay, plus maybe a million dhanay a year to maintain. In contrast, the Bahá’ís are building their Centers on their own and pay no one to run them. Why is it that the old religion can’t do the same?”

“Honored prince, the people appear to like the services of a local religious community, but they aren’t used to paying for them, yet,” replied Isursunu.

“But the Bahá’ís are forming these communities almost for free! What is the difference?”

“Honored prince, without a local priest to lead the hymn hall, it will degenerate into a movement to oppose the local lord, to call for the resolution of all sorts of grievances, and to stir up mischief. We have seen that happen.”

“Interesting problem; but why is it the Bahá’ís don’t have that problem, either?”

“Honored Prince, we are learning how to create these communities over just a few years. The Bahá’ís have much more experience.”

“I think they know how to manipulate the poor people in the villages to build these Centers,” added Weranodatu.

“Have you any ideas for the improvement of education or the laws of the kingdom?” asked the Queen.

“Someone should consider a reform of education based on the hymns,” said Werétrakester. “All high school students should study all the hymns every year, so that as they mature, their understanding deepens.”

“The hymns impart a clear set of duties,” said Wëranodatu. “All teachers should teach them, but all schools should have priests to offer clear explanations of their meaning.”

“I’d favor a curriculum reform, as there are other interpretations of the hymns than those favored by the priests,” responded Wërétrakester.

“As for legislation, if Your Majesty is indeed the Queen of the Eryan and the Queen anointed by Esto, legislation to restrict the Bahá’ís is essential,” exclaimed Isursunu. “This is the world of Widumaj, not the world of Bahu. He may have been a great widu on Gëdhéma, but Éra does not need his teachings, nor are they suitable here.”

“I think we have found that the new knowledge is highly suitable here,” replied the Queen carefully. “I assume you came here in a steam powered vehicle, rather than on a horse or by foot in the winter weather. The teachings of Widumaj have gaps in them, concerning the new world produced by the new knowledge.”

“Your Majesty, it is a matter of time before we close those gaps through careful study of the hymns,” replied Wëranodatu.

“I look forward to that day, your Excellency. Meanwhile, I want a written report about your ideas, so that I can respond and ask for revisions.”

“We will be honored to produce such a report for you,” replied Wëranodatu.

“We didn’t mention plans for expansion of all the major city temples,” added Isursunu.

“I assumed those would be in your plan. Thank you so much for coming and meeting with me. I hope we can meet again in a few months to refine your proposals further.” She rose, so they rose as well.

“Thank you, Your Majesty,” said Weranodatu. She extended her hand to all three and shook hands, then escorted them personally to the door.

“Wepokester, could you leave us?” she asked.

“Certainly, Your Majesty.” He rose, took his pad of notes, and left the room.

Estoibidhé turned to her husband. “The Bahá’í plan was credible, detailed, and did not ask for any funding.”

Kandékwes nodded. “It won’t be easy to implement however, my dear. Equality of men and women, for example, will be fiercely opposed by the priests of Widumaj, the Sumi priests, and probably the philosophers of the Way as well. There are a few hymns one can quote that describe the duties of men and women.”

“True, yet Widumaj also allowed for queens, and I am the second one this kingdom has had in a row. I think that shows that the duties he mentions are traditional, but not necessarily required. No one has said that I had to become a good cook or homemaker to be a good queen or even a good woman.”

“I agree with you that the only credible alternative to the Bahá’í plans are the thoughts offered by Werétrakester.”

“And even he wasn’t very specific.”

“I think part of the problem is the question you asked. Essentially, you asked them to answer a Bahá’í question.”

“One could have phrased it many ways, but asking them how to improve society basically produced one answer; give us money,” replied Estoibidhé. “That’s the difference between the Bahá’í answers and the others. Eventually I want answers that can

be published, and when that happens I think the majority of the public will favor the Bahá'í approach.”

“Except for a fiercely conservative minority,” warned Kandékwes.

Reread and edited 6/17/13, 9/2/17, 12.2.24

The Changing of the Guard

Mid Belménu/early Jan. 17/635

Two blizzards delayed Liz and Thornton's visit to Késtontroba. The army struggled to keep Route 1 open from Melwika to Kostékhéma; they did not plow the route farther east to the Long Valley, nor did they have the resources to plow the short connecting roads for the Késtone and Mémenegone villages. Telephone pleas from both of them for animal fodder and basic essentials finally triggered an emergency effort. When Thornton heard the army was acting, he had Liz in a rover—which had excellent traction in snow—in a few hours. They drove to Sértroba to pick up Lord Patékwu, then headed for the Késtone village.

It was close to sunset when they reached the village. When everyone heard the engine, they all poured out of their houses to greet the vehicle. "You are an answer to prayers!" said Lord Duku. "We knew you'd get here eventually!"

"This winter is terrible everywhere," replied Thornton.

"I see the fodder has arrived," said Patékwu, noticing a fresh hay bale outside a barn. "We've been saving straw for you and the other villages and will get it to you as soon as we can."

"Thank you, we are very grateful. Please come into my house." Duku pointed the way to the largest house, which was nearby. The plow had not entered the village itself because the snow had been packed down by people and animals.

They walked fifty meters in the bitter cold wind and entered the village's largest house. Inside, a crowd of elders was gathering. Liz was pleased to see four women among them; apparently some progress had been made in the last few weeks, for the previous meeting had involved only one woman, Endrodukter. "Allow me to introduce you to everyone," Duku said, and he began a quick round of seventy names, few of which they could recall afterward.

"Could we perhaps start with some prayers?" asked Liz. "They can be Bahá'í prayers, Eryan hymns, or traditional Tutane hymns, since they all praise the same God."

"That would be excellent," said Duku. He bowed his head and chanted the Bahá'í prayer the "Remover of Difficulties." One by one, others followed, and if they said a Bahá'í prayer it was the same one; they knew only one prayer. When Liz, Thornton, and Patékwu chanted, everyone listened very carefully.

"Thank you, and welcome again," said Duku, when the chanting ended. "The hot tea is ready and you get the first cups." He personally handed cups to the three of them, then sent the tray to the others nearby. His wife was rapidly filling cups for a second tray.

"Thank you, this is the perfect hospitality for such a cold trip," said Patékwu. "The Central Spiritual Assembly was thrilled to hear that you all want to be Bahá'ís, and asked Auxiliary Liz and I to come assist in any way we can. Thornton has come because he drove us and he knows you already, so he can offer advice as well."

"Excellent. As you heard, we held a three-day gathering of the village elders—if you want to call this group the elders—where we reviewed everything we have learned about how to make our village prosperous. Endrodukter made a compelling case that true

civilization was spiritual in its nature, as well as material; we had to have both to be truly happy. Several of us had read *The Secret of Divine Civilization* and felt its principles were sound. We have also heard many of Mitrubbéru's radio programs about the Faith. We do not have many books here, but we feel ready to make the commitment."

"Marvelous," said Patékwu. "We do have one question. I will explain it this way. In Mēlwika, a city of 22,000 people, the City Council could not deliberate and declare the entire city Bahá'í because the City Council cannot speak on everyone's behalf, where such a matter as personal faith is concerned. I am not even sure whether, in Mēlwika, the husbands could speak on behalf of their wives, where being a Bahá'í is concerned. In Gordha, husbands could speak on behalf of the family; that is the way things work in Gordha. But the Gordha Council could not declare the entire city, or even all the Méghendres, Bahá'ís. In the Krésone lands, as lord I could deliberate with elders and others and declare everyone Bahá'í because that is how we work. So, my question is: has the entire Késtone tribe become Bahá'ís, or many individuals?"

"Everyone," replied Duku immediately.

There was silence as Patékwu and Liz looked around the room. Heads were nodding. Then Endrusunu, brother of the late Lord, shook his head. "This decision does not speak for me. I remain a firm believer in Endro as patron of our tribe and in Esto as the Lord of All."

That caused murmurs. Patékwu looked around and saw that Duku did not speak for all. He sensed, in Endrusunu's tone, a family rift over things other than religion. "Very well," he said. "The Bahá'í Faith rejects all coercion in matters of faith and commitment

to Esto. Those who accept Bahá'u'llah as a messenger of Esto should affirm their trust in Him. No penalties or bad feelings should result if someone does not feel inclined to trust Bahá'u'llah. Perhaps they will feel such love and trust later, or perhaps not; that is between them and Esto. In this world we love all equally, unless they openly seek to hurt us. Then we love them but protect ourselves and our families if they seek to do harm. Bahá'u'llah has come to bring unity, not division, so we are forbidden to attack, harm, ignore, or divide.”

“Lord, if we accept Bahá'u'llah, will it bring fodder for our animals and assistance to us, so that we may become a prosperous people?” asked someone.

“One cannot accept Bahá'u'llah because of material gain; Esto will see through such deception and no spiritual benefit will result,” replied Patékwu. “I see fodder has already arrived. That had nothing to do with your decision to become Bahá'ís. I presume you called Jordanu of Mennea Development Services and he arranged for a palace grant or loan to pay for the fodder. That is his business and his way to serve everyone, regardless of their religion. Being a Bahá'í may eventually bring material benefits, but they will result because if you accept his teachings, you will be more honest and therefore more able to get loans; you will be more hard working and therefore earn more; you will seek more education and therefore will make wiser decisions. That does not mean disaster won't strike; becoming a Bahá'í won't protect your village from burning down. A volunteer fire company will provide that protection better.”

“It is a practical religion with practical ideas about prosperity,” added Endrodukter. “It is a path to put our feet on, not a destination.”

“The destination is eternal closeness to Esto and material progress in this world,” added Liz.

“So, what is the next step?” asked Duku.

“Let us ask every adult in this village whether they are willing to trust Bahá'u'llah,” said Liz. “And let us hold meetings to answer people’s questions and give them more knowledge about the Bahá’í Faith.”

Chris was amazed at the extent of frost damage in Melita. As he left the village center driving north, he rolled through a constant swath of brown; all winter corn and vegetables were dead. Even peach orchards, normally immune to a few winter frosts, had suffered damage. Melita’s entire “third crop” was a loss, at a cost of a hundred thousand dhanay to him and fifteen times as much for the others involved.

He crossed the border into Ornakwés and the brown, dead fields were replaced by fallow land covered by a skim of snow. Generally, Ornakwés farmers did not attempt a winter crop; they had been wise to avoid it this year. In a few minutes he reached Ornakwés village center and turned into the driveway leading to Roktekester’s villa. The General rarely was home, but for some reason he was there that day and had asked Chris to stop by.

He parked the rover and walked to the main door. A servant, hearing him arrive, opened the door and ushered him in, then led him back to Roktekester’s study. The General rose to greet his old friend.

“I am so grateful you could come here! Thank you. Would you like tea?”

“Yes, thank you, I’d appreciate that. It’s certainly warmer here than at the palace or in Melwika!”

Roktekester called out for tea. “I hate the cold! It bothers my knees terribly. Here, please sit.” He pointed to two chairs and they sat near each other. Chris looked up at a saber-toothed tiger head mounted on the wall opposite. “I bagged him two years ago,” explained Roktekester. “It was a really lucky shot; I’m not the archer I used to be, and he was a long way away.”

“You can’t get close to them.”

“No, they’re alert and stay away from humans.”

The tea arrived and the servant handed Chris a cup, then the General. Roktekester nodded and the servant hurried out. “I doubt I’ll get any more like him,” he added, referring to the sabertooth. “I just turned 72 last month and I can really feel it!”

“I know what you mean. I’ve been using a cane almost all the time. I forgot it today and it makes my thigh and knee hurt.”

“How old are you?”

“In Eryan terms I’m 69.”

“So, we’re the same age.” Roktekester nodded as if a mystery had been resolved for him. “I’m hoping we can collaborate more on the development of Ornakwés and this entire area; that’s why I invited you to come by. I’m thinking of establishing an official village council to strengthen the functioning of the township, maybe with an elected mayor to make most of the decisions.”

“You’ll have to turn over to the Council a large fraction of the local taxes. In Melwika and Melita, the councils get 5/6 of the taxation technically due to me.”

“So I have heard, which explains why those towns have paved streets and water mains, which Ornakwés does not. But I’ve scheduled them for next year. I have about 200,000 dhanay every year I can devote to investments.”

“Do you want to be centrally involved in the investments?”

Roktekestær shook his head. “I want to continue a major planning role, but I don’t want to manage things. You see, in about a month it will be announced that I have retired from the army.”

Chris was startled by that. “You? I thought you planned to die with your army boots on.”

“I did, but now we have a new monarch and I sense that she wants to have a team of her own. Many changes are coming. Soon there will be a new head of staff.”

“Who? They’ll never elevate Perku to that position.”

“I don’t agree. This Queen is willing to defy tradition. There’s less and less tradition left. The Old Houses aren’t in the position to oppose a commoner as chief of staff, and there is no member of the royal family able to do it.”

“Both are true.”

“This is completely confidential information. I anticipate being here in Ornakwés full time by spring, assuming we’ll have a spring.”

“The winter freeze has produced some shortages and the prices of staples are shooting up, so yes, invest in wheat, rice, and corn, or in irrigation equipment, tractors, or fertilizer that will raise crop yields. The price of animal fodder is shooting up. Demand for meat is falling because people are concentrating their money on essentials, so poultry and livestock are being slaughtered and sold off. Demand for fertilizer is going up in

anticipation of a large spring planting. I suggest you and your brother approach the granges serving your towns and find out what they'd do with some extra cash."

"I'd get the loan back and profit in the form of higher tax revenues."

"You can charge them a low interest rate, too; less than a bank. I loan my granges cash at two percent. I'll probably get back a few percent more through taxes."

"Any idea why this winter is so bad?"

Chris shrugged. "It seems to happen every few years, though this is worse than the others. Do you want to get involved in expanding your industrial park? I'd ask Jordan to make a plan for you. He's the best. He knows who's planning what, too, so he can make sure you won't face excessive competition. That's getting difficult now, though, because so many people are building factories; investment in factories has hit six million a year. That's one reason growth is so fast."

"Can one still get good returns on investment?"

"Sure. It's not as good as it was a few years ago when there was a shortage of almost any manufactured item, but profits are still good. I can refer you to the reports of the various provincial tomis, if you'd like; together they give a pretty good picture. So many factories have opened, there's now a shortage of skilled workers. Many tomis are instituting training programs. Salaries for skilled workers have gone up a bit, too, but that's been held down by overproduction, which has forced prices down slightly. The result is that an average factory job now pays 3,500 dhanay per year instead of 3,000; investment to open a factory now averages 5,000 dhanay per job instead of 3,000; and returns on investment have declined to about 300 dhanay per job per year."

“Six percent without including the local tax I’d collect. It sounds like too many factories have been built. Are you getting worried?”

“I don’t know what to make of it. I think I should ask Aryéstu; he’s the economist.”

Roktekestær nodded. “The real experts in this process are the Kérékwēs clan.”

“Yes. Ask them for advice, if you want. They almost went broke because they wouldn’t listen to me and wanted to create personal estates with imported peasants. No one would work for them. Then they sold the land to farmers, imported old houses to serve as estate lords, got most of their huge townships plowed and farmed, and poured the mortgage payments into factories. They can’t spend their money fast enough. They’ll invest in Ornakwēs if you want them to, even if you are outside Swadnoma province.”

Roktekestær shook his head. “I don’t need their money. Will you invest?”

Chris nodded. “Sure, depending on the plan; maybe thirty thousand.”

“Okay, I’ll ask Jordan for development plans for the township and for the village site itself.” Roktekestær finished his cup of tea and called for a refill, so a servant hurried in with the pot. “You have so much confidence in the future, Chris. I wish I felt the same.”

“Why not? Things are progressing.”

“Materially, yes; many people are lifted out of poverty, given skills, education, medicine, and . . . choices. They never had so many choices before. But that worries me. It appears to me that you Bahá’ís have won. You’re still a minority, but you are now the dominant attitude in the kingdom. In some ways, that’s good. Many of your principles have been endorsed by Werétrakestær and by moderate priests like the ones in Mēlwika.

But the changes are dangerous, too. For example, the law of succession is based on Widumaj's revelation, but if the majority are Bahá'ís—or even the royal family, as is now the case—that may change. And I've seen too many power struggles in my life to think that's a good thing. Widumaj has saved us from countless wars."

"I agree. The Eryan conquered the Sumi largely because the succession law unified them. Kingdoms on Gædhéma were repeatedly torn apart by civil wars over succession. I have no idea what would happen to the succession law if the entire kingdom were Bahá'í, my friend. I am inclined to say that it would be a matter to be settled consultatively, so the consultative assembly would have to weigh in. But I am sure that the Bahá'í Faith has come, partly, to end strife over power."

"That gives me some comfort, Chris, although I know that Bahá'ís aren't perfect and have their struggles as well."

"We do, even on the Central Spiritual Assembly, which I am relieved not to be a member of any more. You know the trouble ɛjnu caused in the early days of that body. That hasn't been the only difficulty. Imagine electing an old central village lord, a Tutane lord, and a former Christian bishop to the same body. Only one of them can read and write well, which means they pick up Bahá'í knowledge slowly and they are all very sure how things should be done based on their radically different experiences. The Central Assembly has been a weak body, let alone the local bodies and the local communities. But there is steady spiritual progress, and that has given me more confidence and hope than I think I ever have had in my life. My fears are very different from yours. I fear too much material progress."

"Too much?"

“We could cut down every tree on Éra and fish out every fish in the Central Sea, let the rich topsoil wash away, and cause the entire economic structure to collapse through environmental negligence.”

“Didn’t the new forestry law fix that problem?”

“Partly. This is a subtle danger, a creeping danger. This whole world—monarchy, consultative bodies, spiritual assemblies, tomis, granges, gabrulis—will need to gain a new maturity. Melita is built on the site of an ancient village. There’s a ruin here, too. This world once had a million people, and then the whole society collapsed.”

“Perhaps we fear the same thing, but via different mechanisms! But your fear also contradicts your advice that I invest in more factories!”

Chris smiled. “That’s true. Because I don’t know what constitutes too many factories, too many people, too much demand on the land. No one knows. I think we have a ways to go, though.”

Roktekester nodded. “Good, then I will build factories and develop my township further.”

“But,” said Chris, raising a finger, “plant trees, too.”

Three days of meetings about the Bahá’í Faith deeply engaged Liz, Patékwes, and Thornton. The village’s one-room schoolhouse bulged with people wanting to meet the visitors, ask questions, and sometimes challenge their ideas. Endrusunu came with his sons and a small group of followers and asked loaded questions at almost every gathering. Liz met with just the women in the back of Lord Duku’s house four times; they

were willing to follow whatever their husbands said about the new religion. The list of people willing to trust Bahá'u'llah kept getting longer. But it was not everyone.

Finally, on the morning of the fourth day, they packed up the rover and left. They stayed just ahead of a blizzard that was descending from the Spine Mountains with ten centimeters of new snow. Thornton kept the rover going slowly all the way to Gordha, where he turned south and returned Lord Patékwu to his home in relatively warm Sértroba. He and Liz were home before noontime.

“So, how was the trip?” asked Chris.

Liz looked at Thornton. “I guess it was successful, though it wasn’t what we expected or hoped. The entire village didn’t become Bahá’í. About eighty percent accepted Bahá'u'llah as ‘the great widu they would trust.’ It would have been one hundred percent, I think, but for Endrosunu, brother of the late lord and uncle of Lord Duku.”

Chris groaned. “A dynastic struggle within the family.”

“Maybe it’s just jealousy, but the uncle has decided to take his stand on the Bahá’í issue. He was immensely difficult and argumentative.”

“But still, we convinced eighty percent,” said Thornton. “That’s pretty remarkable, too.”

“It is,” agreed Liz. “We have the declaration list with us; Thornton plans to make a copy to send back to Késtontroba so they can organize themselves, then we’ll forward the list to the Central Assembly. Patékwu’s working on a report.”

“Good. What do the original Bahá’ís think of this development?”

“We had a long conversation with several of them. Endrodukter is thrilled. The others were less deepened and they’re cautious. I think we’ll be less successful with this place than we have been with some of the other villages because of the pre-existing disunity. Duku made a big move only two months after becoming lord and before he had really established himself. Anything new here?”

Chris nodded. “A few developments. I’ll be working a lot more with General Roktekester for the development of Ornakwés; he wants to focus more energy on that task. Thornton, have you talked to the meteorologists about this bitter winter?”

“No, not in the last two weeks. They don’t know what to make of it; they just said that in the newspaper the other day.”

“I think you should call Philos and ask him. Maybe there’s something going on that we need to know about.”

Thornton nodded. “I’ll send him a text message. He rarely calls me any more, but he seems to respond to emails and text messages after a week or so.”

“Good; please do.” Chris turned back to Liz to tell her about the worrisome agricultural situation. Thornton listened, then headed upstairs to find Lébé or the kids. Everyone was at school, so after unpacking and taking a shower, he decided to send Philos a message. Sending an email was complicated; his computer was Melwika Génadema’s only one and was in the computer area and in use twenty-four hours a day. The aliens had just replaced it—again—because the keyboard had been pounded too much.

So he pulled out his cell phone and texted: *Dear Philos: This is the coldest winter in the last seventeen years and we are told one has to go back fifty years to find another*

one like it. We are worried that it reflects a change in the climate. The entire winter harvest has been killed and food prices are going up. Can you enlighten us at all about this situation?

He hit send and watched the message disappear from his phone. He grabbed his satchel and unpacked various papers, then started to read the accumulated mail.

His phone rang. He looked at the caller id: it was Philos. Fortunately, Philos now used translation software between his language and Eryan, because Thornton's English had gotten so rusty it was slow and imprecise. "Hail, Philos," he said. "How is your family?"

"They are very well, thank you. Isn't it interesting how all sentient beings—well, most sentient beings—will start conversations asking about their kids. How are your children?"

"They are well, and so is Lébé."

"Excellent. Regarding your question, there is no climate change; or maybe I should say not much climate change. Éra is a very small world. A big planet like Earth has more systems to buffer each other, so its climate on the average is more stable and predictable. Éra has a small ocean, so it doesn't store a lot of heat, and if cloudiness spreads over the surface it can increase the planetoid's albedo and cool it off. That's what has happened this winter; a chance arrangement of weather systems in the fall cooled the northern hemisphere more than usual, and the coolness caused moisture to precipitate and make more clouds, cooling it more, etc. The northern hemisphere drives your world's climate because the north polar basin's rim traps cold air and causes it to build up, then pour out. The South Pole, on the other hand, is open toward the equator, so its cold air

pours out constantly and evenly. The seasonal cooling will continue until the sea cools off enough and the contrast between its warmth and the north polar basin decreases. By then, Skanda will be heading toward perihelion, so Éra will get more and more sunlight every day. This winter should end more or less when it usually does in a cold year; a few weeks, maybe a month, late. But it will end.”

“Alright, thank you. I think it might be wise to reassure the public here about the winter because it could cause panic. The price of basic foods is rising.”

“Let me consult with our climatological experts and get back to you in a few days, so the statement is more definitive. How would you get the statement out without attributing it to us?”

“I’d sit with the meteorologists here and talk about the pattern, making the observations you just made. I’ve had a basic course in meteorology and what you told me was pretty simple.”

“I see. I may have a more complex explanation in a few days, though! You asked whether this is climate change. There is a slow climate change occurring. When Éra was a desert planet, it had less vegetation than it has now. The restoration of the ocean has increased rainfall and that increases vegetation, which pulls carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere.”

“Which reduces the greenhouse effect. And the increased water in the atmosphere has increased cloud cover, so more sunlight is reflected into space and Éra cools.”

“Exactly, so the climate has cooled. Of course, when the sea dried up a thousand years ago, the carbon dioxide content in the atmosphere increased and the climate got hotter. But don’t worry about burning Éra’s coal deposits. Éra atmosphere needs the CO₂.

“But I wanted to talk to you about a different matter, Thornton. Seventeen years ago we had an electronic expert who was fascinated by your cellular telephones and computers. He made all the equipment you’re using today, which is essentially a copy of the equipment you had when you arrived. We’ve now run out of our spares.”

Thornton’s heart sank. “Does that mean you can’t get us new equipment?”

“No, that isn’t it. We don’t want to end communication with you; it serves the purposes of our research well. I contacted the Sentientology Authority about the matter and they agreed to send several electrical engineers. They arrived a few days ago and we’ve talked about the problem in detail. They have ideas about upgrading your equipment; Earth in 2023 has very different equipment than Earth in 2005! The distinction between phones and computers no longer exists. Instead, there is a wide range of equipment, some more adapted to communications and others more adapted to computing, but all doing both. They want to design new equipment for you, and our robotic factories on our home world can make a larger batch of equipment this time. Queen Estoibidhé was using one of your cellular telephones during the tornado emergency and she kept it for an additional month. We are willing to produce up to fifty telephones for official use, plus spares to replace them if they break, and a similar number of computers for the various génademas around Éra.”

“Really? But won’t that cause other ethical problems? The army will want some. The people will worry whether the government is being manipulated by you in some way. It will spawn all sorts of rumors.”

“Perhaps that is true, but your family and the queen are better able to judge that than we are. We are making an offer; it is up to you to decide whether to accept or not and how to handle the issues.”

“I see. It also means you’ll be able to monitor a wider range of communications.”

“It does. Our linguists are excited about the possibilities. But for seventeen years, we haven’t interfered in any way. We have provided a small range of basics to your family and, through them, the entire world, like medicines, access to the web, and ink to print web documents. Everyone has used that service, including the army and the palace. We have better automated filters now; the army won’t find out how to make nerve gas or atomic bombs. What we are proposing is an expansion of the existing arrangement.”

“I see. I had better take this to my family. When would you have equipment for us?”

“Three or four months. We plan to start designing it right away. If you don’t want it, it’ll become an experiment for us.”

“I can let you know in a few days.”

“That’s fine, Thornton.”

Reread and edited, 6/17/13, 9/2/17, 12/2/24

New Potentials

Mid Belménu/early Jan. 17/635

Thornton, Lébé, Chris, and Liz discussed the offer much of the day. That evening—when it was finally morning in Pértatranisér—they telephoned Amos and May for their opinion, called Lua and Behruz in to comment, and invited Jordan and Tiamaté to Melwika to join the pow-wow.

“It has huge potential positives and negatives,” said Amos. “The negatives are not just the public reaction or the advantage to the government and army. If enough of these cell phones become available eventually, hundreds of thousands of dhanay of investments in our current telephone system may end up obsolete.”

“On the other hand, I'd love to see a centralized medical record system with access obtained via computer or cell phone,” said Lua. “We’re talking about fifty phones and fifty computers? The major hospitals on Era number only nine.”

“And there are sixteen génademas,” said Chris. “And Prosperity Bank has twelve large branches; they could all use laptops. Many of us would like one. Miller Motors could use several. The palace and the army both need a dozen. The numbers grow fast and exceed fifty.”

“I was looking on the web today at the latest products,” said Thornton. “The aliens have copied the pages onto their server. A combination of tablet computers and smart cell phones would give us a pretty robust set of devices.”

“Could we create an email network?” asked Jordan.

“Certainly,” said Amos. “Vast amounts of financial, tax, and medical records could be stored remotely and accessed.”

“But the aliens would have access to all that data,” said Liz. “And even if they aren’t using it to conquer us or control us, there’s still the uneasy sense that they are studying us.”

“It’s like having a camera in the bathroom that may or may not be running,” said Chris, nodding. “The palace is sure to see it as unacceptable.”

“I don’t know,” said Liz. “We’ve been storing data with the aliens for much of two decades, and chatting and messaging each other. It’s something one adjusts to.”

“I suppose,” said Chris. “It’s a decision to be made by the queen. And as it happens, I got a call from Wepokester a few hours ago, inviting me to the palace early next week for a meeting about banking and insurance. So I have an opportunity to arrange a private audience with her.”

Having several days to flesh out the implications of the aliens’ offer was useful, but neither Thornton nor Amos got much sleep while they considered the proposal. Thornton posed several questions to the aliens by text message and got some details about the equipment and its capabilities.

Dwodiu afternoon was cold but clear and Chris headed for the palace in his aged rover. The gathering about banking and insurance included Yimanu, President of Prosperity Bank; Wéroimigu, President of Wiki Bank; Migéstu, President of the Royal Bank; Weranu, Chancellor of the Exchequer; Aryéstu, economist and President of

Gésélékwes Maj Génadema; Chris Mennea; Wepokæstær; Estoiyaju; Kandékwes; and Her Majesty. After tea and greetings, Her Majesty got right down to business.

“The Sumiuperakwa disaster has taught us some lessons,” she began. “The village is still not completely rebuilt, though most people have shelter. The huge demand for building supplies generated by the disaster pushed prices up and the money we allocated did not go as far as expected. Demand for modular housing shot up as well and it could not be manufactured fast enough. I have been informed that many suppliers have taken steps to keep larger inventories and the shortages are not likely to recur, at least not for disasters of this scale.

“Reconstruction has cost the exchequer 600,000 dhanay; more than expected. Consequently, I asked Aryéstu to look into ways to set up an insurance industry. Gone are the days when neighbors rebuilding each other’s houses was sufficient. We need more, and the banks are the only financial institutions able to provide more. Aryéstu, please give your report.”

“Certainly, Your Majesty. We are not proposing that the banks offer insurance as much as they create an insurance side of their business under a separate incorporation, or invest in a separate insurance company. Prosperity Bank already has a small insurance business and is the model we have in mind. Insurance costs about one percent the value of the property insured, so it is not impossibly expensive. The problem is getting people to pay for it. Most bank mortgages automatically include it, and we want legislation requiring it. We also want legislation requiring villages to carry insurance on their schools and other public buildings. Many people live in homes that have been owned by

their families for generations and they don't have mortgages, so we are uncertain how to insure them; possibly through a new tax."

"Insurance isn't something you can just create through legislation, though," objected Yimanu. "There must be building regulations to ensure construction is up to standard. Faulty wiring is the leading cause of house fires. Proper wiring and heating systems are essential to make the insurance affordable. Furthermore, we have to have reliable and efficient fire companies. One third of the kingdom is not within a fire district or is so far from the nearest fire station that they are essentially without coverage."

"Those are serious issues that must be addressed," agreed Aryéstu. "The plan calls for the gradual implementation of regulations and a five year effort to make fire coverage universal. But those are both controversial matters. People are used to building houses according to traditional methods. There are a lot of traditional builders and they are not inclined to change. People oppose more regulation and paying for more services."

"Then your plan will not cover everyone in a tornado emergency," said Yimanu. "My bank can't write insurance for ancient, traditionally constructed buildings; for all we know, they are nearly ready to collapse or spontaneously go up in flames."

"In many villages, people still don't have clear title to their property," added Wéroimigu. "When a house stays in a family for generations, the person who lives in it might own a very small share of it; the rest is claimed by siblings and cousins. In spite of all the work done in the last decade to clear up ownership, it's often still murky."

"The payment to rebuild would go to the person living in the house if they took out the insurance," replied Aryéstu.

“I still don’t know how you’d get poor people to pay anything,” persisted Wéroimigu. “There’s not much Wiki Bank can do. Our clients are so poor, they have nothing to insure.”

“They can insure the property or items they buy with the loan,” replied Aryéstu. “If a farmer used ten dhanay to buy a milk cow, Wiki Bank could insure the cow for a premium of about a dhanay per year.”

“It’s not that simple. We couldn’t even be sure it was the same cow because people don’t brand their animals.”

“We’ll need some guarantees,” added Yimanu. “A whirlwind cutting through Melwika could do ten million dhanay of damage. That would bankrupt us.”

“Not with proper planning,” replied Aryéstu.

“We don’t want to spend anything from the exchequer if we can avoid it,” added Wëranu.

Chris could see that the queen was getting frustrated. “I think we need to remember a few things,” he said. “This is an area with a big potential for profits. I don’t mean exploiting people’s fears; a profit is a legitimate reward for offering a service people need. Prosperity Bank’s program can be used as a model and will help us estimate the annual cost pretty accurately. If we set rates 25% higher than normal expenses and collect a 12.5% profit, we could save 12.5% every year and build up a large surplus against the day when a really big disaster strikes. That surplus, meanwhile, can be invested, and if it can’t be liquidated quickly when disaster strikes, we could borrow against it and liquidate it slowly.

“Second, we can’t expect people to change their habits overnight, but we can gradually push them toward better construction techniques, tighter regulations, higher standards, etc. That’s what we’ve done in Melwika. Animals can be branded. As prosperity gradually improves, the habit of buying insurance will spread.

“Third, private insurance will never be enough; there will always be uninsured victims. The government will always have to step in, one way or another.

“Fourth, the exchequer cannot completely avoid bailing out private institutions when disaster strikes. It should be minimized, but it can’t be eliminated unless one allows the insurance companies to fail to provide their services periodically.”

He looked at Estoibidhé. She wasn’t altogether pleased by his intervention, but the arguing stopped for a moment. She nodded. “I want an insurance commission to formulate a plan,” she said. “Aryéstu has a draft that accommodates many of the objections that were raised, if you had let him speak! I agree that this is a process that will take years, but I want us to start. The palace does not want to be the only source of funding when disaster strikes. There will be times when we have to subsidize reconstruction; there will be times we’ll have to subsidize the insurers. But right now our insurance industry is too small. I want it bigger, and I want a plan. I want all of you on the commission.”

“When do you want a report from us?” asked Yimanu.

“After this exchange, I’ll leave that to all of you. A few months. An ideal time to push insurance is right after harvest when people have cash; assuming we’ll have a harvest, of course.”

“We will,” said Chris. “This is a bad winter, but it’s part of the natural pattern, according to the meteorologists.”

“Good. I think we are done here; thank you, all of you, for coming.” She rose and headed for the door.

Chris saw his opportunity slipping away, so he turned to Wepokēster as everyone else stood up as well. “I urgently need to see the queen on an unrelated matter.”

“How long?”

“Five minutes,” he lied.

“Five minutes.” Wepokēster looked at the others. “We’ll have to hold a commission meeting right now to determine when we’ll meet next, but I think we need a break to have some coffee and reflect.”

“Definitely,” agreed Aryéstu.

“Alright.” Wepokēster beckoned Chris and headed out of the room, toward the queen’s private chambers. In a minute they entered her private sitting room, where she and Kandékwes were reviewing the meeting.

“Lord Chris, how can I help you,” she said when she saw him.

“I’m sorry the meeting went so poorly, Your Majesty, and I hope I was of assistance. I have a very important but unrelated matter to mention.”

“What matter?”

He pulled out his cellular telephone. “As you know, we arrived with several of these. We also arrived with Thornton’s laptop computer. Over the years, the aliens have replaced broken phones. They have even provided us with two replacements of the laptop, so right now the génademas have access to two machines. They have been

immensely helpful to store information; all the geological survey maps are stored on the laptops, with a copy on an alien computer in case the laptop breaks. Now the aliens are willing to replace the two laptops with fifty more powerful computers, and the cellular telephones with fifty more powerful models that can serve as computers as well.”

The queen frowned. “I do not understand the offer. Are they providing phones or computers?”

“Both, but the cellular telephones can also serve as small computers. They would be larger than this one, come with a keyboard—an Eryan keyboard, we have been assured—and a separate piece that fits in one’s ear, which would allow one person to talk to someone else while another person types in information. The cellular phones would really be both.”

“Why would they offer these items to us?” asked Kandékwes.

“Several reasons. They are studying Gædhéma and human beings because that’s what they do, as a people: they study other intelligent species, especially their transition to a people able to travel between the stars. They have no plans to hurt us or Gædhéma; if that had been their intent, they could have crushed us long ago. Even now, Gædhéma would be helpless if they decided to attack it. All these ‘web pages’ they give us from Gædhéma they have studied first. They have engineers who want to study gædhéma equipment; making equipment for us would be one way to practice with the technology. In our case, they can see our data, listen to our conversations, and can ask us why we did what we did or said what we said. They used to ask my family many questions, but lately they have asked very few.”

The queen looked at her husband. “Lord, this is becoming very complicated.”

“What would we gain from this?” asked Kandékwes.

“It is easier to understand what we gain than what we might lose. Let me give some examples. A farmer pays his taxes to a local lord in Ləwəspa. The lord records it on a form, gives the farmer a copy, and takes a copy and the money to Məddwoglubas to deposit it with the Royal Bank. Royal Bank would type the farmer’s name and amount into a computer. A computer here would instantly know the farmer paid his taxes, how much he paid, and which account the money went into; the information wouldn’t take two weeks to be processed in Məddwoglubas, mailed here, and processed here. The palace would have near-instant access to all tax payments. Trends and patterns could be studied on the computer because all the numbers are already in it; the computer could be asked to add it up in different ways and tell you what patterns can be seen. The palace could send instructions from the computer here to the computer there about what to do with the money; the palace could even move the money from one account there to another account there using the computer here, even when the office workers in Məddwoglubas are at home at night. The palace could create checks here and they could be printed there. There are similar examples I can give for génadəmas, hospitals, banks, big factories, etc.”

“Fascinating,” said the queen. “And what might we lose?”

“Privacy. Your information would not be available to other people here, but it would be visible to the aliens. They might write books and scholarly articles about it for their own scientists to read.”

“I see.” The queen pondered that.

“For seventeen years, they’ve been writing books and articles about this place. Every time anyone views a web page—including the medical school and the army—they know what we see, and I am sure they have been writing about that.”

“I have a question,” said Kandékwes. “Can all these devices communicate to each other over our telephone system, instead of through the alien’s communications system?”

“It is theoretically possible. We may have to improve the quality of the telephone system.”

Kandékwes looked at Estoibidhé. “That would reduce their access.”

She nodded. Chris added, “One problem is that the computers can store only so much information, and we have no way to increase their storage. So we would either have to load our old information onto the aliens’ computers or print it out, to make more storage space available on our computers.”

“We could do that; our records are kept on paper now,” said Kandékwes. “What if they stop replacing broken equipment?”

“We’d have to go back to the old way of doing things,” replied Chris. “But I think they will make a commitment to replace broken equipment. They may even give us more equipment.”

“We don’t have enough people trained to use these machines,” noted Estoibidhé.

“It will take several years to use them efficiently,” agreed Chris.

“Alright, lord, how’s this,” said the Queen. “You, Aryéstu, and Perku meet as a task force, talk this through, consider all the implications, and if you want to go forward, make a plan.”

“Very well, Your Majesty,” replied Chris. “But Perku is in Sumilara.”

“He’s coming here once a week, and I think he’ll be here permanently soon,” she replied.

Jordan drove the kilometer from the Mennea house to Tomasu’s house because it was too cold to walk or take the bus. He, Tiamaté, and Thornton were visiting Tomasu and Sulokwé to see the new baby and attend a traditional one-week ceremony.

They drove into Tomasu’s driveway and parked as close to the door as possible. Tiamaté stayed in the car until Jordan had knocked and the front door had opened, then she dashed out of the car and hurried to the house.

“Thank you, the cold is really hard on me today; perhaps it’s the pregnancy.”

“Welcome,” replied Tomasu. “How are you feeling?”

“It went from hard to easy and now it’s getting hard again. I’m entering the last trimester.”

“That was the worst for Sulokwé,” said Tomasu. He looked at Jordan. “How are you holding up?”

“Pretty well. We can’t wait to see whether it’s a boy or a girl. We have a nursery ready to go.”

“The baby will sleep with us for the first year, of course,” added Tiamaté. “We’re starting to look for a girl who can come live with us.”

“I have a cousin here from Weranopéla,” said Sulokwé. “Let me know and I’m sure I can find you someone.”

“We’re going to look on Sumilara; we want the kid to grow up speaking Sumi as well as Eryan,” replied Jordan.

“Come sit down,” said Tomasu, pointing to their parlor, which had a raised bench along two walls covered with cushions, pillows, and Tutane blankets. He took their coats.

“What a beautiful house,” remarked Tiamaté.

“Thanks.”

They entered the parlor and the other guests rose to greet them: Primanu and Gramé; Budhéstu was visiting from Kërda and had taken the bus from Mèddoakwés; and Chandu, head of the All-Grange Council, was there. He and Thornton both nodded a greeting to each other; they were the only two in the room over age 30.

“Long time no see,” Jordan said to Primanu and they shook hands warmly.

“It’s good to see you, too.”

“How is the baby coming?” Gramé asked Tiamaté.

“Pretty well, but now I’m getting tired again.”

“I’m not looking forward to the difficulties. We just discovered, to our surprise, that we’re going to have a baby at the end of the summer.”

“Congratulations!” said Tiamaté.

“Thanks.”

“It wasn’t what we had in mind,” said Primanu. “But Esto had other plans for us.”

“These things happen,” said Thornton, with a smile. “Our last two weren’t planned.”

“We never planned any of ours!” quipped Chandu. “We have five and probably haven’t stopped yet!”

“Where shall we put these?” asked Jordan, opening a bag and pulling out three presents.

“Right there,” said Tomasu, pointing to a table in the dining room. “Here, have some pastries.” He handed them a platter of fruit filled pastries, a traditional Eryan treat for births.

“Thanks.” Tiamaté and Thornton took one; Jordan did as well once he returned empty-handed from the table.

“So, Primanu; how’s business?” asked Jordan.

“It’s crazy. The weather has forced us to postpone several jobs in semitropical areas where the ground is too frozen to excavate! We’re building a big public water and sewer system for Mēdhpēla right now. Who would have thought the savage Kwolone would want running water at home! But of course they do. The city—it is a city—has a thousand buildings. And since I had to fire one of my foremen a few weeks ago, work is going slowly.”

“What happened?” asked Thornton.

“I caught him stealing funds.”

“You should have hired a Bahá’í,” commented Chandu, who was the only non-Bahá’í present.

“He was a Bahá’í; that made it sting even more. Fortunately, I have a worker I think I can promote to foreman. In another week I’ll decide.”

“Gas work is crazy, too,” said Tomasu. “As you can imagine, the farther from the equator, the bigger the demand for gas and the greater the shortfalls. We can’t install biogas in most of the places that need it because the ground is frozen and they don’t have the manure and straw to make it, anyway.”

“So what are people doing?” asked Chandu. “Burning firewood?”

“Yes, and keeping their houses barely above freezing. The gas company can’t produce gas fast enough anywhere. The Melwika coal gas plant isn’t producing coke for Miller Steel, it’s just converting coal to gas. The blue water gas plants at Nuarjora and Gramakwés can’t get wood fast enough because there’s not enough in the sea to cut any more and the northern forests have so much snow the wood can’t be hauled to either plant. Wood’s being hauled from Gordha and the mountains above Sértroba on the equator. The situation’s better on the western shore, where there are tropical forests to cut. Gordha’s biogas units produce a surplus most of the year, but they can’t keep up with demand and the city’s manure mountain is rapidly shrinking.”

“Any sign of warming?” Primanu asked Thornton.

He shook his head. “Not yet. This is a really cold winter; this is a small world and sometimes it happens. But spring will come.”

“I hope so,” said Chandu. “This is causing panic among some farmers. I was touring North Shore Granges last week; a wretched time of the year to be there! I couldn’t get to the North Polar Basin because the roads are plowed only once a week, so supplies could get through. If fodder wasn’t being sent, their herds would be dying by now. Most people have moved to the top floors of their houses and given the ground floor to the animals because the barns are too cold for them. They can’t get to Melita and the other tropical townships to plant, but the weather there won’t allow planting anyway. They worry they’ll never have a growing season at home this year and the growing season at the equator will be shortened. Their income may be cut in half, so they’re hoarding their cash and not buying anything.”

“That’s for sure,” said Jordan. “I’m getting developmental consulting calls from villages all over the map who are cutting their factory hours to as little as half time because demand for everything is drying up. People aren’t buying clothes; even boots and coats. Demand for furniture has collapsed.”

“Not to mention pickups,” added Tomasu. “Grandpa was happy the coke plant was making coal gas because he had to shut the assembly line for the month anyway. There’s no demand for pickups or steam cars. He has ramped up tractor production because the granges have grants to buy them, but that’s small compensation.”

“Are you guys finding more people asking for work?” asked Thornton.

“Definitely!” said Tomasu. “Any gas plant construction attracts a long line of men asking for paid work. That’s new; last summer we could get volunteers willing to improve their villages for free.”

“I wonder whether we should ask the palace for money to pay workers,” said Jordan. “The economy’s definitely suffering right now.”

“Well, the price of crops will double over the summer, so farmers will do well at that point,” said Chandu. “Getting there is the hard part.”

“Their income won’t necessarily go up,” replied Thornton, shaking his head. “Because panic is causing people to stop buying consumer goods and save so they can buy food. But that’s causing the income of factory workers and artisans to drop by as much as a half, which causes them to stop buying as well. Businesses and families are having trouble paying off loans and mortgages and that’s causing banks to get tight-fisted with credit. Warm weather can restore agricultural confidence, but not economic confidence.”

“So things won’t bounce back up?” asked Chandu.

Thornton shook his head. “I doubt it. We’ll see.”

“The Seven Year Development plan has a bit more than a year left,” observed Primanu. “It sounds like we won’t achieve its goals.”

“We’ll manage most of them,” said Thornton. “Seventeen years ago the average household had an income after taxes of 600 dhanay per year. Over eleven years it grew to 1,200. The goal is to reach 2,400 by next spring, and I think we were heading for an average family income of 2,200 this year before the winter started. Even if we don’t hit 2,400 next year, we will the year after. People are immensely more prosperous now than they were seventeen years ago.”

“That’s very true,” agreed Chandu. “But it sounds like the next half year will see a slowdown, and that will cause hardship, even if people don’t slip back to 600 or 1200.”

“I think you’re right, and I think I’ll ask Aryéstu whether he forecasts a recession, because I suspect we’ll have one,” agreed Thornton.

Sulokwé had slipped out during the conversation, and now appeared at the door of the parlor with the baby. “He’s now awake!” she said. “Let me present Jonmitru Miller.”

“Jonmitru?” asked Thornton. “That’s a pretty combination, like Jonkrisu, which we invented for our youngest boy.”

“We wanted to honor Tomasu’s father, his brother Mitru, and my grandfather Mitru,” explained Sulokwé. She handed the baby to Tiamaté.

“He has your nose!” she said to Tomasu.

“Maybe; some people think it’s Sulokwé’s father’s. He definitely has her eyes.”

“Yes.” Tiamaté kissed the little boy, who stared at her.

“Let us pray he has a life of peace, prosperity, and opportunity,” said Thornton.

Reread and edited, 6/17/13, 9/2/17, 12/2/24

397.

Big Changes

early Plowménu/late Jan. 17/635

Chris was relieved when the light snow finally changed to light rain. He was surprised that it happened only about ten degrees north of the equator; he was half way between Médhela and Mèdhpéla at the time and close to the border between Kwolonε and Medhelonε lands. Médhela's oasis was buried under half a meter of snow, its palms killed or badly injured by the winter.

He speeded up; the graveled road surface was safer now that it had no ice and snow on it. In a few minutes he reached the northern edge of Mèdhpéla, capital of the Kwolonε, a long, rambling “city” that stretched for ten kilometers along the banks of Mèdhpélakwés. Ditches snaked along Route 2 and broke its connections to many alleys, marking future water and sewer pipes that Primanu had begun to install.

Chris parked the steam car—he had mostly retired his rover—outside the fortress-like home of Staurekester, who was both Lord and Chief of the Kwolonε. It was built on top of the “middle hill” that gave Mèdhpéla its name, a big, flat rock with cliffs on three sides and a powerful, perpetual spring that gave the city its water.

He climbed the steps cut in the rock slowly to the front door, which was on top of the mesa and directly above the spring. Staurekester's oldest grandson welcomed him in and led him to the chief's sitting room, where the chief waited for him.

“Count Mennea, thank you for coming.” Staurekester rose and extended both hands in greeting. They shook.

“Thank you, lord. It’s good to see you again.”

“Thank you. Would you prefer a chair to pillows? I see you are using a cane. I gather you don’t drink wine or beer; it’s a pity because our beer is famous. But we can make you some coffee.”

“Coffee would be marvelous, thank you, and if you don’t mind, I would appreciate a chair. My legs hurt more and more and getting down on the floor is difficult.”

“I would prefer a chair also, actually! I’m afraid if I get down I may not be able to get back up.”

“Exactly.”

They paused while the grandson hurried into the room with two fancy wooden chairs imported from Sumilara. “It appears you have been spared the snow.”

“Quite true. We have had a few mild frosts; enough to kill the winter vegetable crop, I’m afraid, but half the bugs survived and the palms are fine. We’ve had a dusting of snow once. We’ve also had unusually heavy rain for the winter, so the grass has been growing well. We should have a good crop, once we can plant.”

“I’m glad to hear that. Food prices are climbing fast, and the best way to bring them down is to get more of it on the market.”

“Our granaries are emptying fast; we’re selling as much as we dare. What do you make of the rumor that there will be no spring and summer?”

Chris shook his head. “It isn’t true. Spring may be late, but it will come. You don’t need to hoard food. Melwika’s selling everything; we’re making a good profit now,

we're keeping prices from rising too much later, and we're ensuring a supply of food for the poor."

"Good."

The coffee arrived; they must have had a pot ready. Staurekæster handed Chris a cup and offered him milk and sugar. The chief took his black and sipped it. He looked at the door; no one else was around. "Lord, I hope you don't hold a grudge against the Kwolone for their attack on Mælwika?"

"Certainly not, lord. That was almost fifteen years ago. Much has changed since and the Kwolone have been good neighbors. Has Mælwika not been a good neighbor to the Kwolone?"

"You have. Your kindness, fifteen years ago, kept most of our wounded alive. You have not only respected their graves, but have beautified them and made them a fitting memorial. You have welcomed us to them and have invested here." He sighed. "My brother accepted five thousand dhanay from the chief priest, Jésunu, to destroy Mælwika. It seemed like an enormous sum in those days, especially since Jésunu said we could keep all the gold we plundered from the city. We were assured that with a garrison of only fifty men and walls barely taller than a man on horseback, and the army tied up in Sumilara, it would be a fast and almost bloodless victory. He wanted to see the heads of everyone in your family."

Chris decided not to mention the role of the Kwolone widu Kowéru, who prophesied victory. He nodded. "Why are you telling me this, lord?"

Staurekæster hesitated for a moment. "Because we need your help."

“What help do you need, that would warrant an unrequested confession? I do not need to know what happened fifteen years ago. It is all in the past.”

“Thank you. It was certainly a foolish decision my brother made; he lost his position as chief, we lost some of our bravest men, the rest of us were forced to build a road for the army through our land, and we lost the western end of our territory where Endraidha and Melita stand. We now face the loss of more land, Lord Kris. Land is the most precious thing we have; it is our blood, it is kneaded into our bodies. We do not want to lose it.”

“I’m sorry, but I know nothing about this development. Who wants the land? The crown?”

“Indeed. General Roktekester has been here twice to negotiate with me. They want a strip ten to fifteen kilometers wide along our western edge, bordering Melita, North Gramakwés, Gramakwés, Swadledha, and Endraidha. It could amount to as much as a tenth of our territory.”

“I don’t know anything about this plan, lord. Obviously, I cannot plot against Her Majesty; I am completely loyal to her. Are you asking for advice on how to handle the negotiations? I could perhaps offer advice about that.”

“Anything, lord. We do not want to lose our land! We are a mighty people and we are becoming a wealthy people. You have helped us become wealthy. But your Melita borders on our western lands and you would benefit from an additional strip of townships.”

“I would, but I can also benefit from a wealthy Kwolona; Mēdhpēla is less than an hour from Mēlwika on a good road. I have helped to defend Tutane land in the past. Your people need their land. One thing that would underline that point would be a land use plan. The Eryan regard land as belonging to someone when they farm it or pasture animals on it. The Tutane regard land as belonging to the tribe, whether it has those uses or others, such as hunting.”

“The palace argues we shouldn’t keep land we don’t use,” agreed Staurekēster. “We don’t know whether to refuse absolutely to sell and defend the land if necessary, or demand a fair price; that is, as high a price as possible.”

“I can’t advise you there because I can’t predict when the army would mobilize against you. Certainly, you wouldn’t want armored steam wagons rolling through Mēdhpēla.”

“I agree. We suffered enough pain and humiliation last time.”

“What is your population now?”

“We are close to 9,000; half more than when we attacked Mēlwika, and increasing very fast.”

“The entire world’s population is growing fast. That’s part of the problem; they need more farmland.” Chris turned to the map of Kwolona on one wall of the room. His first impression was of how large their territory was. “You have more land than any other tribe.”

“Indeed, because we are the largest, but that’s not a reason to take it from us, Lord.”

“That’s not what I was thinking. I was thinking that Kwolona is larger than Swadnoma province. It may be larger than Arjakwés. I’m sure it’s larger than Rudhisér, Vespa, Lëwésa, and Jérnstisér. The land of the Mëghendres and maybe of the Kwétëkwone also are large and may be province-sized as well. But the other tribes on this side of the mountains have much smaller pieces of land.”

“They do indeed. What are you suggesting?”

“You will have to decide whether to concede the land and extract a price, or refuse altogether. But if you agree to concede the land at a price, you may want to ask that Kwolona become a recognized province. That would give you the title of Duke and as Duke you would get a tenth of the total tax, which would give you more money to invest. You might even want to insist that the new townships remain in Kwolona province and pay you a tenth of their taxes. That would have some disadvantages, though; you would have to expend some of the money on them, and if there is ever a provincial consultative assembly they’d have a vote. Indeed, if they were more numerous than the Kwolone, they would dominate the province.”

“We don’t want that, but perhaps we could ask for the tenth of the taxes for ten or twenty years. What’s a fair price for the land they want?”

“The tribes have asked for two sorts of fees; something up front and something per year for a certain period of years. You can’t ask for too much of either because it will make the cost of settling the land excessive. The strip they want can make five townships. I’d ask for a thousand dhanay per square kilometer and suggest they open the townships one at a time and pay you for each one over a two or three year period when they open it. That would give you income over a period of time, rather than all at once. And ask for a

fraction of the taxes for a period of time. That gives you a stake in their development; an incentive to support them. Then you need a well-thought out plan to spend the money on development, because otherwise the money won't be spent efficiently and effectively. The more people who plan that, the better; otherwise some will be resentful and there will be jealousy."

"We need a vision for who the Kwolone will become."

"That's the hardest part because there are so many different ways to envision development. The money is not the end; it's the means, but to what? The Médhelone have squandered much of the money they got from South Ménwika's rents and the sale of that township to the crown."

"Can we hire Jordan to help plan development?"

"I am sure, but your people still need to make most of the decisions. He can help with the meetings; so can Thornton. The other thing that would help: a land use plan for Kwolona. You have more big game than anyone else and you need to preserve land for them, plus you need to plan for the expansion of your herds. You could assign certain parts of your territory to animal preserves or areas where the grass can be harvested for hay, or areas where the prairie can gradually become forest. The geological survey can help with that."

"We need a land use plan and a development plan either way. We have parts of such a plan already." Staurekester nodded. "Thank you for coming down, lord. This has been very helpful. You are indeed a friend of the Kwolone."

Over the next two weeks, Chris exchanged a few brief phone calls with Staurekester. When Plowménu headed into its last week, he attended an insurance commission task force at the palace. He came home in a brooding mood.

“Her Majesty will not be pleased by our report,” he said to Liz. “The idea of organizing an insurance industry is an excellent one, but the timing is wrong. Aryéstu brought us the latest tax collection data. Revenue from manufacturing is down twelve percent and from services, nine percent. Agriculture is down thirty percent compared to the same month last year. We’re definitely entering an economic slowdown.”

“A recession?”

“Aryéstu refused to use that word; he said the definition is too hard to apply to our situation because the data is spotty. Unemployment is hard to measure. There’s a lot of underemployment because the laws allow reducing hours or salaries. Aryéstu said income tax receipts forwarded by companies have dropped ten percent.”

“The last slowdown was triggered by a really bad winter, too.”

Chris nodded. “The economy is still half agricultural, so crop prices have a huge effect on the economy. The sales of modular buildings, which shot up after the Sumiuperakwa tornado, have plunged again. Miller’s running at two thirds capacity and is allowing workers to withdraw the difference from their retirement accounts. Textile and furniture sales are down to forty percent of average. Aryéstu’s talking to the queen about a fiscal stimulus; printing money and putting it into roads, dams, and public works.”

“It sounds necessary. The gabrulis are really hurting; sales of candles, preserves, knitted clothing, rosewater, baskets, etc., are way down. I’ll call Melitané and ask her for exact numbers, if you’d like.”

Chris nodded. “Yes, let’s get that data to Aryéstu. Aryéstu also gave me a note from Estoiyaju inviting me to attend a special gathering tomorrow during the eclipse when Her Majesty would have a major announcement.”

“What sort?”

“He didn’t say, but it sounds big; it’ll be broadcast over the radio. Perku’s around the palace now and not in Sumilara. It may involve his service to the crown. Aryéstu and I met with him, finally, to talk about computers and cell phones. He and Aryéstu are excited about the possibility of computers and cell phones, so the recommendation to the queen will certainly be positive.”

“I guess that’s good. I met with Estodhéru this afternoon and we reviewed changes to the final draft of the Central Spiritual Assembly’s report about spiritualization of the kingdom. It’ll go to her on Kwéterdiu, as requested. It’s a good report. The task force of Bahá’í school teachers has already outlined a curriculum on the oneness of humanity and has started to review various virtues curricula.”

“That’s important; it has to be the new focus of development. We’ve learned how to build schools, hospitals, and roads, after seventeen years.”

Just then the telephone rang. Chris walked to the phone and picked it up. “Khélo, Mennea here.”

“Grandpa, this is Jordan! How are you?”

“Pretty good. How are you and Tiamaté doing?”

“Pretty well. She’s getting more tired, so she’s taking it easy this afternoon. We found a Sumi girl from Bilara who can serve as a nanny.”

“Excellent. How’s the weather in Melita?”

“Better; warmer! And less rain.”

“It was almost ten Celsius here; the first ‘warm’ weather of the winter. What can I do for you, Jordan?”

“I need your help, grandpa. I got a call today from the grandson of Lord Staurekæster of the Kwolone. We talked for half an hour. The lord wants me to devise a ten-year development plan for Kwolona, assuming an average expenditure of 100,000 dhanay. This is huge! They’ll pay five thousand for the plan. He said it should include ‘everything a province usually has, such as a hospital and a génadema.’ They’re thinking *big*! I can’t imagine they’d have the money to do it.”

“They wouldn’t call you for advice if they didn’t. It does sound big.”

“But do they really need a hospital or a génadema? It sounds like a waste of money to me.”

“Gordha has both, and it’s about the same size and distance from Melwika. They also need a land use plan.”

“Yes, he said that, too.”

“This is very important and must be done right, so I’ll make myself available to help. We’ll need to involve Thor as well. I’d like to involve Lord Patékwu or Lord Èndranu; the former has more development experience but the latter gets along better with Kwolone. And we need to consider spiritual development priorities as well as material ones.”

“But they aren’t Bahá’ís.”

“It’s time to propose Bahá’í-type development goals, such as educating girls. If they’re going to spend that kind of money, they need to have a vision first.”

“I hope you’ll propose those goals, because I wouldn’t be sure what to say!”

“Oh, I’m sure you could, but I’ll help, yes.”

“Any idea where they’re getting the money?”

“A little, but I can’t say. If you listen to the Queen’s live speech over the radio tomorrow during the eclipse, perhaps we’ll find out.”

Chris headed for the palace a bit early the next day and was surprised by the crush of steam cars seeking to park in the palace’s parking lot. Every lord in Arjakwés was there; most members of the Old Houses; some members of the consultative assembly; all members of the House of Lords, even the ones from snowed-in Kërda; almost all the Counts; even Werétrakester arrived.

The old throne room was filled with chairs for them all, and everyone hunted around for the chair with their name on it. As a Count, Chris was seated up front. Both Countess Ninti and Duchess Sugé, widows of Prince Meméjékwu, were present. Chris was surprised to see Lord Mitrudatu of Ora seated by his brothers, Mitrubbaru, Mitruiluku, Mitrulubu, as well as his sister Sugé. Since Chris was behind him, he extended his right hand forward. “Good to see you, Lord. It’s been a few years.”

“It has, Lord Kris; how are you?”

“Old. I’m so happy to see you with the rest of your family.”

Mitrudatu looked at his siblings. “Well, sharing blood is more important than sharing wine. They’ve done quite well, haven’t they?”

“Indeed; three booming towns, strong factories, abundant agriculture, and they’re well managed.”

“You helped a lot,” said Mitruiluku, the oldest. “Have you any idea what this is about?”

“No, but it clearly is quite big. How much is manufacturing down in Ora?”

“About twenty percent,” replied Mitrudatu. “Here comes Her Majesty.”

The Queen entered and all rose. She was closely followed by a long line of men, dressed in their best, who arrayed themselves behind the podium. She stood and waited for them to get in place, then she turned to the microphone. “You may all be seated,” she said. “The throne room today is filled with one hundred of the leading men and women of the kingdom. I thank all of you for coming, in spite of the weather. I am very grateful for your continued support for my reign and the advancement of our kingdom.

“A few days ago marked the end of the sixth month since the passing of our dearly departed monarch, Dukterésto I, and my sole assumption of the throne. In that period of time I have been served by some of the most loyal and devoted servants any monarch could imagine. Their advice has been wise and precise; their completion of tasks, exact and complete; their efforts, diligent and far-seeing. The transition would have been impossible without them. With their help, it was relatively smooth. Now many of them complete their service to the crown and move on to other efforts.

“General Roktekester has been a rock of strength, loyalty, and steadfastness ever since I have known him. After the attempted assassination of my mother and the cruel

murder of my brother, the Crown Prince, he demonstrated absolute reliability and integrity. No one could have been better.

“But the General has asked to retire and I have reluctantly granted his request. For his service, I am giving him the honorary title of Count of Ornakwés. General, please accept our gratitude.” She extended a hand to him, so he came over and shook it. Tears were in his eyes; the audience applauded strongly.

Roktekester returned to the line of men behind the podium. “Replacing General Roktekester as head of the army will be General Perku. Perku comes from a humble Kerda family, but has risen through the ranks because of his immense skill and talent. As commander of the Melwika garrison, he was one of the first to grasp the implications of the new knowledge to create a new army. His leadership was a major factor in saving Melwika during the siege. Subsequently he was central to the reform of the army. Because he was among the first group to acquire the new writing system and such important tools as accounting and office management, he was crucial in efforts to pacify rioting cities and to reorganize dysfunctional provinces. He and I will be developing a plan to reorganize the army and reconceive its purpose.” She beckoned him forward to shake her hand and the audience applauded, but less enthusiastically, for many were in shock that the headship of the army would go to someone with no aristocratic or royal blood.

“His elevation to the position of chief of staff creates a vacancy: commander of the Sumilara Garrison. That position will be filled by Aisendru, who is now elevated to the rank of General. Aisendru has served on the island for most of two decades, has married into the population, and speaks Sumi. He has been innovative at the Officer’s

Training School in Endraidha and has the collaborative approach that the army must pursue wherever there is a garrison embedded in a large city, such as Anartu or Meddoakwés.”

Aisendru came forward to shake the queen’s hand and the applause was a bit more vigorous, for he had aristocratic blood. Chris applauded loudly, for the general was Tiamaté’s father.

“Turning now to the palace, there are few who have worked harder than Wëranu at the exchequer. For twenty-four years he has overseen vast changes in that department as the revenues it controlled increased six fold and the nature of the operation continually underwent reformation. With both regret and gratitude we accept his request to retire. We name him lord of Orntroba, a new township that will be created on the Ornakwés immediately to the east of General Roktekester’s now flourishing lands.”

Wëranu, who was about 70 years old, came forward and shook hands with the queen, then returned to his place. The old house members were loud in their applause because he was a prominent member of their group. “Replacing him will be Modobéru, Governor of Sumilara, a man known for skilled fiscal management and considerable developmental experience. He is a particularly prominent member of the new generation trained in the new knowledge but has also acquired much experience and wisdom in its use. Together, he and I will embark on an effort to reorganize the exchequer to raise its efficiency yet further.”

There was startled applause as he came forward to shake the queen’s hand, for he was part Sumi. The exchequer had always been headed by someone with royal blood. “I should add that I will not be appointing Modobéru’s replacement as governor of

Sumilara. That task now reverts to Duke Lamuno, who henceforth is in charge of the civilian administration of Sumilara. He has appointed Dingiramarru, also known as Déolubu, Mayor of Amurrueqluma, to that position. I congratulate the Duke on such a vigorous and experienced choice and am sure he will work well with the army and the rest of the island's institutions.

“There is one more transition I wish to announce today, one of immense importance and personal feeling for me. For twenty-four years, Estoiyaju has been at the right hand of the monarch as personal secretary and chief of the palace staff. His organizational skills are legendary, his discretion is complete, and his loyalty is incomparable. But the time to move on to other tasks has come. Therefore today I am granting Estoiyaju the title of Lord of Gramdhunas, a new township on the equator due east of North Gramakawés.” She turned to her loyal secretary and he came forward to shake her hand to very enthusiastic applause.

“Estoiyaju and Wëranu will anchor two of six new townships that, with the agreement of the Kwolone, will be added to Swadnoma province, thereby rounding out that province and creating a permanent eastern boundary with the province of Kwolona. The Kwolone have demonstrated remarkable leadership and Mëdhpëla has grown into a booming city. For these reasons I am now elevating Staurekëster to the rank of Duke of Kwolona. With my consent, some of the Kwolone lands will be divided into townships and various Kwolone designated as lords of those places. Ekwukordu is the first, designated as Lord of Awstroba. We are grateful to the Kwolone for what will be their last concession of territory.

“Replacing Estoiyaju will not be an easy task; his shoes are well nigh impossible to fill. But I have found a talented young man with the new skills of the new knowledge and the wisdom of his prophet father. Wepokēster will be my new personal secretary.” She turned to him and he stepped forward to shake her hand. Werétrakēster looked on from his seat with tears in his eyes.

“One final announcement. Today I am creating a new position, economic advisor to the monarch, and appointing Aryéstu Weranopélai to fill it. He is the founder of the field of economics on this world and has proved again and again to bring wisdom and forecasting talent to difficult economic questions. We are pleased he will be serving us in this way.” She paused so that Aryéstu could come forward to shake her hand.

“The kingdom moves into a difficult time. The winter has been very cold and promises to be a little longer than usual. Agriculture has been severely impacted and this has shaken manufacturing and services. But with this new team we will be prepared to move forward, regardless of the weather. In a few weeks we will be announcing a plan to stimulate the economy. We are no longer a world of farmers who make almost everything they need at home. We are a web of workers who support each other. The web is susceptible to panics and other actions that can disrupt the relations. It is the job of the government to compensate and keep the ship of the economy moving forward. We are learning how to do that. With this new team, we will lead the kingdom forward into a bright and prosperous future.”

She finished and turned to leave the stage. The audience stood and applauded. Chris turned to the Kérékwes family seated around him, who were slightly shocked by the program. “She sacked half the old stalwarts in her administration!” said Mitruiluku.

“She is powerful,” agreed Sugé, a touch of jealousy in her voice.

“I’m excited that Swadnoma will double in size,” said Chris.

“More competition,” replied Mitrulubu.

Wepokester returned to the podium. “Her Majesty invites everyone to a reception starting immediately in the ballroom,” he announced.

“Oh, we get fed,” said Mitrubbaru.

“I wonder how she managed to acquire a second row of townships from the Kwolone,” said Mitruiluku. “A Dukeship, provincial status, and a few lordships are not enough.”

“There must have been a big payment, too,” agreed Sugé.

They joined the crowd as it moved slowly toward the ball room, which was in the new palace adjoining the old throne room. Once they entered, Chris observed big crowds forming around the queen, Perku, Roktekester, Weranu, Wepokester, and Estoiyaju. There were few talking to Modobéru or Aisendru, so he went to them first, in that order.

“Congratulations on the promotion,” he said to Modobéru, extending his hands.

“Thank you.” They shook. “The Exchequer is a huge challenge, but standard accounting procedures worked well to run provincial expenditures in Sumilara, so they should help here as well.”

“Weranu was slow to implement standard accounting. Sumilara had a reputation for minimal waste of funds, so I’m sure you’ll bring new standards to the palace.”

“Thank you. It’s a shame the weather here is so much less pleasant than Anartu!”

“At least the winter will be ending within a month.” Chris smiled and walked over to Aisendru. “I can’t imagine a more capable leader of the Sumilara garrison. Congratulations.” He offered his hands.

“Thank you.” They shook and Aisendru smiled. “Our conversations about forgiveness and unity were very helpful.”

“Really?”

“Yes. Sumilara doesn’t need an iron fist; it needs an open hand of partnership. The army has to work hard to prove itself worthy to keep a garrison there. It can do that if it becomes an instrument for development. That’s what it will become everywhere under Perku, if I read him correctly.”

“If that’s the case, having a fifth of the army in a place with only 15% of the world’s population will give that place an advantage. It will have that much more resources.”

“Exactly. If the army changes the way I think it will, the calls for it to reduce its presence on Sumilara will come from the Eryan. We can’t abolish the army; we’ll always need to maintain a credible threat to use force to maintain law and order. But the army can do a lot more than practice maneuvering in armored steam wagons.”

“What will you do on the island?”

“Get all the roads paved, drain a few swamps, build a few more hydroelectric dams, clear a road along the north shore, develop hiking trails and logging roads in the remaining forests, improve several harbors, expand the gas pipelines. . . there’s no shortage of projects. We’ve started a priority list.”

“Excellent. And you have a son in law who is a development expert; I’m sure he’ll help.”

“I’m counting on it. I wish we could entice Jordan and Tiamaté to move to Sumilara, but as Lord of Melita, that’s not practical.”

“Probably not, but they do plan to visit often, and it sounds like he plans to continue improving his Sumi.”

“He’s good with languages.”

Chris exchanged a few more words with Aisendru, then walked to Estoiyaju, who had relatively few people talking to him. The former secretary extended his hands to Chris. “Greetings, lord.”

“Greetings, Lord Estoiyaju. I want to thank you for your decades of outstanding service to the crown. You’ve had a very positive impact on the development of this world and I’m sure it will be remembered very favorably by historians.”

“You flatter me, lord, but . . . thank you. If anything, I need your help to develop Gramdhunas. It is a 12 by 8 kilometer rectangle of grass inhabited by antelope and occasionally by marauding elephants. I doubt it will be a fitting place for me to retire for some time.”

“Perhaps not. This world has approximately two thousand new married couples every year, and nearly a thousand of them want to move, either for new farmland or a new job. If Gramdhunas provides both competitively, it can fill up very quickly. Twelve by eight kilometers is farmland for about 500 families, nowadays.”

“The crown will provide a hundred thousand dhanay per year of investment for five years, which is enough to build a substantial village center. If you have ideas about developing the township, I would greatly appreciate them.”

“I will be honored to discuss the matter. But I should tell you that yesterday Jordan was asked by the Kwolone to provide them development advice, and I have pledged to help. Our advice to you will inevitably be colored by our advice to them and our plans for Melwika and Melita.”

“Perhaps that’s good; I wouldn’t want to invest in something that competes with any of them. You specialize in finding unique strengths in each place and building on them. That’s what I need. Weranu’s fortunate; Orntroba has an industrial park at its edge that could be expanded into his township, as could housing and other services. He has a concrete road, power, electricity, and gas. Gramdhunas won’t have any of them for a year or more.”

“I’m sure we can create a plan for Gramdhunas that will build a modern town quickly. If it’s right on the equator, it will be blessed with warm winters; that’s important, especially after this winter.”

“How true. Thank you, lord, I would welcome a collaboration with you.”

“Excellent.” Chris offered both hands to Estoiyaju again.

He looked at the refreshments, but found little he desired. Roktækestær was standing with his daughter nearby, so Chris walked over. “So, my friend, today the retirement is official.”

“Yes.” Roktækestær sighed. “I don’t know whether I’m relieved or regretful.”

“Both,” replied his daughter.

“Yes, both.”

“We have some new neighbors.”

“Wəranu’s right next to both of our townships and was relieved to see there already was a road through a corner of his land. He wants to build his villa there.”

“I think Route 5 only has a hundred meters in Orntroba, but there may even be a few houses there already, and that spot has the river as well, so it’s a good place for a town center. I’ll have to look at the map, but I suppose a new north-south road crossing all six new townships will be needed.”

Roktekester nodded. “The army is already pledged to build it this spring, and a crossroad connecting Gramdhunas to North Gramakwəs and Kérékwəs. I told that to Estoiyaju, but I think he is still in shock, so it may not have sunk in. The palace will put a lot of money into the area in the next few years. Frankly, I wish we could develop the Long Valley, but people feel it’s too far away. Swadnoma will grow faster.”

“I’m amazed the Kwolone agreed.”

Roktekester snorted. “That barely happened! Until two weeks ago they were resentful but submissive. Then something happened; I’m not sure what! Suddenly they were bold and aggressive in their bargaining. They wanted a thousand dhanay per square kilometer, they wanted it over three years for each township we opened, they wanted a concrete road connecting Mədhpéla westward to the area and ultimately to Kérékwəs, they wanted a second road to Melita—we refused that!—they wanted provincial status, a dukedom for the tribal chief and lord status for the main elders, they wanted Route 75 to Awstroba concreted and designated ‘the Kwolone Highway,’ they wanted a tenth share of the taxes of the new townships for fifteen years—we cut them back to ten—they even

asked for a regular radio program! In the end the Queen decided it was better to pay through the nose than outright confiscate the land.”

“That would be tricky, with the free press.”

“It complicates relations with all the Tutane tribes, too. I doubt we’ll be buying much more land from them; the price is too high!”

“Perhaps that’s just as well, my friend. The land needs to be preserved for nature as well as for the tribes. Your big game hunting was mostly on Kwolone land.”

“That’s true, and some of it was on the prime grasslands that are now part of Swadnoma. Staurekester did pledge to create a park out of most of their lands south of the Swadakwés; that’s a strip ten kilometers wide and 140 long and can provide a home for a lot of game.”

“They called Jordan yesterday and asked for help creating a development plan, and he’ll involve Thornton and the Geological Survey. The result will be good for the entire world.”

“I suppose, but the expense! And the implications for the role of the Tutane in the future of this world! That worries me.”

“Don’t worry. The Eryan, Tutane, and Sumi are learning to live together and that means treating them all with respect. This is a great day, where that is concerned.”

Roktekester nodded. “Perhaps that is true.”

Reread and edited, 6/17/13, 9/2/17, 11/2/24

398.

The Heat of the Fast

Early ɛjnaménu, 17/635

Thornton slowly unrolled the gigantic map of Kwolona across the floor of Mædhpéla High School's gymnasium. As he unrolled the five by sixteen meter map, those present gasped at its detail. They slipped off their shoes and stepped onto it to admire the detail.

"You do this for a living?" exclaimed Duke Staurekæster, amazed.

"I did; now I supervise others," replied Thornton. "This is a product of the Royal Geological Survey, which is based at Melwika Génadema. It has twenty full-time map makers and each one turns out four quadrangles a year. This map consists of 160 quadrangles and thus represents two years of production. After twelve years we have completed 48,000 square kilometers of maps, but the planet has 76,000 square kilometers of dry land, so we're about 2/3 done. By the time we finish we'll have to start updating them."

"Yes, Mædhpéla High School isn't on it!" observed Wékhestonu, a former army zoologist who was now director of the tribe's educational agency.

"So, the army paid for this?" asked Staurekæster.

"No; the palace. We have all the provinces mapped and the Long Valley. Basically, we don't have the Spine and its shoulders mapped yet. These maps can be purchased by anyone; they aren't a secret. You must have some of them already. The Survey publishes an advertisement in the *Melwika Nuēs* every year about them. I assembled this set for you to keep."

“Thank you. We must read the *Nues* more often. We do have one or two, but we didn’t know the entire province had been mapped!”

“Indeed.”

Staurekēster pointed to the eastern end of the map, which had Mēlita and all the new Swadnoma townships on it. “You’ve included a lot of land that isn’t ours any more.”

“It helps planning if you can see what’s around the edge. Besides, we’ve been asked by Weranu and Estoiyaju to help plan their townships and it’ll help us to see and plan everything at once.”

“I suppose it’ll help us decide where the new roads the army agreed to make will go,” added Staurekēster, pointing to North Gramakwés and its existing roads. “Can you put this on the wall? I think we’d like to leave it there permanently.”

“Yes, the wall’s big enough.”

“What are all these green dots?” Staurekēster pointed to dots along the Swadakwés River and ravines cutting the valley edge.

“Trees. We haven’t mapped every tree; the dots represent areas with trees. But that comes from old aerial photographs. There are a lot more trees now.”

“We’ve started burning some areas twice a year to stop the forest from spreading.”

“That makes sense. That’s a decision in your hands. You could also cut the grass and sell it, because demand for hay is growing.”

Just then Chris and Jordan entered the gymnasium, accompanied by Stauregéndu, “seizer of bison,” the Duke’s son. He was in his thirties, had a triyeri in accounting and

management, and was the tribe's tax collector and bill payer. "How was your tour of our industrial park?" asked the chief.

"Excellent," replied Chris. "I had lost track of your factories."

"Five factories and a large artisanal building represents considerable diversification," added Jordan. "That's important when the economy is shrinking."

"We've been fortunate in that regard," agreed Stauregéndu. "The textile mill and clothing manufactory are running at half time right now and the boot manufactory is cut to 2/3 time. But the vegetable processing facility has been unable to keep up with demand and has hired extra workers. We had only one frost here and it was light; the vegetables recovered, and demand shot way up. The meat packing plant has seen a small drop in orders. The artisans have struggled."

"But overall, tax revenues are slightly up because of the high price of winter vegetables," concluded Staurekæster.

"That reminds me; could we listen to the *World Table* in a few minutes? The Queen's economic advisor, Aryéstu Wëranopélai, will be on and will explain the economic stimulus plan for the kingdom. It's important information for any planning effort."

Staurekæster nodded. "Yes, of course, but there's no radio here. We can go back to my house to listen." He led them out of the auditorium and to his house nearby.

The dozen of them sat in the chief's meeting room and listened to the *World Table*. It was surprisingly long; Këkanu liked his guests that day and took his time with them. They started on supper before the show ended.

“So, do you think we can get any of the extra five million dhanay to stimulate the economy?” asked Stauregéendu.

Staurekēster laughed. “No, I think we got everything out of them we could!”

“It sounds like you did very well,” agreed Chris. “Initial payments, ongoing payments, roads, radio shows. . .” He smiled and Staurekēster laughed.

“Yes, it worked well; thank you for your advice, lord!”

“I think you could get some of the stimulus money, though,” said Jordan. “The office that handles it isn’t under the direct control of the palace.”

“You would know,” said Staurekēster. He turned to Chris. “Aryéstu and Modobéru mentioned money to go to temples and hymn halls, but not to Bahá’í temples.”

“Bahá’í temples are gifts of the Bahá’í community to the world. We wouldn’t accept government money to build them.”

“Really?” said the chief.

“Only Bahá’ís can contribute to them,” said Chris. “In another week the Queen plans to release the various proposals for spiritualizing the world that the different religious communities proposed to her. We didn’t ask for any money at all. The others asked for enormous sums.”

“Typical.”

“I’m curious, lord; how well have the Kwolone accepted this new treaty?”

“You’ll see tonight at the gathering; *we’ll* see tonight. It has been very controversial. We gave up eight percent of our territory. It was very far away, but it was also some of the richest, best watered grassland we have, and the grazing rights belonged to a powerful clan. The fact that we forced the palace to pay a very, very high price—if

you include all the paved roads, over a million dhanay—makes it much more likely that the treaty’s pledge that they won’t demand any more land will hold. That’s very important. How we spend the money to develop the tribe is also essential for the treaty to be accepted. The radio program is important as well, because it is a big psychological victory.”

“Lord, if there is a single key to successful development, what would you say it is?” asked Stauregéndu. “Factories?”

Chris shook his head. “No. From the point of material development, factories are certainly important, though material development works best if it includes many different ways to make money: developed agriculture, a grange, factories that make many different things, a gabruli, stores, etc. More important, I’d say, is spiritual development. The Kwolone were always the most powerful single tribe on this world. The army was always sized to be at least double the tribe’s fighting force. You had a reputation for courage, fierceness, brilliant strategy, and effective coordination of cavalry units. But the world has now changed and none of those traits will guarantee the Kwolone a prominent place in the new world that is emerging. The single key to that is education.”

“Education?” asked the chief and his son simultaneously.

Chris nodded. “Without a doubt. I don’t just mean Kwolone doctors and engineers, though those are important. Right now, the average adult on this world has two years of schooling. To be more precise, anyone under the age of 25 has an average of four and anyone over the age of 25 has an average of one. The basic literacy rate, which has been rising fast, is about thirty-three percent now; forty-five percent for men and twenty-one percent for women. I suspect with the Kwolone the numbers are lower.”

“Literacy is about twenty percent,” confirmed Wékhéstonu.

“That’s about what I would have guessed. While there are exceptions, usually the better paying jobs require more education. Your location isn’t bad; once Route 2 is paved, you’ll be less than one hour from all of Arjakwés and Swadnoma provinces. If you develop good stores, people could come here; if you have famous doctors, people could come here; anything you have that has an excellent reputation can bring people here. The Kwolone need to become a tribe of brilliant experts, capable engineers, and famous artists. And you can do it. But you will need to improve your schools quite a bit, open a local génadema, and create an environment where people—including a lot of women—will want to improve their education.”

“We want to open a génadema; will you help?” asked Staurekèster.

Chris nodded. “We will. Melwika Génadema already sends faculty to teach courses on a daily basis as far as Tripola and Bellédha. It would be easy to send them here. More importantly, you need to develop your own faculty who can come to our génadema to teach. You already have Wékhéstonu, who has taught for us, so there is potential exchange.”

“But when we say education is key, it is important to realize that people have to want education; they have to want to pursue it,” added Jordan. “It isn’t enough to throw free génadema courses at them. In fact, it is better that they pay something because that increases their commitment. The key to a strong educational system is a change in culture. Education has to be something that Kwolone society values and emphasizes.”

“And for that to work, it has to accept the idea that women should be educated as well as men,” added Thornton. “Educated women learn how to feed their children

nutritious food, how to recognize illnesses and what to do, and they read to their children so their children want to read as well.”

Staurekēster raised his hand. “This is perhaps asking us to move too far, or perhaps too fast. We aren’t ready for anything like that.”

“Perhaps not,” said Chris. “It is a hard change to accept. But consider: the Krésone had a literacy rate of four percent, four years ago. It is now thirty-six percent; better than the world average. Furthermore, literacy among the women is twenty-nine percent. Family income has risen from 500 dhanay per year to 1,200, in just three and a half years. The Wurone in just two years have raised literacy from two percent to twenty-two percent and family income from 350 dhanay to 1,000 dhanay.

Khhermdhuna—up by the north pole—in seven years has raised literacy from five percent to seventy-five percent and family income from 400 to 1,900 dhanay. I can give other examples. These are all remote places. The Késtone and Ghéslone still have family incomes under 600 dhanay per year. Melwika has a literacy rate of eighty-five percent and a family income of 3,500 dhanay per year.”

“But not all of that is a cause and effect relationship,” noted Staurekēster.

“True, not all. But literate people can open businesses better; they can plan use of their money better and sign wiser contracts. Literate women can create gabrulis and cooperatively make items for sale. Literate people also tolerate injustice less and are more likely to demand that changes be made. Overall, literate people are more tolerant of other groups; that’s one reason Sumi and Tutane settle in Melwika.”

“Lord, I hope you are not trying to convert us to your faith,” said Staurekēster.

Chris shook his head. "That is a completely separate matter. We can talk about Bahá'u'llah some other time, if you want. But some of Bahá'u'llah's teachings clearly work to raise up a just and prosperous society. One does not need to accept him to accept those principles; accepting them is a purely practical, prudent matter."

"I'm not sure I would go so far as to call accepting a nearly equal role for women to be 'practical' or 'prudent.'"

"I disagree, lord; we're talking about basic respect for others and opening up the possibilities that women, as well as men, can express and develop their potentialities. Everyone is happier, more fulfilled, and more eager to work with others when they can do the things they want."

"But what about the children? The house work?" asked Stauregéndu.

"Men want families and clean houses, too," replied Thornton. "There are ways of sharing the work more equally that allows both husband and wife to do some family responsibilities and some vocational responsibilities."

"I'm not going to cook and wash dishes!" replied Stauregéndu.

"A change of culture does not occur overnight," replied Chris. "I doubt your wife would want you in the kitchen; it is probably *her* kitchen. But if you educate your daughter and she wants to be a doctor or a nurse or a teacher, she and her husband can find ways to do it. One has to start now to bring that about. Because if both work, in fifteen years salaries will have grown enough so that the two of them could buy a steam car together. That's one of the results of this change of culture."

"Really?" said Staurekéster. That gave him something to think about.

Amos yawned as he walked across Melwika to the headquarters of Miller Tomi. He had just arrived from Pértatranisér a few hours earlier and was still dealing with the nine-hour time change; besides, it was the second day of the Bahá'í fast. At least the temperature was finally above freezing. The two-meter snow banks lining the city's streets were melting.e3

He entered the tomi building in a new extension of Miller Industries northeast of Melwika Génadema. He was escorted straight up to the conference room on the third and top floor. Present were Yimu, Tritu, Rostu, and Mitru, John Miller's first, third, eighth, and ninth sons.

"Amos, welcome to Melwika," said Yimu, rising and offering both hands. He was four years older than Amos, but because Yimu, had counted his age in Éra years while Amos had used the shorter Earth years for most of his life, officially they were 48 and 46 years old. They shook hands enthusiastically.

"Thanks; it's good to be back."

"We really miss you; the engineering institute isn't the same without you," added Tritu.

"It's doing fine; I talk to them three times a week by telephone. Rostu, how are you? How are the wives and children?"

"Quite well, all of them. My oldest graduates from high school this year, believe it or not!"

"Wow, times flies!" Amos turned to Mitru with a nod. "How are you doing?"

"Pretty well. The transportation company remains the most profitable operation."

“People have to get around.” Amos turned to the last person in the room, Belékwu Kwénu, the elected worker’s representative on Miller Industries’ Board and a member of the city council. “How are you, Belékwu?”

“Quite well, thank you; relieved the winter is finally ending.”

“We even had frosts in Pértatranisér! They said that never happens.”

“Would you like tea or coffee?” asked Yimu.

“Nothing; I’m fasting.”

“Oh, that’s right; so is Mitru. I apologize.”

“No problem, people often forget.”

“It’s rather difficult to forget this year,” said Tritu. “The Melwika Nues published an article yesterday about the fast.”

“I saw it before leaving Pértatranisér. It was a very nice article.”

“I liked the interviews,” added Mitru. “I was amazed the report said that two of the twenty non-Bahá’ís he spoke to randomly on the street said they planned to try fasting this year!”

“That was surprising,” agreed Yimu.

“In fact, I have a request from two workers that a room be provided near the cafeteria so that people can go pray at lunchtime,” added Belékwu.

“We can do that,” agreed Yimu. “So, Amos, what do you say to the boast by the priests of the old religion that they got money for temples but the Bahá’í Faith got none?”

Amos shrugged and sat. “We didn’t ask for any. You can read the spiritualization plans that the various religions submitted to the palace in this week’s *Royal Beacon*. The Bahá’í proposal involved changing the school curriculum and other practical things. The

other religions said if you want to spiritualize the world, give us money for temples and shrines, and that'll solve the problem."

Yimu smirked. "Just what we need, more greedy priests running around."

"I was surprised the palace included a statement criticizing the greediness of the other two," added Mitru. "That can only increase the tension."

"I heard the palace was angry when the Eryan priests had boasted they got money and the Bahá'is didn't," replied Amos. He didn't mention Chris had heard that directly from Wepokēster. "Where's John?" he added.

"He's not coming to this meeting. Last night he said to me 'you boys can handle it. Tell me afterward what you decide,'" replied Yimu.

"He's tired," confirmed Mitru. "His age is catching up on him."

"That's hard to believe," quipped Amos, with a smile.

"It is," agreed Yimu. "We're glad you can spend three weeks here. Even if it is short, we need help with increasing efficiency."

"I understand you've eliminated the night shift entirely and cut back hours to forty per week."

"We've also let natural attrition draw down our workforce; Miller Motors and Miller Foundry together employ 1100 people," replied Rostu. "I really think we can develop the 999-dhanay steam car. If we can break the psychologically important 1000 dhanay barrier, demand will go up."

"But right now, manufacturing costs are 1000 to 1050," replied Tritu. "If we're to make a ten percent profit, manufacturing costs have to drop ten percent at least."

"Without squeezing the workers," added Belékwu.

“Costs have come down a lot already,” said Amos. “It’s really impressive. And right now raw materials must have dropped slightly.”

“They have, and that hasn’t been figured into manufacturing costs yet,” conceded Tritu. “We can afford to sell pretty close to cost if people borrow the money from us.”

“At least we have plenty of credit to offer,” added Yimu. “The workers retirement fund is our principal source for that.”

“It has dropped though, right?” asked Amos.

Yimu nodded. “At the end of last summer it reached almost three million dhanay. We were borrowing some of it for expansion, using half of it for loans to buyers, and investing the rest in local businesses. Half a million went out in the form of loans to workers to buy houses, steam cars, and other expensive items. The fund has dropped another half a million since hours were cut back at the beginning of the winter. Half of that is permanent withdrawal and half must be paid back by the workers eventually.”

“Still, two million dhanay; that’s a lot of credit. Miller Industries is blessed.”

“The retirement fund was the best benefit we ever created,” agreed Yimu. “Not only has it helped workers buy things and save for their retirement, but it has given us the cash on hand to invest. We pay ourselves—our workers—interest and then have a bigger nest egg to invest.”

“Right now we’re not using any of it for expanding the plant, and the drop in sales has decreased the amount of money earning interest,” added Mitru. “The return to the retirement fund has dropped to only 3% this year. An increase in sales would be good for the retirement fund’s earnings.”

“Anyway: Amos, how will we search for improvements in productivity this time?” asked Yimu. “A walking tour of the assembly lines?”

“We also have an accumulation of ideas in the suggestion box,” noted Rostu. “And my son wants to be involved. He’s very interested in productivity issues.”

“Good, we could use an efficiency expert,” replied Amos. “We’ve tried three techniques in the past: a walking tour of the assembly lines, asking workers about problems as we go; holding big meetings of sections of the company to brainstorm ideas; and holding small meetings of the production teams. We should use all three this time.”

“There’s a fourth idea to consider, too,” suggested Belékwu. “The second shift has been idled. Why not bring in the second shift people to audit the work of the first shift; watch how the work is done and suggest ways to improve it.”

“And vice-versa; great idea!” said Tritu.

Amos nodded. “That will help a lot. I’m sure we can improve efficiency by five percent. There may be new machines—hydraulic lifts, for example—that can be added to the production and assembly lines to improve them even more. We can get to the 999-dhanay steam car.”

Jordan drove up the driveway of his house in Mēlita and stopped the steam car. “Come in and have something before you go home,” he suggested to Wéroimigu Wēsénakwénu, President of Wiki Bank.

“Thank you; I hope it won’t be a problem. Kalané won’t be home for a few hours and the nanny will be too busy with the kids to make me anything.”

“Maybe you should learn how to do a few basic things in the kitchen.”

Wéroimigu laughed. “No thanks, I’m not a Bahá’í!”

Jordan didn’t comment on that. They both stepped out of the car into the cool air. It was near the end of the eclipse and pitch dark outside. But at least it had been warm earlier in the afternoon, so it was still fairly comfortable outside.

They entered the front door and Jordan immediately saw that they had guests already: his parents in law, Aisendru and Sarédaté, and Tiamaté’s brother, Aisugu, who had just turned eighteen. “What a surprise! How nice to see you!” said Jordan. He shook both hands with his father in law and brother in law and hugged his mother in law.

“We’re back in Endraidha for the rest of the month,” replied Aisendru.

“And I’m staying on until the baby comes,” added Sarédaté.

“We could use your help,” replied Jordan. “I should introduce everyone to Wéroimigu, President of Wiki Bank.”

“Pleased to meet you,” said Aisendru. “I’ve heard of your marvelous work.”

“Thank you.” They shook hands.

“And I know Kalané,” added Sarédaté.

Jordan and Wéroimigu sat in chairs, so everyone sat. “So, you were in Kwolona today?” asked Aisendru.

“Yes. Thornton’s conducting a short, intensive course on the principles of development for about thirty Kwolone. A few are taking the course for credit; the rest are participating to take part in the discussions. Today the theme was credit and banking, and Wéroimigu gave two hours on the role of microcredit.”

“We don’t have many clients in Kwolona,” added Wéroimigu. “The Tutane, generally, have not been attracted to Wiki Bank. I’m trying to change that.”

“How are you doing that?” asked Aisendru, curious.

“We’re trying a new approach to microcredit, not to replace our main system, but to supplement it. It also relies on formation of solidarity groups where people help each other make commitments to borrow money and repay the loan, but the source of the money primarily comes from the group members. The idea is that when the group—say ten people—is formed, they all pledge to pay in a fixed amount each week or month, such as ten dontay. Members of the group borrow from the accumulated capital and pay it back interest free at the agreed-on fixed payment. The group can also ask for a loan from Wiki Bank—usually up to the amount of capital they already have—and pay back the loan with interest.”

“So, that doubles the capital available to them.”

“Exactly, and cuts the interest rate in half because they don’t pay interest on the money the group has accumulated. It simplifies our paperwork enormously as well because rather than keeping track of a lot of small loans, we’re keeping track of fewer, larger loans. We’re also in the process of setting up Wiki Insurance. The way it works, a group of people—it can be an entire village or just three or four families—agree to open a bank account together and put money into it to cover a fire, flood, theft, or some other disaster. They have to agree ahead of time what sort of coverage to provide and who will decide when the conditions are met; usually it’s a joint meeting. The bigger the group, the better. People pay in proportion to the size of the asset being insured. When disaster strikes, the accumulated cash is given to the victim.”

“Impressive; we could use that on Sumilara.”

“General Aisendru is now in charge of the Sumilara garrison,” explained Jordan.

Wéroimigu's face brightened. "I didn't realize who I was talking to, I'm sorry!"

"That's alright. I don't make any development decisions; the garrison mostly builds roads and other infrastructure. I'm still learning the job."

"I'm so relieved you're in charge, though," said Jordan. "It's what Sumilara needs."

"I just wish you and Tiamaté could move back there and help. But the Lord of Melita has other priorities, of course." He said that with pride in his voice.

"We'll come whenever we can," replied Tiamaté. "And whenever the business permits. Jordan, the phone rang off the hook all day. We had all six lines engaged constantly. Everyone wants a piece of the stimulus."

"I'm sorry I wasn't here to help, but I'm glad I went to Kwolona. The Kwolone are thinking about their development plan very seriously and carefully."

"I'm glad we were able to buy land from them," said Aisendru.

"Lords Patékwu and Endranu of the Krésone and Wurone are there as well, theoretically as faculty, but they're modifying their tribes' development plans as well. When this is over, I need to present some changes to Melita's plan."

"What sort of changes?"

"They're based on the spiritualization plan the palace has endorsed. All Kwolone youth are expected to do a year of service to the tribe, whether in school or not. The high school will have special vocationally oriented service projects."

"I hope none of their service projects will include military training."

"No, but the high school will include martial arts; that'll help attract the macho young men."

“Young Kwolone warriors. Maybe the army can offer them some teachers. That way we can keep an eye on the program and recruit some of the best for the army.”

“That’s a good idea,” said Jordan.

“I’m glad to hear the spiritualization plan is already being used,” said Sarédaté. “It’s already controversial.” She pointed to the radio; the *World Table* program was wrapping up. “Kεkanu said he plans to interview Dr. Widumajlébé Orai tomorrow.”

Jordan frowned. “Why her? What does she know about the plan?”

Tiamaté smiled. Sarédaté hesitated, then said, “It’s the attack on birth control.”

“She’s outspoken about that whole subject; women’s health, that is,” said Jordan.

Wéroimigu’s face darkened. “A terrible thing that you Bahá’ís have brought to this world . . . women are sneaking about with these pills and not telling their husbands.”

Tiamaté blushed a bit and momentarily turned away from Wéroimigu so he couldn’t see; she had introduced birth control pills to Kalané. Then she turned to him. “This has nothing to do with the Bahá’í Faith. Birth control pills are something physicians prescribe to female patients. They always tell them to consult with their husbands.”

“Well, they don’t, they just take them! What if unmarried maidens start taking them? It’s very dangerous for their reputation and the reputation of their families!”

“The doctors have been prescribing them for *married* women,” replied Sarédaté. “And the pills are useful for older women, too, women my age who would suffer greatly from a pregnancy and need relief from monthly pains.” She looked away from Wéroimigu—this was not a conversation for polite company—and she glanced at Aisendru for a bit of emotional support. He was startled instead.

“Oh?” he said, a tone of anger in his voice.

“My dear, they’re an immense relief for me,” said Sarédaté firmly.

“At any rate, Widumajlébé Orai is not a Bahá’í,” noted Jordan. “Birth control pills are part of the new knowledge, not part of the Bahá’í teachings.”

“Only partially true,” replied Wéroimigu. “Women use the ‘equality of men and women’ principle as an argument in favor of them.”

“Well, they should; they’re the ones who are stuck with the children,” replied Sarédaté. “Look, in the past the average woman was pregnant a third of her adult life, from age 15 to age 40, if she lived that long! She had an average of three miscarriages and four babies, maybe five, and two kids grew to adulthood. She had maybe one chance in three to die in childbirth and a serious chance she’d end up sterile or with all sorts of women’s problems. Now we have better nutrition and there are doctors and hospitals. Do you want the average woman to raise *eight* children? That’s not old fashioned; that’s crazy!”

“I take your point, Sarédaté; my mother died when I was twelve,” replied Wéroimigu. “But it’s not right that women fool their menfolk, either.”

“I agree,” she said. “Equality of the sexes doesn’t justify that.”

“This particular attack on the Bahá’ís interests me,” said Aisugu, speaking up for the first time. “The earlier attacks sounded like silly conspiracies. I suppose twenty percent of the population believed them, but most didn’t. If anything, the attacks just hurt the reputation of the attackers. But this accusation that Bahá’ís promote birth control will work much better.”

“But it’s not a Bahá’í teaching,” repeated Tiamaté, irritated at her little brother.

“It doesn’t matter,” replied Wéroimigu. “Aisugu’s right. Most people can’t tell the difference between the new knowledge and the Bahá’í teachings; it’s all new. And almost all women physicians are Bahá’ís.”

“That’s true,” agreed Jordan.

Aisugu sighed. “The population is slowly dividing into two groups; Bahá’ís and traditional religionists.”

“No, not true,” replied Wéroimigu. “There are also the modern ones, or partially modern ones. I’m not interested in religion at all. The priests keep preaching ‘chant the hymns and sacrifice’ because only they can teach the hymns and only they can perform the sacrifices properly. So it keeps them employed. The Bahá’ís say ‘no drinking, pray every day, and fast.’ I’m not interested in either.”

“But you are interested in morality, obviously,” replied Sarédaté. “You need some sort of standard; everyone can’t invent their own. Better sacrifice a bit and give up drinking, if the result is an honest society.”

Wéroimigu pondered that. “Perhaps. Perhaps,” he replied.

Reread and edited, 6/19/13, 9/2/17, 12/3/24

Liz (69): Gabrulias and growth of the Faith

Chris (71): Focuses on granges, forestry companies, sustainable development.
Talks to John about sustainable development

May (44) is focusing on the Institute; Amos (46) is focusing on engineering, especially a telephone switching system; Lua (49) is busy with a rapidly expanding health system; Behruz (53) is teaching Arabic, Persian, Bahá'í texts; Thornton (34) is working on forestry in the south; Lébé (34)

The children: Rostamu Shirazi (16, summer); Skandé Keino (15, spring); Jalalu Mennea (14, spring); Kalé Mennea (12, June); Marié Keino (same); Jonkrisu (9, Aug.)

Tiamaté (22-23) Jordan (22-23): Have a baby in Dhébelménu, continue development consulting work

Tomasu: finishes biogas installation, goes into maintenance; Sulokwé is due in mid-late Belménu

Primanu: Goes into water and sewer construction, gets married to Gramé Miller, who's one year older

Sugérsé: Moves to Mèddwoglubas, starts Institute, translates Universal House of Justice guidance into Eryan

Chandu: Becomes a major force in grange movement

Roktèkèster: retires because he wants the new Queen to choose her own team; amicable full-honors retirement. He meets with Chris to ask for help in developing his township further.

Estoiyaju: forced out in favor of Wèpokester. Wèranu: forcibly retired in favor of Modobéru. Duke Lamuno replaces him with Dingiramarru. Aisendru: moves to Sumilara to command of garrison there when Perku becomes chief of staff of the military.

Queen calls on the banks to get into the insurance business

Amos: gets automatic telephone switching system finally working reliably

Budhéstu and Blorakwé: Have baby, move to Isurdhuna, work with mental patients there and Pértatranisér.

Soru: Expands school for blind in Pért.

Rébu is rehabilitated

Queen Dukteréstó: dies in the summer, daughter becomes sole monarch.
Awster/Estoibidhé is controversial until she helps the Sumiuperakwa tornado victims. Her accession to the throne triggers mass conversion.

Goal established of universal literacy among Bahá'ís; how is it going?

Behruz admits the Fischer-Tropsch process works, but is uneconomical and apologizes to Chris. Thornton sees start of road from Melwika to the north basin. How are things in Penkakwés? Sumilara? Wiki Bank?

Round-the-sea bicycle race planned. It includes Kerda, too.

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