

July 3015

After Toby had settled back into his suite in Laton, he started having weekly meetings with his staff, including Thomas, Roberto, and Sally, and community members, Nadia and Henry. He was motivated to make the island ready for construction of the space port to begin when the factory ship being planned arrived in several years. Land would need to be appropriated, and local personnel would need to be educated and trained to run the facility. Sally would need to work with Nadia to reach out to the people, to help sell the idea. Sally was thinking that it would make sense to start at Nadia's families farming community, and proceed from there to the further away farmlands where the port would be located. She was thinking about Joseph too. Their conversation by the fire lingered in her mind. She wondered if Joseph was thinking about her, or if he was too busy with his work for that. After a couple of months of planning with Toby, she packed for a trip to the farm with Nadia, to start on her promotional tour.

Nadia took her time driving one of the farm's tractors up the road past the end of their property, along the coast and then inland, past the other large farms south of the city. It was early August, and she was happy with the progress on her farm, and pleased to see that the others were doing just as well. It would be a good season. She parked the tractor on the street near the hotel, and enjoyed a quiet dinner with Sally, who told her about her tour to let the people know of Toby's plans. Nadia's farm would be the first stop before the tour really got underway, and Sally was anxious to see how the farmers would respond to the big changes that were in store for the island.

They rolled away from Laton early on a warm day, the road shimmering from the sun shining down. As they traveled, Nadia told Sally how crop yields were improving dramatically with the addition of synthetic fertilizer. The mining operation up in the hills had discovered a steady reservoir of natural gas, and it was being used to produce ammonia. The knowledge being recovered from the old libraries was proving useful in producing things useful to the planet. The Haber-Bosch process proved, once the accompanying technology was achieved, to be an effective step in the process. Sulfer, coal, and phosphate rock, as well as potash, were plentiful in the mountains that overlooked the town. Sally was impressed by how tall the corn had become, and thought of how satisfying it must be to coax the soil to produce such a harvest.

The open tractor afforded a panoramic view of the countryside, but its speed was limited, so it took 3 hours to travel the 57 kilometers to the farm. The crops in the fields varied as they passed one farm after another. Tall green corn stalks alternated with squash, tomatoes, and many types of leafy greens. Some farms had sheep and steers, and there were several dairy farms as well. Farmhouses and barns dotted the landscape. Sally was tired of the ride, and was glad to climb down from

the tractor when they arrived at the house. There was no sign of Joseph, but a nice lunch had been prepared by Nadia's grandmother, and they relaxed on a picnic bench under the big tree next to the house, enjoying their sandwiches and iced tea. Sally spent the afternoon reviewing her notes for the short tour. The plan was to spend 1 day each in Lango, Cusp, Logo, and finally Snill, the site on the easternmost part of the island where Toby planned to build the space port.

The sky was turning dark by the time Joseph returned from the port of Lisp after his day of fishing. Sally could see how tired he was after his long day, but also sensed how happy he was to see that she was there. After dinner, when the rest of the family retired, they had another long conversation. Sally was curious about the people of the island, and wondered if they had any sort of religion. Joseph told her all about the sacred groves and sacred coves. The people were fortunate to live on a world where they could thrive on the bounty of the forests and of the sea. The custom was to meditate on their good fortunes, in places set aside for that purpose. In each forest near a city or town, an area was set aside as a sacred grove. No fishing or hunting or wood harvesting was permitted in the grove, which was preserved in its natural state. Small cabins and campsites were built near the groves, for people who wanted to stay for a little while. Meditation was often an individual pursuit, but at the solstices and equinoxes that marked the change of season, families would come together near the groves to celebrate their good fortune. Joseph, being an ocean fisherman, would meditate at another kind of place, a sacred cove. Like the groves, the coves were protected areas along the coastline where the people would come to commune with the sea, free of the noise and commotion of ships and fishing. Sally was fascinated with how simple, and different this was from the organized religions she knew at home. Joseph told her that he planned to visit the sacred cove west of Lisp on the next equinox, and offered to be Sally's guide if she wanted to learn more about their practices. Sally was delighted, and said that she would try her best to be there. She was also surprised but delighted by Joseph's good night kiss before they retired to their rooms.

Toby was kind to offer his aide Thomas Krost to drive the shuttle around to the villages Sally was to visit. He arrived at Nadia's farm a little before lunch time on the kind of grey day that was typical at this time of year. Nadia brought out a basket packed with hot soup her grandmother had made, along with cheese and bread made at the farm. Joseph had already gone to join the fleet by the time Sally arose that morning, so she had taken her time getting her notes in order while waiting for the car to take her to Lisp. That village was not much of a part of Toby's grand plan for the island, but would be a stop along the high speed rail line that would eventually girdle the place. A picturesque fishing village would be an attractive tourist destination. Everybody she had talked with back in Laton knew of Heorge Iduke, and some claimed to know him quite well. Joseph was not surprised to hear

that Sally was to meet with Iduke, who was the owner of the small fishing fleet that he was part of. The people of Lisp considered him their most important townsman, so he was the one appointed to carry one of the cellphones that had been brought from Tobus. Sally was looking forward to meeting him to gauge how the people of the town might welcome the increased commerce the transportation improvements would bring them. The shuttle proceeded at a slow and steady pace down the road towards the sea, being careful to avoid the potholes that were overdue for filling. After an hour or so Krost turned and parked the vehicle a short way down a turn off from the main road. It was very quiet as they had their lunch by the road, the only sound coming from the breeze and the sea birds that hovered high above the path. The hum of the car as they proceeded down the road, now heading due east, made Sally sleepy, and she dozed lightly until they approached Lisp. Heorge was out on the deck that framed his tall wooden office building, pacing and looking out over the wharfs and the sea beyond, and saw the car approaching while it was still minutes away. At 118 Tobus-years of age, he had learned some patience, and so was not going to be quick to judge the people from that far-away planet. But with his maturity also came a sense of comfort with the familiar, and he had a sense that he might not be as excited about the future plans as Toby and his staff seemed to be. He was down stairs at street level to greet the vehicle when it arrived.

Sally got out of the car, and knew without asking that the imposing figure before her was Heorge Iduke. He was even taller than the typical Ladvian, and looked like a fisherman. She knew he was 118 years old, but thought that he did not look more than 60. "Welcome to our village" he boomed out in greeting. Sally and Thomas followed him up the stairs and took their seats in his spacious office overlooking the harbor. They settled in, and Thomas unrolled the map they had prepared. Heorge looked intensely at the satellite image superimposed with map lines, and with the planned changes to Lisp. Thomas talked about how interesting the fishing village would be as a tourist destination, with the rail line stop at a large station in the town. Sally noticed at the far left part of the map a barely visible road branching off the main road, ending at a small harbor on the coast. She wondered if that might be one of the sacred coves Joseph had told her about. Heorge didn't say anything about that, but he did have a lot of questions and comments for them. "Well, maybe it would make sense, if this is to be a tourist spot, to not put the new, modern station right in the middle of it. How about you put the station a few kilometers to the north, closer to the main road, and out of site of the village?" Thomas jotted down notes as Sally nodded. Heorge was clearly interested in the clouds that were part of the satellite image. "So, it seems this is a good money making venture for your tourist company. Maybe you can help with my business. Can you see the weather out at sea with those pictures? Can you spot schools of fish?" They spent most of the afternoon discussing how the alien technology could be put to profitable use for both the fishing business and the tourism industry. Heorge was emphatic about moving the rail line further north and away from the coast. Sally wondered if he

was aiming to preserve the sacred cove, though he did not say so.

After the meeting, Iduke had one of his staff take Sally and Thomas for a tour of the office, the docks, and the fisherman's hotel in the village. They sat down at the hotel later with Heorge and the crew of one of the boats that had come in early, and enjoyed a hearty meal with chowder, biscuits and beer. Their rooms in the hotel were warm and comfortable. Sally wondered which boat Joseph was out on, and if he was spending the night at sea, or if he was somewhere nearby. She fell asleep wondering about the mining operations in Lode, and the industry in Lango. Tomorrow would be another interesting day.

Toby was restless and a little bored in Laton, waiting for Sally to return to report on how receptive the nearby communities would be to the improvements he was working on. He knew that he should have sent a message to Israel DeGaulle back on Tobus, asking what was happening back on his own world. It wasn't like DeGaulle to not keep up a constant stream of advice on what needed to get done, and Toby was starting to worry that maybe he was doing some things back on Tobus that he would not have approved of, if he was home. He spent a lot of his time every day walking around the small city, enjoying the fresh air and lack of congestion. The architecture was interesting. Most of the buildings used a combination of stone, brick and wood and had simple, pleasing proportions. He was especially impressed by the library, with its stone walls, wooden arched roof, and shined stone floors. On several occasions during his walks, he stopped and talked with builder Shad Hills, where he was supervising the building of a new hotel near the docks. He learned that most of the stone was harvested from the mines around Lode, on the side of the Lake Hills. The colorful swirls on the library floor were from rock that had been brought over by boat from Lavia, about 1000 kilometers eastward, and the largest of the islands in the Ladlan Islands that girdled the planet at its equator. He thought about his estate on Ladia, and what an impressive sight a unique polished stone floor would be. During one of their discussions, Shad mentioned that he was going to be taking the boat to Lavia in a couple of months, to buy stone to use in some upcoming projects. Toby thought a sea voyage might be just the thing to do to get away from the routine of his life in Laton. Shad said he'd think about a design for a home for Toby, and if it could be scheduled, they could plan it during the passage to and from Lavia. Toby was pleased with how the people of Laton treated him as he made his daily rounds. He would often have his lunch at a pub down by the water front, and the townspeople, though they knew he was the ruler of Tobus, treated him as a friend and peer. It was easier to be around the sincere and simple folks of Ladia, than the life of politics, pressure and expectations he faced at home.

It was only a short drive straight north for Sally and Thomas to the hotel at the south edge of Lango. The industrial town was larger and louder than the fishing village they had come from. They parked the car, and met Gary Gowin, owner of the foundry, and Phil Rollins,

proprietor of Lango Farm Store, who had agreed to take them to see the mines and the workers in Lode. They boarded a rugged, well worn rust brown vehicle which rolled through the city, northeast along the Lower Lin River, to a turn that led them northwest to the bridge over the river. The pathway ran along the edge of the woods, and started ascending the rocky spine of the mountain. A mine truck overloaded with ore groaned past them coming down the mountain, and they had to crowd the vehicle to the very side of the road to make way for it. The road climbed higher, cut out along the mountain side, with the mountain looming above them on the left, and a cliff on the other side, dropping down to the dense forest. After climbing for quite some time, they took a turn to the left, and took a road carved out into the center of the mountains. They passed several other vehicles carrying different types of materials as they delved further on. It was clear that this was a very active mining operation. Gowin knew quite a bit of the history of the area. The operations had been going on for many years. As the manufacturing center discovered new methods of production, and needs for new materials, the miners searched and found what was needed. The volcanic activity that formed the island had fortunately placed many different elements in this particular mountain chain. Gowin told Sally that the organization of the mining operation was extremely interesting, and that the president of the corporation would give her all of the details. Finally the road leveled out and the low buildings of Lode appeared in the distance. It was clear that the village had been built in a haphazard way as the mining operation grew, and was expanded whenever a need for more housing for workers and machinery was required. There was a small town hall, built of stone and wood, in the middle of the town, and that's where their car stopped. There was no real mayor, but Frances Frowley, President of the Lake Hills mining cooperative, represented the residents. Frances was small and slight by Ladia standards, but she proved to be extremely knowledgeable and comfortable with explaining the details of the business. They sat in a small conference room in the hall, and sandwiches, soup and coffee was delivered as they gathered around the table. The business was run as a cooperative, owned by the workers, and decisions were made by a board of elected workers, which also included the president. Profits from the sale of ore were distributed to workers based on how long they had been part of the organization, and this worked as a good incentive for productivity. Serious accidents were rare, considering the nature of the work, but the board had established safety standards agreed to by the miners. Sally talked about Toby's plans, which would required increased output for materials for the building and other activities related to establishing a tourism business on the island. Frowley said the requests would be considered, but that a methodical approach to expansion would make the most sense in the long run. The farming and fishing trades were well established, and it would take some effort to persuade people to give up their trades to become miners. Both Sally and Thomas felt confident that the relationship with the mining company would go smoothly, as they said goodbye to their hosts and headed back down the mountain.

The sun was out and shining brightly by the time they crossed the bridge over the Lower Lin River, and turned right along the water. The wires, transformers, and towers of the power plant gleamed ahead of them as they made the turn, and got a clear view of the gigantic power tower, a tall round red brick reservoir, and a crucial component of their power management strategy. To their left, south of the river, was a bank of 15 large wind turbines, turning listlessly on this calm day. The dam and generator on the Lower Lin River, combined with the energy from the windmills, was capable of elevating enough water to keep the power plant lit brightly throughout the night, and power the smelting and manufacturing operations in the town. The tower faded from view as the road descended towards the banks of the lake, and got a clear view of the large mining boat pier, where a large mine vessel was moored to one side. They got a better view of the operations as they neared. The boat contained a row of rail cars, anchored along a track that extended along its length. A worker attached a pair of massive hooks to the front car, and signaled to a distantly visible worker in the control tower next to the foundry way up the hill. The row of cars rolled off onto a track that went up the hill, and they were slowly hoisted from the boat and started up the rails to the foundry. The road went over a bridge over the tracks, and offered a good view of more docks along the long lake shoreline of Lango. On this clear day, the light house above the power tower on Eagle Rock Island was visible in the sun. The car stopped in front of a small office building overlooking the boat yard below. The plan was to meet with Ben Arkwright, one with a long family history in boat building. It looked like nobody was in the office, but Arkwright soon emerged from the flight of stairs down to the docks. He asked if they'd like to see the construction of a new craft in progress. This was to be their largest so far, an ocean ferry to carry passengers to the island of Lavia, a few hundred kilometers to the east. Like many of the islanders Sally had met, Ben believed in slow, considered progress in technology, but also had a deep respect for the unspoiled forests and shorelines of their home. Krost was thinking that maybe they should proceed with caution before revealing all of Toby's ideas about how profitable a small fleet of tourist vessels could be. Met with the idea that expanding and stepping up production might be a good idea, Arkwright thought that there could be difficulty recruiting new workers to work in the new facilities. The idea of bringing workers from Tobus to help out didn't appeal to him, and he wondered if this is what Toby had in mind. Sally was glad that the days tour was coming to an end. She was tired, and had other things on her mind. Thomas had a lot to think about too, so they retired to their rooms after dinner in the dining room of the hotel, an attractive and inviting structure like all of the residences on the island.

On another grey morning Sally and Thomas set out from Lango, heading northeast along the Lower Lin River Road, steadily up hill as the River crashed loudly to their left. The car leveled off as they arrived at a long green meadow extending into the distance. As they slowed along the

bumpy road, finally the farming and fishing village of Logo appeared. Sally remembered the large buildings visible down near the piers, and her companions on Toby's tour saying that this is where many of the crops and fish harvests were processed and preserved, for trade with other islands in the system. Logo, like most of the other places she'd been to, had a small comfortable hotel for visitors.

They left Logo on a very rainy morning, heading to Snill, population 4,202. Their final destination was really about 20 km beyond the town, at the home of Jeb and Sarah, leaders of the Smithers clan who ran the largest farming operation in the fertile northeast kingdom. Toby's engineers, looking over the geography of the island, had pretty much convinced themselves that the flat plains of this region would be ideal for the spaceport. Sally wasn't planning to go into detail explaining it all to Jeb, preferring to get an idea of how receptive he would be. The heavy rains continued for an hour or so, but stopped completely by the time they saw the large barn, with the farm house behind it. They were greeted by Sarah, who told them Jeb was checking an irrigation system that was having problems, and would be back soon. Sarah told them that they were not totally convinced that new farming machinery was all for the best. Jeb had taken his horse for the inspection, knowing the electric tractor would get mired in the mud after the heavy rains. Electric may be the latest thing, but his horse was efficient and intelligent, and could always be depended upon. A wood stove was burning in the kitchen, taking the chill out of the damp day, but the stove top Sarah was cooking on was electric. She explained that their big house served as a test kitchen to help ensure the quality of meat, grains, and vegetables grown on the farm. They had created a production business in Snill, where the output of the farm was preserved and prepared for shipment throughout the island. They heard Jeb's horse clopping up the drive, and he was soon in the house, warming his hands over the stove. Jeb was glad that the irrigation was working, but was curious about the intentions of Toby's people. Word had been getting around about Toby, and nobody Jeb knew was too sure if he could be trusted. They all sat down to the soup that Sarah had been cooking, and Jeb was pleased that Thomas, and particularly Sally, were fairly open and genuinely interested in his family's businesses. Thomas was vague when asked about Toby's interest in his part of the island, and reasons for coming to Snill. He commented that it was a nice location at the corner of the island, and Toby was just curious as to what was being done in the area. What did Sarah and Jeb think about Snill. Would its unique blend of a farming community and fishing community make it a nice tourist spot? After lunch Jeb took them for a short tour of the farm in Thomas and Sally's car, staying on the main road and paved farm roads to keep from sinking into mud. Thomas and Sally were shown to nice rooms in the farmhouse, which was actually quite a bit roomier than it appeared.

Jeb and Sarah's farm was part of a small unnamed community that formed where Lake Glibb Road bore south from The North Way, which followed the

northern shore. They passed a block of several stores and shops, another water storage reservoir, like most of the places they'd been to had, and several more houses. Woods and meadows appeared to their left as they went south towards the lake, and flat farmlands were visible on the right. They weren't surprised to see a small group of riders coming up from turnoff to the main road, after the Smithers clan couple had explained how useful horses were, particularly in the mud season. The woods and meadows ended as they approached the edge of the large lake, and then turned west, heading away from the lake. At the end of the road they turned left and the highest peak of the northern range of The Lake Hills was visible in the distance. They kept up a good pace, eating as they drove, with a lot of kilometers to cover to get back to Laton. After zig zagging west through Alia, south of Lake Adia, they took the loop around the Lake Hills, not arriving in Laton until well after dark. Sally was glad to be home.