

# Second Coming

By: Isabel Alexander Showler

This book is dedicated to the memory of  
my three older brothers who all had  
a part in my upbringing.

**John Stuart Alexander,**  
**who taught me to enjoy dancing, and play bridge and the**  
**horses,**

**Howard Wright Alexander,**  
**who supervised my growth, both spiritually and**  
**educationally,**

**and**

**Walter James Alexander**  
**who taught me of communities and cooperatives, folk**  
**dancing and singing, and social justice.**

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## SECOND COMING

After a while the slapping of leaves and branches on the cockpit window ceased and all was silence. Jaimie checked the gauges on the environmeter one more time. He could hardly believe his luck! All the readings were excellent.

The next time he surfaced from unconsciousness, sleep, or whatever it was, he heard a voice like his mother's saying, "Come on, Jaimie. Pull yourself together and take stock." She would have reminded him, "Ask yourself where, when, what, who, and why?"

First, he didn't know where he was. Second, his universal clock told him it was 13/9/2533,15:32. That he had crash landed was evident. He seemed unhurt except for a bruise or two. His craft had not fared as well. With luck, (he paused to hope his supply had not run out) the odd tear and crumple could be mended but until he tested some of the systems, he didn't know what other challenges his skills might face.

He bobbed to the surface of awareness again. He had to admit to himself that this was not just bruises. As well as this annoying habit of often waking up but never knowingly falling asleep, he felt his feet tightly trapped in the remains of the crumpled fuselage. He firmly pushed panic back into the deep recesses of his mind and returned to his stock taking.

He had already recognized that he had crashed. Who was he? He was Jaimie Higgins, known as Jaimie, member of the Astronaut Core of the United States Army, Astronaut First Class, Serial number 88922.

Why had he crashed? Probably a combination of systems fatigue, bad luck, and momentary inattention. He would have to examine the question further and make a report. It occurred to him briefly how optimistic he was being!

On his next surfacing he was no longer in his cockpit. His legs were free. He could tell he had been injured but the pain was not great. He was surprised to find he was a little hungry.

Just then the door opened and in walked a young woman. Jaimie tried not to stare but it had been a long time. She was young, slim, poised, with an air of serenity that captivated him.

"How are you feeling?" she asked. "A little bit hungry perhaps?"

"English!" Jaimie was stunned. How could this young woman, on this distant planet, speak English? Her voice was soft and quiet but there was a lilt to it that hinted of humour and of song. The surprise in Jaimie's voice caused her to produce a smile that fulfilled the promise of humour. When her smile rested on him he was reminded of his mother saying "We're not laughing at you, we're laughing with you." He wanted to shout so the world would hear, "Oh yes lady, let's laugh together!"

Jaimie grabbed hold of his soaring spirits. He knew what was happening to him. It had happened to him before, although never with such intensity. He had to slow down. He didn't know anything about her or these people. They could be cannibals. They probably know nothing of good old American democracy and civil

rights. However there was something about her which reassured him that in her choices she would choose the gentler way.

Jaimie finished his stock taking. He summed it up by telling himself he had been extraordinarily lucky so far but, not only was he not yet out of the woods, but also those woods could be denser up ahead.

Just then the door opened and in walked a man. He was tall with an erect posture and an air of confidence that made Jaimie want to ask him the meaning of life or some equally important question. The man strode across the room holding out his hand; "Paul Jones, your doctor. I see you have decided to join us for a longer time this time. Good! You don't seem to have much in the way of injuries. We were a little worried about your right foot but offhand there doesn't seem to be anything we can't fix. We'll know more after we get some X-rays... with your permission, of course"

Jaimie realized he was trying to place the man's accent. When he thought about it, he didn't expect to succeed, but it reminded him of Harvard and some of his more elite friends. He wondered again where these people came from. He wanted to ask but was not sure that his inquiries would be welcome. At least their ideas of medicine seemed to match his own.

An hour or so later he was fed and X-rayed. His stomach was full of a soup like his mother used to make and the dream of his life was called Mayanna, She smoothed his pillow, rearranged things on his bed table and asked if there was anything he needed. He assured her that he hadn't been so well looked after since he crept out from under his mother's wings to try his own.

"Yours have taken you a long journey", she remarked.

"Yes," he agreed, "I think my mother would have liked to clip my wings but my father was really gung ho about exploring and exploiting space. He would have countered anything she wanted to do to divert me from a career in space."

"Do your parents take different views on many things?" asked Mayanna, her voice giving away her surprise.

"Not as much as most." Jaimie felt he had stepped on a fox trap. He didn't want this woman to think he had a poor view of marriage. That would not improve his chances as he began to hope that some day he might be able to persuade this delightful person to enter into such an adventure with him.

"But why would they marry if they were not in agreement?" Her voice expressed a genuine bewilderment with such behaviour.

"What if they fell in love?"

"If their values are not the same, or close to it, that's not love, that's lust!"

"Isn't a certain amount of lust a good thing in a marriage?"

"A lot of terms would have to be defined and a lot of principles established before we could discuss this to any purpose, I think."

Jaimie drew a deep breath and said cautiously, "I guess I'll need some help for a while. I hope you'll be involved and we can explore many ideas. I want to learn all I can about this place and your people."

"I may not be your best qualified teacher. There are many who would be happy to share in that enterprise. Perhaps one of the elders will take you under his wing."

Again Jaimie felt a sense of the unknown. Why his wing? Of course this was one of those times when a word which straddled the male and female, favouring neither, would have been useful.

The door opened and in strode Paul Jones. "Well the X-rays are up and they show pretty much what we expected. A couple of things will have to be taken care of, but we see no cause for alarm. One or two of our other colleagues will be in to see you. In any case let us know if there's anything that would make you more comfortable, and we will see what we can do."

Jaimie thought of how many of his fellow astronauts would have seized this opportunity to spell out a primitive need that might not have occurred to his rescuers. Jaimie felt no urge to raise it at this time. His reluctance to do so had something to do with the expression on Mayanna's face as she said, "That's lust." He would be very cautious. He would show her the best Jaimie he could manage.

What he said was, "I must confess to considerable curiosity about this planet and you people. I'd also like to know if you're in touch with earth in any way and if you're willing and able to do what you can to help me return."

Paul's face broke into a cheerful smile. "That's really good to hear," he exclaimed. "We long to be able to pass on to others what we have learned about living together. But we have no neighbours, except as understood in the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. The Committee of Elders, a group who accept some administrative responsibility, has asked one of our members to become a sort of mentor/teacher. Feel free to ask about anything that interests you."

Jaimie's smile was rueful. "I had hoped to discuss these things with Mayanna."

Paul grinned, "That sounds like a useful and instructive idea. Most of us love to talk about how we live together. Feel free to ask anyone anything. We have no secrets.

"One thing though. Please be careful in talking to our children. We try not to communicate to them dilemmas and discouragements that we are still trying to get a handle on ourselves."

Jaimie assured Paul he would be careful how he spoke to the children. He told Paul that, if he survived, some day he would like to be a teacher, when he was too old to be an astronaut.

The tour of the labs and radiology departments to put together a comprehensive picture of his injuries and his general condition, was reassuring in regard to his health. However he was increasingly disquieted as he met more people and all the women were young while he didn't see a man who could be under forty five.

That afternoon, after a visit from an orthopedist ("We were concerned about a squeezing fracture to your foot but we're very happy about the results of the surgery") and a visit from a neurologist ("We think the lapses in consciousness were due to the shaking your brain got and it's responding nicely to treatment."), a gentle tap on his door was followed by a "May I come in?" Jaimie's welcoming

response brought into his view a very elderly elfin man around whose eyes and mouth the humour crinkles were deep and obviously well-used. He advanced to the bed and held out his hand saying, "I am Jacob Zoltan. The Committee of Elders asked me to visit you. They understood you had a bunch of unanswered questions and thought I might be of help."

Jaimie liked the man. Still he hesitated. The questions that most troubled him might be thought too impertinent. He decided to ask something meaningful, risky or not.

"For starters," he tried to keep his voice detached and neutral, reflecting little of the revulsion he felt for any scenario that occurred to him to explain his observations, "Why are all your women young while your men are middle-aged or older?"

Jacob laughed. "From the tone of your voice I would say that your most probable explanation is that we murder any woman who reaches her forty-fifth birthday, while keeping the boys from birth to about forty five under wraps so to speak. Let me assure you that is not the case.

"When we first came here from Earth, even though we tried to do better, we brought some of our Earth bad habits with us. It became clear that Agape would be polluted as Earth had been if we did not adopt some measures to stop it. One of the things we did not want was over population, so we worked very hard to find a safe, effective method of population control to prevent this. However, something went wrong and after a while the percentage of babies being born girls became higher and higher. We frantically tried to reverse the process, but were unable to. However, we did find a good method of sex change. So it was decided that a male population could be supplied by this method. When the question was raised of who should get the operation, our rather literal and very egalitarian society of the time decided that everyone should, and so we developed the pattern of everyone being born female and living half of their life span that way, and then, at middle age, retiring into a sex change program and the latter half life span living as a man.

Jaimie was stunned. This was no more strange than the things he had imagined, except that it was even more unlike living on Earth. He found himself anxious to know more, and probably to let these people know how he felt about this revelation. He would learn all that he could before he said anything that might be critical. He admired these folks for the openness of their lives and their willingness to discuss this.

"You are going to be a great help to us. The experience of seeing ourselves through another's eyes is a real gift if that other is unbiased, truthful, and loving.

"But let me give you a little bit of our history. In the latter part of the twentieth century and the early part of the twenty-first, we were living in various parts of the Earth, exchanging e-mail about how we might live together peaceably. Soon we longed to experiment but the social atmosphere was polluted by the War on Terrorism. Still, a few brave souls gathered in the Australian outback and set up our first community. Of course there were helpful models: the Hutterites, the Bruderhof, L'Arche, the Catholic Workers, and many others. We tried to be open to whatever we might learn from these pioneers. We called ourselves the Blessed Community, trying to live the 'as if' of the Kingdom of Heaven as in the New Testament.

“It seemed that among the people coming, wanting to be part of this community there was a high proportion of scientists, Ph.D.’s, and other highly trained people. They were intrigued by the idea of space travel and getting away from the polluted planet. A plan was developed, more to amuse its developers than for any real reason. More followed and each plan was evaluated. Finally there came a plan developed to the point where no more faults could be found. Of course there were some who wanted to try it out.

“In the meantime three astronomers had developed a ‘space probe’ which could look at the properties of an object in space and get remarkably consistent results. The results they got when they focused on a small planet on the other side of the galaxy were exciting. All information told us it would be a perfect home for us. The pressure to be allowed to go was intense. Finally three pods were built and a dozen young men were named to go. It was an intensely emotional time. Even though we lost one of the pods with four young men aboard, the enthusiasm to continue was enormous. At the end of four years after that first flight, three hundred and seventy had landed and started our first colony, called ‘AGAPE’.

“But I have talked too much and given you no time for supplemental questions. If you have any, now would be a time to ask.”

Jaimie smiled cheerfully. “This has all been very interesting and quite reassuring as well. I will have many more questions, supplemental and otherwise, but I think I’d like to mull all this over for a while before I try to take in any more.”

When Jaimie woke up next morning the sun was shining in a slightly paler initiation of earth’s Sol. Mayanna strode into the room, her usual energy enhanced by the promise of a perfect day. She opened some windows, breathed deeply, and exclaimed, “What a beautiful day to try a couple of things you haven’t done recently! Would you like to start with a little trundle around the grounds in a wheel chair, or would you like to go down to the Physio Department to try out your refurbished legs?”

Jaimie considered carefully and asked “I can’t just go out and try walking?”

Mayanna grinned as she said, “The doctors would prefer that you take one step at a time but they promise not to hold you back. They are pleased, and a little surprised, at your progress.”

After lunch, Jaimie made known his preference for trying out his walking first. As they entered the Physiotherapy Department, Jaimie was aware that his heart was pounding, his knees felt weak, and he realized that he was really worried about the outcome of this effort.

He liked the physiotherapist as soon as he met her. Again he was impressed by the liveliness of the young women he had met. He also realized that the sexual awareness, and even tension, that flared up occasionally in his experience between men and women working together, seemed absent as far as he could discern.

Marie-Lynette first took him through some exploratory movements and warm-ups, making generous and careful notes. She also gave him a detailed run-down of what he might expect and how much of it was insignificant. Finally she wheeled him over to what looked like a couple of porch railings set a little less than a metre apart. At her instruction, he grabbed the railings and walked without difficulty the three metres to the end. Everyone laughed as their tensions dissolved.

“How would it be if I walked around the grounds?” Jaimie asked. But Marie-Lynette looked worried. “When our ancestors first came here they had a lot of difficulty with leg strength. It was overcome with time but we’re still not sure what we did that was right and what was wrong.” Jaimie promised to listen to Mayanna, and take no chances.

Jaimie was surprised at the size and beauty of the grounds. He thought he had understood that looks were not of primary importance to these people. But many hours must have been required for the manicured look of these lawns and the work that must have gone into the planting and care of the shrubs and flowers. He asked Mayanna about the use of work time for something so purely decorative.

He could see that Mayanna was amused but was marshalling her thoughts to answer his questions. “First let me tell you that one of our men remembered hearing that the way the English gentry developed their lawns was by grazing sheep on them for three hundred years. We thought this was an interesting idea and, although the experiment hasn’t run for three hundred years, the results over a much shorter period are encouraging. Almost all art work is voluntary, unless it is commissioned. More than half of our school children are rated as “very creative.” They work away on a volunteer basis in their free time until someone who has acquired the influence to be able to commission a work decides that he should be given a chance. Once that happens, if it is successful, he will be considered for other commissions. However the work in these gardens so far is voluntary.

“How is it decided what work a person should do?”

“When a person is still in elementary school, she and her teachers will be watching and considering in what task stream she would be happiest, most productive, and most needed. She will be given opportunities to observe and do volunteer work. By the time most girls have finished secondary school, they have established what stream they will work in and have acquired certain skills.”

Jaimie drew a deep breath. “It really confounds me the way you act as though anybody in elementary school must be female!”

Mayanna smiled, “It’s been like that for a long time. I don’t think anyone living now can remember anything else, so it seems normal.”

“But who makes the decision?”

“It’s a difficult question to answer.” Perplexity furrowed Mayanna’s forehead. “First of all her peer group must agree. However this doesn’t usually become a problem. The kids will have been together for some years and will be used to reaching agreement. But the decision would have to be confirmed at the next level, a coming together of all the peer groups of that age in that district. Usually all goes along easily without incident. The kids take this duty very seriously and are proud that their decisions are respected.”

“At what age would this occur?”

“It occurs quite early, often as early as ten or eleven. But the kids can take what time they need and can change streams later if they choose. There is some pressure to get on with it because their mothering time is over usually between forty and forty-five. No one wants to leave it past twenty-five for their first

marriage -- although there are exceptions. The problem is each of the milestones a girl passes has its own requirements. If she has not settled on a work stream by her late teens, she would probably not be ready to marry by mid-twenties, the optimum time because, if she leaves it later than that, her child might still need mothering when she would otherwise be ready to move on to retreat and sex change in her early forties."

"These peer groups that you spoke of - how are they formed?"

Mayanna's face showed her concern to reflect accurately the community's commitment to a right balance between order and freedom in the way their communal life is structured.

"First let me point out that we are a series of rather small settlements. The largest one is just under four hundred people. Since about two and a half per cent of our population is under two years, the kids form peer groups with about a two-year age spread in each group. Once these groups are formed they tend to continue. They can be disrupted when people move from one settlement to another to fill the training needs or the individual or the employee needs of the group."

Jaimie was having trouble. First of all it sounded a lot like Communism; the scourge of the twentieth (and to some extent the twenty-first) century. He knew it could not co-exist with freedom for the individual. He knew all the arguments to prove this. He had memorized them in school. Yet none of the people he had met in this strange place fit what he knew about communism. He decided to listen carefully and say little for a while. Sooner or later they would reveal their true colours.

Secondly, what Jaimie wanted was to find a way to approach Mayanna about exploring a relationship with her. It was difficult concentrating on what Mayanna was saying while his attention was being drawn by his response to her attraction. If he didn't listen carefully and respond appropriately she would think he was a dummy!

Jaimie was enthralled by the curve of her chin and throat and the slight blush that rose from neck to brow from time to time.

"Please don't do that!" Mayanna exclaimed.

"Do what?", Jaimie's voice was a marvel of slightly injured innocence.

"Look at me like that!"

"Like what?"

"I don't know -- as though you were going to eat me or something."

"Now that's something I have never heard before!" Jaimie's voice was tinged with a mixture of relief and amusement. "The truth is that I love the way you look but there is much more of you to know. Your health workers have done a good job of repairing me. I'm just afraid that I'll be discharged from the hospital and won't see you any more."

Mayanna was silent, her head slightly bowed, obviously turning the whole situation over in her mind. After some minutes had passed she looked earnestly into his eyes and said, "I have had no experience of anything like this before. I

have never met a man before who had not shared the experience of being a woman. I find the situation intriguing and I like you a lot, more than I would have thought possible with a person from Earth. But you don't need to worry about not seeing me anymore. This is a tiny community by Earth standards and you have to settle things between people. There is no place to hide.

"I believe Paul is nearly ready to discharge you to some family here in our community but we'd like you to be more settled and know more people here first. In the meantime, you are invited to a community engagement celebration and picnic tomorrow. I hope you will come. People really want to know you. This would be a really good start.

"As far as any personal relationship between us is concerned, I hope you will put that on the shelf for now while you get to know our culture and social relationships."

Jaimie sighed. "Of course I will do as you ask. It won't be easy. May I continue to discuss the differences between our cultures with you from time to time?"

Mayanna's eyes twinkled with the mixture of joy and amusement which so captivated Jaimie when he first saw her. "Don't worry! I couldn't get away from it if I wanted to -- and I don't want to. Besides, the doctors are not planning to discharge you tomorrow or anything. They will do some careful planning and you will be party to it. Perhaps I shouldn't have mentioned it."

"The more I know about plans involving me, the better I like it -- so thank you very much. But we're not making the most of the time we have. You'd be about the age girls are expected to marry, wouldn't you?"

"You have an ear for details, haven't you? We have a much tighter time frame for our life events than people have on Earth. Of course we have only one or two children to a marriage but any children must be mature enough to get along without intensive mothering before a woman may move on to the next phase of her life."

"Do people hassle you, or ask you when you are going to get married, that sort of thing?"

"Not so much that, but don't forget the peer group. These groups are often referred to as 'cells' and seen as cells of the Blessed Community-- the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth. But other people say that, given the associations of the word cell, it becomes almost an oxymoron like the Lady Terrorists Group.

"In any case the real pressure comes when you see the other members of your cell get married off one by one and you haven't decided who, let alone when. There are a couple of guys who have just emerged from their mid-life retreat (some would say advance) who I have always liked and respected."

It was just at this point that the door opened and Paul Jones walked in. Jaimie felt his temper rising. This was unfair. He was sure in a few more minutes he would have had Mayanna disclosing something really important. Was Paul Jones one of the two he instantly decided were his rivals?

Paul motioned Mayanna into the empty chair beside Jaimie's. He himself sat comfortably on the bed.

“We doctors have been giving some thought to what should be included in a discharge plan for you. Typically such a plan would have two parts: continuing treatment and social support system. You will probably need little continuing treatment although that will depend largely on the degree to which you have returned to your normal health and what goals if any you would still want us to work on.”

Jaimie grinned, “I couldn’t have done better if I’d written the script myself to please me. However, I must warn you I will be asking for technical help in repairing my spacecraft and navigational help in finding my way home.”

Paul Jones stood up offering Jaimie his hand, “It sounds as though we are in substantial agreement but we will be very concerned about being found by Earth people. You were wise to tell us about your hope for help. It makes it clear that you are an open and honest person. This makes it easier to give you what you ask, in spite of our concern that Earth not discover our little homeland.

## 2

Jaimie gazed down on the green valley below with considerable interest. Once again these people (he had given up any thought they might be aliens) had surprised him -- a bunch of adults behaving like children over a picnic for heaven’s sake! People were carrying picnic tables, lawn chairs, anything to sit on. Each item seemed slightly redesigned to be a little different from his idea of normal. He had noticed this of the furnishings in the hospital too. Mostly they seemed simpler or stronger or both.

A group of people, obviously used to handling food, were setting out huge platters of meat, bowls of salad, baskets of rolls and other items he did not recognize. He had been told he should arrive about two. It was time to start down the hill.

Even the paths down the hill were a little different. It was possible to choose a precipitous path straight down the hill. However this path was crossed at intervals by a path that meandered down the hill at a gentle slope which might be pleasanter for some. Jaimie had been expecting a rigid social order with almost no choice. Yet choice cropped up all over the place when least expected. Crushed brick in a traditional red brick colour paved the path. The whole layout was pleasant to the eye. Jaimie wondered if this had been a commission to encourage some young artist.

As he reached the bottom of the hill, Jaimie spied Mayanna, together with Paul, pouring over a piece of paper.

“We’re just going over the speakers’ list for this afternoon. It’s a good thing we have lots of food. If our guests all have an equal desire to speak, we could be here for a long time!”

Just then the workers’ attention was captured by a spectacle in the driveway, Lumbering along came a caravan of vehicles, some drawn by animals: goats, dogs, ponies, mules, camels, and at least one elephant, and one pig. Some vehicles were drawn by people on bicycles. The vehicles were crammed with guests and bundles. Those who lived in the settlement ran to greet them with affection. There

was much hugging, handshaking and back slapping. Gradually the hubbub settled down. Those in charge of the animals led them away accompanied by some of their hosts.

Paul turned to Jaimie and said, "Let's go and find our places. I have to sit at the table with the microphone. You will sit with me and so will Mayanna. We could ask Jacob Zoltan to join us. I understand you and he have had great discussions about the nature and definition of democracy. I too would like to hear your thoughts on that. There will be little time for unprogrammed conversation today but it would be good to do it soon."

Jaimie was surprised. He had not thought anyone would be interested in these private conversations between Jacob and himself. He had a slight sensation of mystery, perhaps even secrets in spite of Paul's statement that there were none. As mysteries go this one seemed pretty dull.

Meanwhile the crowd had found seating, some being satisfied with blankets on the ground. When, after a few minutes, Paul stood up, the silence was almost eerie in its completeness. After a few more minutes Paul picked up a book and read a short passage. It was a simple reminder that when we are thankful we must remember that our thanks are owed to the Creator and this should be a part of our thoughts at this time.

After sitting in silence for a few more minutes Paul stood up and began to read again. Jaimie listened and, a few words later, recognized the ancient rite of the reading of the banns. There was a rustle of pleasure through the assembly. Paul nodded to one of the guests, who spoke in glowing terms about the groom-to-be and his settlement's satisfaction in the person he had matured to be. Then Paul nodded to one of the hosts who stood to speak of the bride-to-be, speaking of the promise she showed. Everyone settled down to demolish the food and enjoy the entertainment.

There was much music and many skits and poems. At one point Paul reminded the group that if the hosts did not curtail their enthusiasm, their guests were obviously prepared to stay for a while, since they brought all their animals with them, "But if they have to hear everyone at length, we will have to feed them."

The voice of one of the smaller guests was heard saying confidently, "We brought food for the elephant, and the others can almost forage for themselves. We want to stay a long, long time! We want to be sure that our Henry James is marrying into a settlement that is hospitable and knows how to throw a party!"

Jaimie felt rather embarrassed at this limitation of hospitality, until Jacob, who was sitting beside him, noticed his discomfort. He explained that this custom of expressing uncertainty of being able to welcome was founded in the anxieties at the time of their arrival on Agape and the uncertainties of their food supply in the early years. The tradition was established as a reminder of the overcoming of difficulties of the past and the need to have faith in the future.

In the meantime a ripple of agreement had gone through the crowd. Some cheered or clapped softly. Some waved their hands in the air. Paul stood up and said, "Thank you all making me feel confident in your agreement with the proposed engagement. It makes my job much easier. And special thanks to our young guest for her clear expression of the thoughts of her group."

The afternoon wore on with presentations from both groups. It occurred to Jaimie that isolated groups often learn to provide their own entertainment. He remembered reading about this in the settlement of North America.

Later Paul caught Jaimie's eye and beckoned to him to follow. They threaded their way through the crowd to a small table where sat a mother, father, and a little girl. Paul introduced them as the Huttons, Laura, Jim, and Merry. As he shook hand Jaimie realized that this would be a fairly typical family. Jim was about 60, Laura more like 35, and Mary a typical 10 year old.

"These folks have room in their house, and I suspect in their hearts. Since the basic units in our social system are the family and the peer group and you have no peer group into which you have been born, we thought these could be your family while you're with us," Paul explained. "We thought you could visit a few times and then, if all went well, we could discharge you from in-patient status. We want to follow you for a while because this is an enormous biological challenge you are adjusting to. For instance, less gravity, different sunlight -- all these things require your body to learn how to work differently. How does this sound to you so far?"

"Great!" exclaimed Jaimie but underneath he worried that he might be getting himself hopelessly into a debt trap which would cut down on his options later. "Will I be able to earn a living? I don't even know which of my skills will be of value here."

"Don't worry. We always have plenty of work to be done. We can run a few ideas past you and see what you think. This can wait until after you're settled."

Paul looked at his watch. "I must be getting back. I'm neglecting my duties."

They returned to their seats congratulating those in charge of the arrangements for the ease with which participants could be seen and heard from any part of the viewing area. "It is so important that everyone feel close to and included in what is happening," Paul remarked to Jaime. "Even the ancient Greeks knew that real democracy depended on the people who were represented by one person being able to assemble together and hear him."

After the platters and bowls had been refilled and emptied, people began to talk of dancing. Some musicians began to play dance tunes. After a few tries they hit on one that they all knew and it seemed very popular. Jacob muttered that this was not a group that rehearsed but this was a tune that everyone knew. Quickly the green space beside the picnic area filled with dancers. They were of all ages and they all knew the structures and steps. It seemed to be a mixture of square dancing, country dancing, barn dancing, and line dancing. It was also a little reminiscent of the Celtic and Scandinavian dancing, Jaime had learned in school. After three of these dances most of the dancers left the dance area. One of the musicians was waved to a small platform. He began to play and the two or three dozen dancers that remained began to dance.

Jaimie was stunned. The dancers moved and bowed and swirled to the music. No one, not even the dancers, had heard the music before except the musician who composed it and was now playing it. The movement was not in unison but it was in harmony. The total effect was one of sensitivity, discipline, and of seeking perfection. When it was over there were intense but subdued expressions of

appreciation. When he spied Mayanna among the dancers he was aware of his personal pride in knowing her.

This pattern of three dances in which almost everyone participated, followed by one in which a musician played a new composition and a group of unusually talented dancers extemporized a dance to it, was repeated until both dancers and musicians seemed ready to drop. The crowd had considerably diminished as participants dropped out to seek the sleeping arrangements their hosts had provided. Finally the last few gathered up the blankets that had been used for seating, wrapped themselves up and settled down for the sleep expected after the outpouring of energy.

When daylight arrived so did the energy of the night before. People, both hosts and guests were greeting one another, catching up on the news, expressing joy or sorrow at what they heard. Each guest family had been invited to eat breakfast with a host family. After breakfast there was much more visiting before the people from Lakeside, the visiting settlement, gathered together, organized their caravan and set off on the sixteen kilometre trek home. Many of the host group from Green Valley accompanied their guests for the first few kilometres of their journey singing, and even dancing, along their way.

Jaimie had been observing the departure from his favourite retreat, the very large bay window in his hospital room. Three sides and the ceiling were of glass and allowed the mild sun of Agape to bathe the person (or people) seated on the very comfortable built-in seating. If the sun were ever too much, little metal slats, like tiny Venetian blinds, could be activated to make the glass panes opaque one by one.

However it was now time for Jaimie to make his first visit to his future home with the Huttons. Mayanna had offered to accompany him on his venture since it would be his first time out walking around on Agape. He felt quite comfortable on his own (he had crossed the galaxy that way) but Mayanna's presence offered another dimension of comfort. He quickly accepted.

When Mayanna knocked on his door he was ready. He had been supplied with three sets of clothing. All were comfortable, well fitted, and easy to care for. The same could be said of the undergarments and shoes. The clothing was colourful and pleasing to the eye. Everyone's clothing looked much the same but Jaimie was used to that. He had been an astronaut for five years. He had noticed that the women's apparel was very similar except that sometimes they wore a wide skirted jumper instead of or besides the pants and with or without a T-shirt.

Mayanna explained to Jaimie that they had a choice of routes to the Huttons'. There was a bow in the river between the administrative areas and the residential area. They could follow the path that took the high ground around the bow or they could go down in the valley and follow the river bank and go up the other side. Jaimie thought he would enjoy the more panoramic view from the upper path.

The house was easy to find as each dwelling had a listing of the inhabitants on or near the front door. Jim greeted them at the door, and Jaimie was pleased to see that waiting with the Huttons to receive him was Paul Jones who was obviously shepherding along this relationship between Jaimie and the Huttons. Jim asked Jaimie about his food preferences.

"It's all wonderful!" exclaimed Jaimie, "None of that GM\* food or polluted air and water or over-population that Earth is still struggling with." Jim was shepherding them out to the patio as they talked.

Laura, who came out carrying a large tray of fruit, asked, "But don't you miss the exotic things like caviar and truffles and lobster and special cheeses?"

"Of course I had a better opportunity than your average man working for an average pay, but I didn't get them often. The people who used to earn a living from things that are no more are the ones that really miss them."

The meal continued with lively discussion, comparing old Earth with Agape. Jaimie was constantly surprised by the depth and accuracy of the knowledge of Earth shown by the people of this small planet.

"No secrets!" said Jaimie to himself and allowed the question to pop out, "How do you have all this current information about Earth when you left there half a millennium ago?"

Paul was silent for a few minutes before speaking. "It's difficult to know how to answer that question. We feel very sure that if Earth knew of our existence they would either want to colonize us or rescue us. Frankly neither is very appealing. What assurance can you give us that answering that question will not lead to our being discovered?"

"Jove! You do know your Earth!" Jaimie exclaimed. All I can say is that I belong to the Anti-Hypocritical Society. We have revised the Hippocratic Oath to apply generally. It begins, 'First, do no harm.' I take it very seriously."

"Sounds good to me," said Paul in acceptance. He leaned forward as if to emphasize the confidentiality of what he had to say. "A few years ago one of our scientists discovered a characteristic of space unknown until then. As you know, theory has it that if you have a one-dimensional object, a point, and if you extend it far enough, in time you will find you have a circle, a two-dimensional object. Extending a two-dimensional object will produce a three-dimensional one, etc. This guy thought we were using a long journey through space when we took the route based on astronomical observations.

"Remember how when you came over here today you had a choice of a short more difficult route or a longer easier one? In a way the choice for the space traveler is much like that. He can go all the way round or punch a hole and go through. When we found a particularly short hole heading for Earth, we made it permanent and hid the Earth end thoroughly. We maintain a listening post there."

When body and brain were satisfied and the meal ended, Jim Hutton showed Jaimie the room he was to have. It was not large but adequate. The furnishings seemed handmade with great skill. The wood trim and furniture were polished and spotless. The bedding and curtains were colourful and cheerful. Jaimie felt he could be comfortable here. He asked Jim about the cost.

Jim was amused even though he tried hard not to show it. "Sorry, it's not you I'm snickering at. Maybe it's all of us. Who should get paid? Who owns the land?"

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\* genetically modified

On Agape, food, shelter, and clothing are civil rights. Here everybody gets pretty much what they need and contributes whatever skill he has.”

Jaimie found this fascinating. What was right? He had learned in school about total communities where the individual meets all his needs in one closed institution like a prison, asylum, convent, or army. There, he lessens his ability to think for himself and to act independently. But these people did not bear that out. They were able, confident and very, very friendly. He decided this was due in large measure to each person’s desire to be helpful and their skill at doing it. It was impressive. As a matter of fact he had only heard one occasion of criticism when a mother said to her young daughter, “Marlene, that is not helpful!”

“Before I met you folks, I would have said it sounds like communism to me. Don’t they have a slogan ‘From everybody according to his ability, to each according to his need?’”

Mayanna said, “It’s like Christianity. We have lots of things we say we believe but we don’t put them into practice, like Christian beliefs in love and turning the other cheek. The early communist states of the turn of the millennium didn’t put those ideas into practice either.

“I find it hard to imagine any use for money here on Agape. Once you take profit and loss out of our incentives for manufacturing, straight necessity is about all that’s left.”

Jaimie pondered this for a few minutes and then said, “Perhaps it’s because I’m an American, but I would feel better with some money in my pocket. By the way, what do you call your money?”

Mayanna grinned ruefully and put up her hands as if to stave off some attack and said, “We don’t have any!”

Jaimie’s “What!” was explosive.

Mayanna looked uncertain as to how to proceed with the explanation but said, “We simply don’t have any money. People use what they need. The distribution of what is available is one of the education work streams, and there is no incentive I can see to accumulating unnecessary goods or whatever might be traded with money.

“There’s a clear expectation that everyone will work and it is the community’s responsibility to find sufficiently rewarding work for each individual to make him willing to go on. Probably you are going to have to wait a while and see how it works before you can really judge whether it is a good system or not.”

When she had finished, Jaime said. “It all sounds really weird to me. Sometimes it reminds me of some kind of totalitarianism, sometimes some kind of slavery. My ancestors fought to free the slaves.”

“Perhaps you’ll have to wait to observe in practice for a while before you can make a very valid evaluation. In the meantime, you know that the community as a whole will take responsibility for meeting your physical needs and for finding some work of value that you will find satisfying.”

“But what about new enterprise? How do people get started if other people can’t invest in their ideas?”

Mayanna answered, "Many people invest in other people's ideas but not in money because money is not what's needed. They invest by encouragement and support in decision-making bodies like the assembly. It seems to us that money is mostly used to distinguish between the haves and the have-nots (which we hope does not occur much in our society) and in laying up more of the world's goods. Renting out other people's labour for money seems particularly obscene to us. But perhaps you see it differently and we could discuss it further."

Later, on the way back to the hospital, Jaimie felt that it was time to give Mayanna some idea what was in his heart and mind. He was a little afraid of this as he had no certainty about how she would react. He remembered her statement that he was the only man she had met who had not shared her experience as a woman. He tried to judge whether this was a positive or negative.

As they crossed over a small shallow stream he ventured to take her hand. He told himself if she found him presumptuous, he could say he was just making sure she didn't slip on the wet stones. Much to his surprise she looked right into his eyes, gave him a big smile, and said, "I've been wondering when you would make some approach."

This was not what Jaimie expected. He didn't know what he expected but this was certainly not it. The Earth girls that he knew would have feigned confusion or misunderstanding or some such ploy to avoid dealing with the situation.

Jaimie muttered to himself, "When all else fails, try telling the truth." He grinned a little sheepishly, "I didn't know what would be acceptable. To tell the truth I find you enormously attractive. I've never felt quite like this before. I didn't want to louse things up. In the circumstances our customs must be different."

Mayanna nodded her head. "Very different," she agreed.

"Tell me," he asked, "What are your rules?"

Mayanna grinned. "No rules," she declared, "But some different ways of looking at things. We consider the relationship between two people, sexual or not, as private and nobody's business but their own. On the other hand, marriage with its vows, promises, and social undertakings is considered a partially public matter of which the community has expectations."

They had reached his room in the hospital building. In his head, while he paid careful attention to what was going on around him, Mayanna's words, "nobody's business but their own", reverberated until he felt anyone passing them must hear and wonder.

When they reached the door of his hospital room, he opened it and motioned her to enter. Her immediate unhesitating acceptance of the invitation would have said volumes on Earth. What did it mean here on Agape? He led the way to his favourite seating, the mini-solarium. As they seated themselves he slipped his arm around her.

As that was accepted without comment he cupped his hand around her breast. Immediately he felt his hand firmly grasped and moved to more neutral territory. Mayanna turned to look at him, "Perhaps we should talk about what's going on here," she suggested.

“What’s going on here!” Jaimie resisted the temptation to shout but spoke with carefully controlled fury. “I’m behaving like a normal man. You’ve never met one before and you don’t know how to handle it!”

“I would rather discuss this carefully than with anger. I think I understand how angry and alienated you must feel. I told you what two people did between themselves was nobody’s business but their own. That is not the whole story. We are not allowed to hurt one another. And informed consent has a large part to play.”

Jaimie decided things were not as bad as he feared. “All I want,” he said, “is a little normal loving with an attractive normal woman. Is that so strange?”

“No, that’s not so strange. Change the word ‘woman’ to ‘man’ for about half of those quoted and you will include the likes of me and that perhaps sums up all of us.

“When you started this little love scene between us, what did you have in mind - a quick wham bam, thank you ma’am, or were you planning to make me over into a ‘normal’ woman?”

Jaimie was horrified. What had he done? All he wanted was to love her in any way that was permitted and hopefully to be loved a little in return. This beautiful young woman whom he had hoped to love forever was hurt and angry. He had to make her understand. He found himself on his knees. He found himself with tears in his eyes. Finally Mayanna started to laugh.

“Dear man,” she said, “You’ve hurt me and I’ve hurt you. Neither of us wanted that. Let’s call it quits and start over. On Agape new friends are scarce enough that they must not be wasted. Let us declare a new start and see if we can do better.”

Jaimie heaved a great sigh of relief. “There is nothing I would like better,” he said, his relief evident in his voice. He led her back to the window seat.

After a few minutes of silence Mayanna disengaged herself from Jaimie’s cuddling arm and said, “When we first met, in our first conversation, we touched on the difference between love and lust and the possibility of defining those terms. Perhaps that would be a good place to start?”

Jaimie plunged right in, partly to be cooperative, and partly because he thought it was a good idea. “Maybe I oversimplify things, but it seems very clear to me, that if you are in a relationship to meet only your own needs that’s lust, but not if you enter into a relationship out of respect and affection and a desire that the relationship should be strengthening for both.”

Mayanna looked very relieved. “That’s exactly what I was trying to say in the first place!” she exclaimed.

“I probably wouldn’t have understood then, anyway. I feel I understand you and your people better than I did at first.”

They sat quietly for a while, arms and legs somewhat entwined to express the closeness that they felt. They were seated (more or less) as they watched a collection of fireflies in the bushes and the valley below. Jaimie, of course, had to inquire “How did that come about?”

He was told of the brilliant young etymologist devoted to biodiversity who spent two or three years before his own departure from Earth in collecting a wide variety of “bugs” and devising an “ark” to transport them into their new home on Agape in the interests of biodiversity.

After a while Jaimie, choosing his words with great care, said, “I hope that, at some time, we will be able to explore that other aspect of our relationship, the physical and sexual one, because I find you tremendously attractive and I have a feeling you feel at least somewhat the same. Here, in this room I feel that nobody feels responsible for what goes on in this room except in terms of my physical health. But the Huttons may not feel comfortable with sexual behaviour by unmarried people on their premises.”

## 3

Mayanna and Jaimie were seated in their favourite spot--the window seat in Jaimie’s hospital room, waiting for Jacob his mentor to drop by and go with them as Jaimie placed his hopes for returning to Earth before the Committee of Elders. Jaimie hoped he could get his space vehicle sky-worthy if some of the resources of the community were made available to him. They were also to consider what work he might do here on Agape.

Just as Jacob was coming in the door Mayanna was saying, “No, I don’t think it will be much like an American court. On the other hand I have never seen either. Here’s Jacob. He’ll be able to answer any questions.”

“I’m not sure I want my questions answered. Maybe I’ll just hang on to them to help me evaluate how things are going.”

They walked across the lush meadow-like grass, past some grazing sheep, to the administration building. The large committee room they entered had sliding doors that cut off a stage or dais from a large seating area with balcony which altogether would seat nearly all the adults in the settlement. Jacob explained that, in the interest of democracy, this was thought to be important because the ancient Greeks believed that all people represented by one person should be able to assemble to hear him/her speak.

The stage area was separated by the sliding doors. Nine chairs were arranged around three sides of a table. Two smaller tables each served three chairs. Writing materials were scattered around on the tables, a pen and a few pieces of paper at each place. In addition copious supplies of reusables, for instance, an old fashioned slate or two, were scattered around. Three elderly men were already seated at the big table.

Others visited in small clumps. Two latecomers apologized at some length although it was only just past the appointed hour.

One of the three men seated around the large table stood up and asked those still standing to be seated. When they had all found their seat there was silence. Jaimie looked around, wondering what was going on. Was he just supposed to start talking without introduction, or were they having a little rest to collect their thoughts. After a short period of silence, the chairmen rose, introduced himself as George Fraser, and said, “This is a special meeting of the Elders’ Committee to advise the Community. We have been asked to consider Jaimie O’Higgins’ request

for help in preparing his space vehicle to return to Earth. We must consider both feasibility and risk. I have requested that Jaimie bring his request directly before this body.”

Jaimie rose to his feet, not at all sure what he should say. A joke was always a good start. “There’s a saying on Earth, ‘You don’t have to be a rocket scientist to . . .’. I’m not a rocket scientist but you don’t have to be one to fix up a space vehicle that’s had a rough landing. I haven’t been out to the crash site yet to assess the damage. I’m not even sure how I would get there. All I want from you right now is assurance that help is available and how I can conceivably pay for it.”

The silence that followed was deep and palpable. All this waste of time was really irksome.

Finally a hand went up. The Chair nodded and the Elder rose to speak, “Jeffrey Brooks, Communications. It seems to me that, as our chair outlined it, we have two very different tasks and that we would avoid considerable confusion if we first considered which of the risks are manageable and therefore acceptable, and which are not. We could then deal with resources.”

People around the room were saying, “He speaks my mind,” and “agreed”. (The phrase ‘He speaks my mind,’ caught on from the Quakers in the original settlement because it says exactly what you’re trying to say.)

George Fraser stood again and said, “It is evident that we have agreement as to this order of business.” When more “agrees” and head noddings followed this, George and the elder on his left muttered a few words and wrote a few and then George stood once again and read: “We recognize that it is absolutely necessary that we should discover and discern the risks inherent in this project and that they must be deemed acceptable before we go any further. We’ll get back to it tomorrow. In the meantime, discuss this with your peer groups and EW streams.” (\*See Appendix One.)

Jaimie leapt to his feet, “Mr. Chairman”, he said, the emotion in his voice barely controlled, “We have a narrow window in time before our navigational data becomes dated. We should go ahead and get the job done and deal with any objections when they occur if they occur.”

After some minutes one of the elders rose and said, “As the representative of transportation I would be glad to find two bicycles and accompany Jaimie to his vehicle tomorrow morning. Then, if we meet in the afternoon, we would have that much more data to work with.”

After a few more minutes of silence the two elders who had been taking notes, closed their books, and everyone stood up, and shook hands with those near them. Daniel announced that the meeting would reconvene the following day at one-thirty.

As they walked away toward the hospital building, Jaimie remarked, “Jove! We did waste a lot of time being silent in that meeting when nobody had a thing to say. It sure would require an ocean of patience to debate something important to you that way! I think I’d explode.”

Mayanna looked amused as though she thought he already had as she said, “As I understand it, on Earth a person states a position and the next person picks out

something with which he disagrees. Then each of them hurls a bunch of facts, opinions, and quotations at the other while watching the effect on any audience. After that there may be a vote. One way or another someone or other gets to be deemed the winner. Then he goes off to put his plan into action while his opponent tries to undermine it."

Jaimie smiled ruefully as he said, "You've got me squarely on the horns of a dilemma. If I object I'm argumentative; if I don't, I don't really believe in our American democracy."

"It's a good start."

"Aw, come on! If you and I are on a committee together and we reach an impasse and we get together and by give and take we hammer out something that both can accept, is that wrong?"

Mayanna still did not look completely convinced as she said, "Sometimes that way, you may come across a good solution, but not if each party is convinced that they have the right on their side and all the wrong is on the other side. A good solution will have a bit of both, and that requires respect and openness, which I don't believe are always evident in Earth's adversarial approach. As the process unfolds, you'll have a better chance to see what it's like. In the meantime, you have other things to do. Would you like help in your move? I thought I'd give you a hand with your stuff if you're moving today."

"That's just what I was hoping. Fortunately I haven't got much to carry."

They set off down the hillside to the riverside settlement where Jim was waiting to bid Jaimie welcome and usher them to the room, which had been made available.

Jaimie plopped himself down full-length on the bed and crowed, "Aw, comfort," then nodded his head in the direction of the other two seats in the room, a comfortable armchair with a reading lamp and a straight chair at a kind of table-desk. Jim relaxed, leaning against the door frame.

Jaimie had something on his mind. It seemed to him that this was a very open straightforward society. He felt he should reciprocate but he didn't know how. He decided to plunged right in.

"Perhaps you should tell me what is expected of me."

Amusement flared at the corner of Jim's eyes as he said, "I'm not sure what I expect of you. I'm not sure what you expect of me. Neither of us has done this before, but if you have something definite in mind, please ask it."

"Well, for instance, what are the rules of the house?"

Jim seemed perplexed, "I'm not sure this house has any rules, but if there are any, ask Laura. She'd know."

"I guess what I mean is things like, 'Do I have to be in by a certain time', 'Can I have guests', 'Do they have to be out by a certain time'." As he said this, Jaimie seemed to be uncertain how much he wanted to say, but he suddenly became more certain, and said "I suppose you know that Mayanna and I have become close friends." As he said this, he looked across at Mayanna to try to read her

expression. She seemed undisturbed, so he continued. "If Mayanna were to visit me in my room, will you be uncomfortable about this?"

Jim considered his answer carefully and then said, "First let me say that if the house has a rule, it is that each person should be able to enjoy the quiet, peaceful use of their own space without encroaching. Beyond that, what you do in your own space is up to you. There is no ownership of the premises. I suppose I should add that we all take our share of keeping the place clean and tidy, dishes washed, meals prepared, not necessarily in that order, and we would expect that you would join in with us in that."

While Jim was speaking, Jaimie had been watching the expression on Mayanna's face. The amused quirk at the corners of her mouth reassured Jaimie that she was comfortable with what was being said.

A short while later, when Laura came through the door to ask for assistance to take food out of doors, Jaimie was feeling reassured that he and the Huttons could be very comfortable with this arrangement. Again Laura had prepared a simple meal of largely vegetables and fruit, with an interesting cheese that had been developed here at the settlement. After supper, he walked Mayanna back to her residence full of hope for his living arrangements and his vehicle repair.

The next morning, by Jaimie's reckoning it would be Wednesday, he set out in the company of Harold Morton to view the remains of his space vehicle. From his last memories of it, he was hopeful that it was not too badly damaged.

They travelled along the well-worn path, first across the meadows and then through the woods. The path showed signs of recent improvement. At intervals along the path, a small assortment of tools would be leaning up against a tree. Sometimes when he came across one of these, Jaimie's companion would stop, dismount from his bike, and pick up a pick axe or hatchet and wield a few strokes to carry the work forward. When asked, Harold explained that a number of community projects such as road improvement would be done in this impromptu manner. Jaimie could see that much of the path had been given this treatment and that it made for a smoother and more efficient ride. After this, when Harold stopped to work, Jaimie pitched in and felt a sense of accomplishment in it. After about ten kilometres, they arrived at the spot where some small trees had been damaged as they lay on the flight path of the space vehicle.

As they walked up to the site, Jaimie realized that his heart was pounding as he considered the enormity of what he would find out in the next few minutes or so. The vehicle had been covered with a number of tarpaulins to prevent any damage from the frequent showers. Other than that, the vehicle had been undisturbed. He and Harold entered the craft. His first impression was enormous relief. There was a great deal of testing to be done, of course, but the damage did not seem to be beyond his skills to repair.

Two hours later, as they walked back toward their bicycles, Jaimie folded his portable slate on which he had written his findings. Harold's curiosity, which had been growing as he waited, overflowed, and he said, "Well, what did you discover in your examinations? Are you going to be able to do it? You seemed fairly perky as though things were not too bad."

Jaimie allowed a broad grin to spread over his face as he said, "Not bad at all. I tested all systems and they all seem to be functioning. There are a few places where the seal will have to be reinforced, but nothing that requires high level of expertise. My only problem is going to be, what am I going to do about the part of me that doesn't want to go back? I guess I have some tall thinking to do in the next little while."

"Most of us who know you both, feel that you are getting into a fairly deep relationship with Mayanna, and of course we hope that you will be able to bring about whatever outcome seems best to you without hurting one another."

Early afternoon found Jaimie seated again in the community building with the nine elders and the other participants. He decided he would join it rather than fight it and take the moments of silence to settle down and calm down before the meeting began.

George Fraser as the chair asked Jaimie if he had a report ready. He said it would have to be an interim one, rather than a final one, but so far the major problem seemed to be to reinforce the spots in the fuselage which were not longer able to maintain the air pressure. Not all the systems had been thoroughly tested, but so far it looked as if they were all functioning. George thanked him and Jaimie sat down. Jaimie was becoming used to this silence. He seemed to be using it to calm himself, organize his information, and work on the solutions to the problems he had found.

While Jaimie's head was busy with these considerations, a tall, relaxed man ambled to his feet, saying "Oswald Page, Construction and Repair, here. It seems to me that, as far as this aspect of the task is concerned, the repair of the space vehicle, there will be no unanswerable challenge. The thing we are going to have to really concentrate on is whether we can do this and still keep Earth unaware of our existence here."

George Fraser looked around the room, watching for nodding heads and gestures of agreement. Then he said, "We seem to have an implicit agenda, here. We want to talk about what resources will be required, and also ways of keeping our existence hidden."

After a while, a rather bouncy small man stood and said, "Jeffrey Brooks, Communication. Perhaps if we considered the risks first, this might give us a handle on the way to discuss the rest of the agenda. For one thing, I myself am sure I do not want to really risk discovery. On the other hand, I recognize that getting home to Earth may be an overwhelming need for Jaimie Higgins while merely a puzzle for us. I would like to hear Jaimie tell us something of his feelings regarding the need to get back to Earth." Jaimie was surprised at the degree to which he felt Jeffrey Brooks understood he feelings.

Jaimie slowly ambled to his feet, thinking of what he could say to convince these people. "When I joined the space corps, there were a number of vows I had to take. There was a vow of obedience, a vow of faithfulness, a vow that the corps would be first in my considerations in deciding what I should do. One of the understandings that followed from this was that if we were ever separated from our mission, we would do anything we could to get back to it. I feel an obligation under that vow to return to Earth and my duty there. I'm sure you people know more than I do about disguising the pathways we have taken between Earth and

Agape." Jaimie sat down and all was silent again. Nothing seemed to be happening. Jaimie could feel his impatience bubbling up inside himself. After a few minutes it was all that Jaimie could bear and he leapt to his feet again. "What's the matter with you people. This isn't getting us anywhere. We could sit here for a month of Sundays and no one could tell us exactly what to do because no one has been in this position before. So give me your big objections and let's see what we can hammer out." Somehow, in spite of the outburst, the quiet seemed undisturbed. After a while, Daniel Fuller ambled to his feet and said, "I know that Jaimie and Mayanna have developed some sort of relationship. Perhaps we can have some guidance on how the situation is affected by this relationship and the needs of the people involved." Jaimie suddenly felt sure that he understood the situation more clearly. People did not want to see Mayanna pulled away from the community but he wasn't going to assure them that this was unlikely to happen.

Mayanna rose to her feet. "The nature of our ongoing relationship has not yet been fully defined. In some ways I feel that our solution to planet overcrowding was not a completely obedient one. There seems to be no way to retrace those steps. But Jaimie's arrival has offered a new path. I make no statement at this time about what will become of the relationship between us but I can make a commitment to you that we will endeavour to maintain a commitment to the spirit of obedience to the force of creation."

Again silence. Jaimie suddenly felt hopeless. They are making no progress. He was on his feet again. "Mr. Chairman, could I make a suggestion to which people could vote yes or no and we could finish this business?"

The chairman sat quietly for a few more minutes then arose and said, "I think we will take a short break. Brother Jacob will explain to Jaimie Higgins our method of decision making--the rules in our procedures--which are equivalent to Robert's Rules of Order in the British parliamentary system."

Jacob said, "Be back in a minute." and returned with glasses of fruit juice from the table. Jacob began by saying, "You know, Jaimie, it's been five hundred years that we have been working on a method of decision-making that was not the adversarial model of Earth but one which was more like a snowball which started with a small agreement which was gradually added to layer by layer as feelings and methods got worked out. Among the original pioneers, there were quite a few Quakers and their influence determines our dependence on silence and waiting as aspects of decision-making meetings. We are seeking agreement among all present on a common course. When the clerk can word a statement that all present will agree to, the decision has been made. There is no disgruntled minority saying, 'if only they had listened to me, it would have been fairer, or more equitable, or more loving.' Out of this has come a practice in which, as you stand to speak, before presenting views of your own, you find something in the previous presenter's statement with which you can agree, and you state that agreement. This allows you to then go on to another statement of your own, which is compatible with the previous speakers. It may surprise you that there is no assumption on Agape that Earth is the prototype democracy and freedom on which we should all model ourselves."

Jaimie sat and swirled his drink in his glass much the way as he was swirling the ideas around in his mind. Finally he said, "But surely there must be times

when two views are presented which are incompatible and which the group must choose between.

Jacob sat in silence for some time before replying, "For the most part, our attitude is one of faith that a solution can be found which will satisfy both view points although not necessarily mirroring either. The task of the group is to have faith that the solution is there if the patience and humility can be found to discern it."

Jaimie sat for a few moments in contemplation, then smiled reassuringly at Mayanna to let her know he was giving his best effort to accommodating these outlandish and rather undemocratic customs. "Perhaps I should reassure the group that I understand their concern about what Earth would do if they knew of the existence of Agape. I would think it would be fair to offer an earnest vow that I will not in any way disclose the existence of this place to Earth. At the moment, I do not know how I can convince all of you that this is reassurance enough."

Jacob smiled and said, "I myself think that would be a helpful start especially if you allow for the exploration of the depth of your commitment to such a vow."

"I think the chairman," Jacob continued, "will want us back soon so that we can offer you the sense of our commitment to reaching some decisions as soon as is practical."

Later, seated back in the hall, Jaimie rose and made his statement. He was disconcerted by the lack of response until he realized that everyone was deeply searching. The possibility occurred to him to see what would constitute the reassurance that would enable them to make a decision.

After one or two probing questions from the assembled elders, George Fraser announced that they had made good progress. "We will ask Jaimie to prepare an estimate of supplies that will be needed for M&C and C&R. This should not be pinpointed but rather a range of best and worst case scenarios. We will return tomorrow to continue this process."

The following day, when they came together, Jaimie could feel in the group a greater degree of confidence and, more clarity in their expectations. George Fraser began by asking Jaimie to tell the Agapeans what a solemn vow meant to him and why it could be relied upon. Jaimie was surprised at the confidence he felt that his knowledge of the thoughts and questions of those present. Sometimes it seemed as though someone else thought a word and it came into his mind. Jaimie rose more slowly to his feet. This was not something he was used to discussing. He explained that along the way to becoming an astronaut, some of the team-fostering activities were not unlike those of the knights of the middle ages. It was understood that his own needs would no longer be paramount in his life but those of the community, the team and the task would supersede them. Prayer to the forces of good and of strength and contemplation of one's own life path were a part of each step into a new phase of his training and work. In these circumstances, vows of obedience and self sacrifice were made which influenced all life decisions from then on. "It is obedience to this which makes such a strong demand on the astronaut to return to his duties. I am sure you will be aware of how strong this demand is and I can assure you that a vow to you would have the same strength of determination and purpose."

Again the disconcerting silence. Jaimie felt some pressure to find more to say to convince the group but realized that was not what the group was waiting for. When Jaimie's patience had been exhausted, and he was about to rise to his feet again. As the chair, George Fraser recognised Daniel Fuller. Daniel Fuller stood for some time before he spoke. "It is clear to me that when we speak of accepting risks, we should be speaking for ourselves and our own groups and not for others.

However, one way in which this happens is when we recognize that however we may have been speaking up until this time, we are, after all, one group. If our goal is to obey God, our best interests cannot conflict. therefore the question we should all be asking is 'am I willing to take the risk?' I have begun to feel that it is within god's purpose that Agape and Earth in the fullness of time, become re-acquainted, although I am sure the time is not now."

As Jaimie heard these words, he was convinced that he was not the 'other', seeking something for himself but one of a group trying to find god's way. (Jaimie had always believed in god, but didn't know much about what he believed in.) He was filled with a sense of belonging and a firm conviction that when they all agreed, they would have the truth.

One of the elders said, "I feel sufficiently reassured that I would like to authorize all assistance in the repair of the space vehicle. However, I would also like to ask M&C and C&R to set to work immediately on the problem of how a journey to Earth could be made in such a way that the return trip from Earth to Agape would not be traceable." There were general murmurs of approval, and the clerk read his wording of the solution which had been offered. He asked the group to meet again the next day to see if any progress had been made.

Jaimie was aware of a little ripple of sound starting out in one corner of the room. A few people were singing

"We are one in the spirit"

"We are one, we are one"

"We are one, we are one"

Suddenly, as though he had seen a great light, Jaimie realized that the thread of silence which ran through the meeting had gathered them all together. He sat quietly for several minutes enjoying the sense of lightness and brightness and the closeness to those with whom he had shared this experience.

As he sat there a man came over and introduced himself as the Men's Work Distributor.

"You speak often of wanting to work for your keep and supplies and some of us had an idea. Could you teach our High Schoolers something more than we have been able to about today's Earth?"

Jaimie pondered a few moments "That's an exciting thought," he said. "But what sort of things would they want to know? There are many things I do not know about Earth."

"Well, let's toss that around a bit and see how it works out".

On the way back to the house for lunch, Mayanna said, "You kind of like this idea don't you"

“Yes I like it a lot” Jaimie said, “but I am a bit overwhelmed at the idea. Maybe they would just laugh at me.”

“Our kids wouldn’t do that” Mayanna said . “They are probably quite curious about what you have to say. I know I am.”

In the next two days Jaimie worked out a plan for preparing his USV in the mornings and teaching in the afternoons. The first class he met with he started out with the geography of Earth. He explained that when the Agapeans had left Earth, there were over 200 nations. Now nations were in groups blocks. North and South America were controlled by the USA. NAFTA and the common security perimeter had started a process which found those two continents bound tightly together. The next block was old Europe under leadership of England and France. China, Japan and South East Asia formed a block, as did the Middle East and most of Africa. The three fundamentalist groups controlled leadership, in this case China and Japan were under Buddhist leadership. The last two amalgamated were Polynesia, and Australia. They took a rather entrepreneurial pragmatic relationship. This left Pakistan and India eyeing one another suspiciously and they were not willing to join another group. Each of these groups was very paranoid concerning the military capabilities of one other. Especially in regards to Nuclear weapons, Weapons of Mass destruction and the arming of Space. “Are there any questions?”

Jaimie, having forgotten that he would be addressing only girls, felt uncertain of the attitudes he should take when the first two question were ‘How long ago did this happen?’ and ‘When are they going to get over it?’ He did not feel reassured. “The formation of the block took place over a 200 year period from 2200 to 2400, but as to how to get out of it is uncertain, but this time on Agape has given me some hope. Perhaps we could discuss about what someone like yourself or myself could do to get out of this situation.” He walked away from the school feeling oddly cheered by this experience although he was unable to say just where this faint ray of hope come from. In the next few weeks as they explored the political structure and industrial organization of Earth, Jamie began to have a seed of a new idea of taking the Agapean’s social concepts back to Earth with him. One of the girls finally asked, “Why did this happen, what was their motive?”

Jaimie was pleased to hear that question. It was one he was thinking about a lot ever since he landed on Agape. “Well of course it was fear. First it was fear of ‘terrorists’ and then as people began to get restless because of restrictions and the government began to get repressive, fear included the authorities. The total amount of resources was being greatly depleted including the land lost to Global warming. Well, people still expected to have the same amount of such things as oil, energy, land, minerals, etcetera. All this caused a general sense of uneasiness and unrest. So the various blocks were able to use it to increase their own power. The United Nations became an implement of enforcement rather than a opportunity for democratic exchange. Some of us managed to maintain small enclaves of friendly neighbourliness, but it is hard.” Girls clustered around him asking more questions, some of which he found extremely hard to answer.

As he and Harry walked away from the school together Harry was suggesting a similar sort of presentation to one of the college groups. This would be different in that the adults would be a mixed group, male and female. Jaimie had some fear of getting in over his head. He was primarily a rather practical technician. He was

not too comfortable with this but he agreed to do it. A week later facing the senior college level group Jaimie had to cover material which he had hardly spoken to the younger group about. That material had been passed on to nearly everyone in the settlements. This group had wanted to know more about the source of values in the various blocks.

Jaimie realized that at some level he had been thinking about this too. Several things had destroyed the way of life that they were used to. Global Warming had considerably reduced the land area of the planet and Global warming, together with genetic modification, had required great experimentation by the farmer to keep the volume and nutritional level of his crops. As a matter of fact, Jaimie realized ruefully he hadn't been quite making it and the farmers' crops had dropped both in volume and content year by year. He decided he would explain to the college students that the old order of values, especially in food production, had to be discarded and new ones were still in formation. One of the reasons he was in a hurry to get back to Earth was to be a part of the solution to the enigma presented. He and some of his colleagues had been trying to develop a moral code for such times that would make it possible to rate the worth of a set of values without taking the risk of actually imposing on them first.

As he walked back to his quarters he was once again challenged by the need to get back and find the solution to these terrible problems. Among them would be the possibility of a real fighting war breaking out between two or more of these power blocks, which would make everything infinitely worse.

## 4

Mayanna and Jaimie were sitting in her room in her parents' home. Jaimie was still surprised at the ease with which Mayanna's parents accepted his presence in their household at all hours of the day and night. However, he was gradually becoming less embarrassed and nervous about it. Suddenly Mayanna turned to face him eye to eye and said, "Dear Man, I want to talk to you very seriously. I find that I really long to have your baby. I would like to know how you feel about this."

Jaimie was almost too overcome to answer her immediately. He did not want to seem to hesitate but first he wiped away a tear at the corner of his eye and said, "I cannot imagine any words in the world I would rather hear. However, I am not sure what kind of family unit we could be with my urgent inner demand that I return to Earth as soon as is feasible. Would it be possible for us to be married? Is there any hope that you would return to Earth with me? What consideration have you already given to what must be a central point for each of us as we think about our relationship?"

As Mayanna answered, it seemed to Jaimie that he could see her becoming before his eyes a little dreamier and less structured than the clear-spoken, direct approach he had come to expect. "Dear man, this will not be a simple matter of agreement between yourself and myself. We cannot do it without the support of the whole community and we will have to seek that support. In any case, where a couple are to be married in our community, there is a process of group discussion and agreement along the way. Finally, are we sure within ourselves that we want to make this marriage commitment? The very first step would be for me to bring it to my peer group. The best plan might be to start with that and then widen it as

the group feedback is available. Would you mind if I went ahead and spoke to the group?"

"Jove! Woman, you do not waste time! But believe me, I have no hesitations and would welcome anything you do of that sort. I don't want anyone to be put off by what could be seen as unseemly haste on our part. Otherwise I would say, full speed ahead.

"But, Mayanna, have you thought at all of the implications? Where would this family be based? Are we an Earth family that visits Agape, or an Agape family that visits Earth? How shall we keep the family together across the universe? If you are like me, you already have a picture of a little family with two or three kids sitting at home together. Where is this home?"

After not too long, Mayanna said, "Dear Man, I haven't put any detail into my picture of our life together. Of course when I think of it, I see us here. I have never seen Earth and if I tried to picture us there, I would probably get it all wrong. I know you are going to want to go back. I would like to accompany you with the understanding that we will return if I am not happy there."

Jaimie drew a deep breath. "Mayanna, my love, you are incredibly generous. Your offer is so generous that I can accept it only conditionally. Let us receive it as a working premise and that as we go into things further, we may not find it to be the best. That having been understood, let us begin to search for the most practical and comfortable plan for this whole adventure."

Mayanna and Jaimie had found their lives together had fallen into a routine. Mornings Jaimie spent working on his vehicle while Mayanna worked the morning shift at the hospital. In the late afternoon, they would get together for a swim, a hike, or a chat. Jaimie had met with Mayanna's peer group and felt comfortable with them. Their days seemed to go along without any deadlines or time targets, but with a satisfactory sense of progress. This new development would change that.

After another one of those silences, Jaimie turned to Mayanna and said, "What would happen if we just went ahead and had a baby?"

The amused crinkles appeared at the corners of Mayanna's eyes as she said, "I knew you would say that. As you know, the first peculiarity of life on Agape started as the medical teams were perfecting a method of birth control and perfect it sure is! If a woman wants to have a baby, there are gateways within the fallopian tubes which have been placed there by needlepoint surgery. To open them requires equipment and technical knowledge. We wouldn't get those until we had satisfied our community that this birth was the right thing. I see no way around this procedure, nor would I want to. Earth has a divorce rate incredible to consider. Agape's is minuscule. I think it right that we should avail ourselves of this."

"Of course what you say makes sense. I find myself a little uncomfortable with the lack of spontaneity but I recognise what choices we have and don't have and we'll just have to knit the spontaneity we need into the wool available. What is our next step?"

Mayanna said, "I think next you should meet with my peer group. Perhaps I should meet with them first to open the topic. Then we should meet with them together to ask for their support."

Jaimie sat in silent thought for a few moments and then said, "Have you any sort of a timeline for all of this? Are we talking days, weeks, or months? The vehicle is coming along pretty well, but I won't really know how much longer it will take until I test the pressure seal."

Mayanna shrugged her shoulders. "If the group finds it easy to reach unity, it won't take long, but if we hit a stumbling block, who knows? Can we start now? Are we ready?"

Jaimie took a deep breath and said, "Mayanna, I feel ready for anything life offers, as long as we're together--Jove! I do sound like something out of a book!"

"Our fortnightly meeting is tonight and I'll broach the whole matter then. It shouldn't take long to find out if it's going to be easy or difficult. I'll come over after the meeting and tell you all about it."

That evening, the ten young women were relaxing in one of the meeting rooms of the administration building. Some sat on the seats, some sat only on the floor. It was a little difficult to discern who was chairing the meeting, but it went comfortably without much structure. It all started when, out of the opening silence, Mayanna said, "Jaimie and I want to get married. But he feels strongly he must return to Earth at least for a while. What do you say? Do I have your support? Or how will we proceed?" A tall young woman addressed as Jean said, "We have a procedure in cases like this, if there are cases like this. Do we want to appoint two or three people to meet with Mayanna and Jaimie, or should it be all of us?"

Again, there was a considering silence, and then Rosemary said, "I think it had better be all of us. There is too much new ground here for any shorter procedure to work. When shall it be?"

The little blonde one, Allyssa, said, "Because there is so much unexplored territory, we had better start as soon as possible. How about we meet with Jaimie tomorrow?"

A little chorus of "Agreed", "Yes", "That's right" sealed the matter.

That evening, as they sat together in the big comfortable chair, Jaimie expressed some of his misgivings about how he would perform at this meeting. Mayanna had little patience for his concerns. "Don't worry about that stuff. Just tell the women the honest, unvarnished truth about how things are and what you hope for. You can trust them to have our best interests at heart. But manipulation as the decision-making process has pretty much disappeared in our procedures."

Jaimie grinned at her. "Some people might think 'always say something you can agree with that the previous speaker has said, before expressing your own ideas' was manipulative but I'll try to be honest and say the right thing at the same time."

The next morning at the hospital, Mayanna found herself working with Paul on preparation for an intricate procedure they were going to undertake. As they worked along, Paul suddenly said, "What is happening with you and our Earthling, Mayanna? I had hoped that we were moving toward a committed relationship, but recently you are more interested in Jaimie. Is this just a novelty or does it spell the end of that idea?"

Mayanna reached over and touched his arm. "Dear Paul," she said, "We have done many things together, and have become very close. This other relationship is of a different kind. It has in it a challenge, new experiences, and new views of life which I find irresistible. Jaimie and I are going to ask for marriage from the community. I hope this won't hurt you, Paul. There are many young women available, and I'm sure you can make a happy marriage."

Paul had been leaning forward to speak to her intently and to listen. Now he settled back in his chair and said, "Of course I'm disappointed. But I can see your point of view. I wish you happiness, and I'm sure there is someone else for me who will be a good life partner here on Agape. Where do you expect to live?"

Mayanna smiled and said, "Thank you, Paul, for this gift from the bottom of my heart. One of the strange things about Jaimie is the lack of any shared experience with him although he is very flexible, and tries hard to understand."

That evening, Jaimie accompanied Mayanna to her peer group with considerable trepidation. If the peer group could not agree on approval, he had gathered, there would be much greater difficulty in getting the consent they sought. It felt like quite a challenge. Jean, who seemed to be occupying the chair, welcomed Jaimie and invited him to express his hopes to the group. Jaimie, with a sort of 'here goes' feeling, took a deep breath and said, "As you know, Mayanna and I would like to marry. This hope includes that we would have a child. I understand that we need your consent to move forward on this. I do not know exactly what you need to know in order to give this consent."

Jean nodded her head in understanding and said, "Perhaps first, you could give us a picture of what life would be like if you were married and back on Earth."

Jaimie smiled and said, "The variables are infinite. I would hope I would have a job with a good income so that Mayanna and I could have a nice home in a nice neighbourhood, where the neighbours were peaceful and quiet and there was very little to fear. Perhaps Mayanna would have a job of her own in the health field. There are good nursery schools to raise our child or children and Mayanna would have many choices about things like work outside the home, volunteer or paid, absorbing a small or a large amount of her time."

Someone asked, "Is this the way it is for everyone?"

"No," admitted Jaimie. "A guy with my experience and training does lead a privileged life. Most of us feel we've earned it."

"How so?" asked one of the girls.

"Well," said Jaimie, "You study hard and you work hard to get into that position."

"And does everybody have an equal opportunity to do that?" persisted the girl.

"No," admitted Jaimie. "It helps to have the right parents. But with enough hard work and determination, you can get at least part way up the scale."

"To an Agapean, that doesn't sound fair."

"I can understand that," said Jaimie. "I'm beginning to realize, since I've been here, how much of our expectations have to do with the culture or subculture from which we come."

After more questions and answers, they thanked Jaimie for coming and encouraged him to leave. After Jaimie made his exit, Jean turned to Mayanna and said, "Well! I see what captivated you. He is of a different breed, isn't he. I can see he would be quite attractive to an adventurous woman. Quite different from our early experience with sex and relationships where most of our early experiments are with guys we knew even before they were guys. I'm inclined to believe that we should support whatever Mayanna wants to do when she goes before the counsel of elders or whatever.

Allyssa hesitated and then said, "I'm not sure that this is right. Do we want to see Mayanna and possible offspring struggling in such a cold society? It would be like a cold shower after a warm bath. If they were going to be living here, I would have no misgivings. But on Earth! That's cruel and unusual punishment."

Someone exclaimed, "Mayanna was always adventurous and wanted to do the unusual thing. If she wants to take a chance on making her way in Jaimie's world for a while, I don't think she should be stopped from it, as long as she clearly understands the nature of the decision she is making. We should be sure that a way back here is part of the picture in case it is too difficult."

Everyone fell silent for a while as they pondered the massive disruption this would make not only to Mayanna and Jaimie's lives but to those that touched them. Jean took up another thought. "One of the things we should consider trying to do is to establish some sort of community support system for Mayanna and Jaimie if they leave on this adventure. I'm rather surprised that I'm including Jaimie, but I think there are signs of change in him, too, and he is becoming more of a community member than he was when he landed."

After some more time and also some more thought and editing, a minute was written embodying these ideas that could go to the committee of elders. Then the girls settled down to a nice, gossipy discussion of what it was like to meet a man who had been born male.

Jean was trying for a while to put something into words while the group waited. Finally she said, "With us and our common experience, whether a person is showing their soft side or their tough side, we know instinctively that both exist. With Jaimie I would think it would be much more difficult to be sure of his soft side."

Mayanna nodded her head enthusiastically. "I was very lucky because one of the first things that happened to us was that Jaimie was deeply touched and dismayed by a mistake he had made. If I had not had that to return to, and he became very confident, it might have been tougher going. Perhaps the main difference is that we are all somewhat polarized but it is experience together that enables us to feel confident that there is a fairly complete spectrum within each of us if we take the patience to discover it. I'm surprised myself at how little of the attention needs to be given to what I would call 'translation', that is, taking some small thing, a dirk or a claymore, as using it to define the culture from which it springs. I think the dirk and the claymore are in essence rejected by non-violent societies such as those on Agape."

Someone said, "What do we do if we don't have a Jaimie in our lives to discover it with?"

Rosemary had been thinking about this. "It seems to me," she said, "that each relationship has more to offer than we are able to glean. We should just gain as much understanding as we can."

After she said goodbye to her peers, Mayanna sought Jaimie out to find out what he felt about the peer group.

"Well," said Jaimie, "I'm almost afraid to say. One of the things that struck me was how alike you all are in many ways. I found them a very endearing group. On the other hand, don't get the idea that anyone else could substitute for you. You are you, and you are what I love. No one else can hold a candle to that. But, since you asked, you all do seem surprisingly similar."

Mayanna remarked that this might be due to one of the main concerns of the planet: the small size of the gene pool. Jaimie observed that it was an advantage to have a gene pool where "goodness" is predominant.

Mayanna was interested in what he would think of another group they should meet with, the EWG or Education Work Group, which consisted mainly of the work group at the hospital. Paul had suggested they meet after the change of shift at the hospital. Would Jaimie be willing to come along? Jaimie was extremely interested and felt that the differences in the interplay between these two groups would give him more insight into the effects of the peculiar culture of this planet.

When they met a little later on, Paul was in the chair. He gave a terse, detached and rather scientific resume of the happenings so far, since Jaimie's arrival on Agape. He said he had been asked if they would want to report, so that was an avenue open to the group if they found they had something to say. One of the women caught Paul's eye and rose to speak. "As we are all health professionals, it seems to make sense for us to explore if there is some health related advice we can give to the young couple. One of our main concerns in discussing this informally has been the effects on the proposed child of the polluted nature of Earth's environment. One of our researchers, Martin Stewart, has been examining reports of the atmosphere in various parts of Earth. He found it hard to speak of isolated areas as winds blow everything everywhere, but he did discover that Iceland, with its geothermal energy, has a better quality of atmosphere in many ways. There have been some good strides toward returning to the organic non-chemical forms of agriculture. We understand that there will be set up some form of communication between the young couple and Agape. We would be interested in continuing this exploratory work and keeping the young couple informed."

Mayanna remarked that the concerns expressed around pollution in the environment had been very much on her mind. She was grateful and relieved to learn that she would not be totally on her own in this matter. She thanked them very much.

Morning found Jaimie wending his way back up to the administration building for another hearing before the committee of elders. He was surprised to notice the degree of anxiety he felt. It was as if his whole life depended on it, and, on reflection, Jaimie said to himself that this was an essential cornerstone to building the life they had begun to dream of.

When the group had assembled, George Fraser read the minute from Mayanna's peer group. He asked Mayanna if she wanted to add anything to this. Mayanna stood and said simply that step by step in the process of getting to know Jaimie, she had felt led to follow the path that she had since chosen. She was not sure whether they were meant to live on Agape or on Earth, but she had complete faith that in time, this would be clearer. In the meantime, she herself had no doubt that the next steps were marriage and conception. The obstetrician she had been talking to assured her that the best time to get pregnant would be just before she set out on the journey to Earth, all the checks and balances assuring a good environment for the baby on the voyage. She mentioned that her

EWG had also discussed the matter and would have a report on their deliberations, especially from a health standpoint. The elders seemed to have very little question about this but they wanted to know what provision there was for a 'change of mind'. Jaimie said that he had made a solemn vow to himself. Someone raised the question of how decision-making was shared between the two of them. It became clear that decision-making was a well-balanced sharing of the power involved in making life-changing decisions. The group went on to examine the young people to see if they had thought at all about the struggle for dominance around such decision as 'do we stay on Earth or do we return to Agape'. Mayanna replied to these concerns, witnessing to a simple faith that if we are attentive and desire to be faithful, answers will come to us.

One of the participants remarked that a great deal of the data was not available that was necessary to make a good decision. George Fraser suggested that they might like an interim report from the two work streams that were working on the risks and possible solutions of the journey back to Earth. At this point Harold Morton and Jeffrey Brooks looked at one another. Jeffrey Brooks rose to his feet. "As an interim report, we seem to be moving in favour of setting up a kind of sally-port at one of the punch-holes we now have for observation and monitoring Earth. We think we could disguise it pretty thoroughly on the Earth side and keep a manned listening post on our side. This would make it possible for the young couple to return to us if they needed, while we would be able to monitor and discourage anyone following them. We haven't explored all the technical answers yet, but it does look pretty promising."

George Fraser thanked them and they quietly considered this for a while. Then he remarked, "We seem to have ongoing work being done on the repair of the space vehicle and a measure to lower the risk of discovery. Are there other fields we should be working on?"

Someone suggested that a more complete blueprint of ongoing communication with someone on Earth might be useful. The group agreed to meet again the following day and continue this examination. As they walked away from the meeting, Jaimie said to Mayanna, "The pace seems very slow. And yet, when you think about it, a lot of work gets done. I'm really feeling hopeful today."

They walked in silence for a few minutes and then Mayanna said, hesitating a little, "Jaimie, I want to try a game with you. I'm thinking of a number from one to ten. What is it?"

Jaimie looked a little surprised but said, "it's number four. I don't know why I think I know, but by Jove! I feel sure."

Mayanna's broad smile showed her pleasure as she said, "Right on!" Let's try it again."

"Seven" said Jaimie.

"Right." said Mayanna.

Jaimie said, "That makes me feel strange. I've never thought of myself as being very intuitive."

Mayanna explained that telepathy had developed to quite a degree among the Agapeans. "I'm really pleased that you have such great potential. We'll have to start doing some regular exercises."

Within the next two weeks, meeting almost daily, the committee of elders had prepared a communication to the community as a whole and a meeting was called to present the recommendation to the community. When the group convened on a hillside on a Sunday morning to consider the recommendation, Jaimie's mouth was dry and his hands were sweaty as he considered how completely the rest of his life depended on the outcome of this meeting. There was a report, long periods of silence, and occasional statements. The group was clear that neither Jaimie nor Mayanna could be held captive. The group as a whole must accept risks, rather than laying them on individuals within the group. Both those who would journey and those who would stay at home must be prepared to take up their share of this burden and trust to the generosity of the other to make the whole scheme work.

In sober quietude, with an underlying excitement, the group withdrew from their meeting ground down the hill to begin the process of putting thought and faith into action.

As they walked down the hillside from the assembly, Jaimie and Mayanna considered the next big milestone: permission to marry. Mayanna was optimistic that, with all the work they had done on the return to Earth, they would have a good foundation on which to build their request for marriage. Mayanna explained to Jaimie that this request would be seen as having large implications for the community. Several things were being asked for which the community had not experienced before: the fact that no woman living had married outside the settlements; the request to nurture the family outside the community; the understanding that the groom would be an alien to Agape.

"What would be the procedure on this one?" Jaimie asked. "Will it get a pre-hearing with the committee of elders?"

"I think it probably will." Mayanna answered with some hesitation. "It's a pretty big issue to be settled all at one at a big meeting. In any case, others will make that decision and tell us what it is."

"That's one of the things I like about Agape," replied Jaimie. "You do not find yourself worrying out decisions that other people are responsible for making."

As they walked, Mayanna's eyes seemed to be everywhere, looking at the smallest details of their surroundings. "It will seem very strange," she remarked, "to leave these things behind. I'm glad I have the confidence I do in the technicians who are planning our voyage. Marooned on earth seems like a very harsh thing to find oneself facing."

“Earth isn’t all harsh,” Jaimie assured her. “It has its beauty too. Until you have seen a sunset over a northern lake or the light show from the ice fields near the North Pole, you have yet another measure of beauty to experience.”

## 5

Jaimie stood at the top of the hill looking down over the manicured artwork of the gardens below and remembering the morning some months ago now when he stood here and watched the assembly from the Lakeshore Settlement arrive. People were beginning to assemble from all of the six settlements. Only a limited group from each of them could be encouraged to come because the costs in time, resources and pollution had to be carefully monitored. He felt comfortable knowing that both Mayanna’s peer group and her Education and Working Group would have positive reports in respect to the decision. Jamie had been reassured by several that such reports are usually conclusive in matters of this sort. By mid-morning, the delegations were assembled and the proceedings began. After the usual silence, the reports were read. Jaimie and Mayanna were invited to add any comments of their own. Mayanna spoke emphatically on how she felt that this was the right next step not only for herself and Jaimie, but also for the community. She saw it as a very first tender exploration of the re-establishment of their planet’s potential friendship with Earth. While she saw the risks, she felt those risks must be taken in order to produce a better way forward for Agape.

Jaimie spoke glowingly but briefly of his deep love and respect for Mayanna and his anticipation of growth in understanding for both planets through new relationship.

After Jaimie and Mayanna, Paul Jones rose to his feet. In a quiet controlled voice, he spoke of his own disappointment that Mayanna would be leaving the planet, but said with great clarity and emotion, that it was essential that the Agapeans be prepared to take their share of the risk of any disappointments and of the adjustments that must be made when a change of this magnitude is contemplated. There was a response--almost a tide of emotion--that went through the crowd as they realized the discipline Paul needed in order to make that statement with such sincerity and determination.

George Fraser, who was chairing the proceedings, stood to say, “I wonder if we have agreement on this statement ‘We heartily endorse the decision made by Mayanna Murray and Jaimie Higgins to be united in marriage under the care of this assembly?’”

There were many murmurs and clear statements of approval. Someone broke into song and the whole group sang, “That cause can neither be lost nor stayed...”.

The formalities were now over and the committee of elders would delegate the making of arrangements for the ceremony to a committee, the rite to take place the following Sunday.

This decision having been made, the group were free to express their joy in it. There was a call for musicians and the community showed how deeply they were touched by this young adventurous couple by the enthusiasm with which the singing and dancing were carried out.

Saturday night Mayanna suggested to Jaimie that the room he had occupied in the hospital was vacant at present. "Let's go and sit in the window seat and watch the fireflies for a while."

Jaimie's first reaction was one of surprise at the lack of hospital security. Obviously the people of Agape had escaped having to deal with some of the evils lurking on Earth. They walked down the hospital corridor openly among people and no one worried about where they were going. Later they sat on the window seat and gazed down the hill at the fireflies and remembered some of the lessons they had learned about being together. After a while, Mayanna murmured "When our baby is born on Earth, our major task is to be able to prepare her for confrontations with real evil while helping her to remain open to and encouraging to the very real potential for good in most of the people she will meet."

Very thoughtfully, Jaimie said, "I guess that is one of the big problems that we Earthlings have not solved. It would be possible to characterize the Agapean solution as running away and hiding from evil rather than confronting and struggling against it. Sometimes it is probably the only thing to do, but it would be good to offer some other solution. "

Mayanna said cheerfully, "The fact that you have shown some pretty keen natural awareness of the inner working of other people in our telepathy games makes me hope that our child will have it too. It is that sensing of the nature and thinking and acting of other people that makes successful confrontation with evil a possibility."

They sat quietly thinking about the future they had begun to map out for themselves. Toward morning, as they had chatted and snuggled and snoozed, they roused themselves and went out to return to the preparations for the day. The busy-ness of the scene below reminded Jaimie of his first trip outside the hospital to the picnic celebration of another marriage. So much had happened and he himself had changed so much in these few weeks since that day.

Large delegations from all of the settlements had begun to arrive. It was fortunate that it was a season of settled warm good weather on this planet. Everyone seemed satisfied with the minimum of space and comfort provided. The area that Jaimie had come to think of as 'the picnic grounds' had been laid out a little differently. There was a sort of head table where Jaimie and Mayanna sat together with George Fraser, the Huttons, and Mayanna's parents. It took a little while, but after some time, everyone seemed to have found a place to sit where they could comfortably view the head table and hear the proceedings which were being electronically enhanced. George Fraser stood up and the crowd became silent. This time, Jaimie felt himself becoming a part of the same awareness as those who had assembled. When George Fraser began to read the established words of the reading of the bands, Jaimie was almost overcome with emotion. He and Mayanna stood hand in hand and told one another of their intentions for their union to be fruitful and responsive to the will of God. When Jaimie looked across at Mayanna's mother, and saw the hint of a tear in the corner of her eye, much of the feeling of difference that he had felt of himself as an Earthling among Agapeans was stripped away and he saw his whole peopled universe as one people. There were much food, many speeches, and much dancing and singing.

After the intuitive dancers had performed, as Jaimie had seen them do before, Mayanna walked over to Jaimie and held out her hand. He was puzzled but trusting as he wondered what was expected of him. Mayanna led him to the centre of the dancing space and began to move rhythmically to the music. He followed her movements and found himself dancing with more confidence and abandon than he would have felt possible. After a few minutes, they returned to their seats. George Fraser made a final announcement that these two were now one, thanked all the visitors for attending, and suggested that people should feel free to resume their rejoicing as long as their energy lasted.

The next morning, Mayanna grinned at Jamie and said, "We have an appointment at the technology labs."

Jaimie looked puzzled but Mayanna just laughed and said, "You'll see," and off they went to the hospital building. They were ushered into a room with X-ray apparatus. and as Mayanna lay on the table, the apparatus was carefully positioned over her and the technician grunted, "That's good" as he looked through an eyepiece, twisted a couple of dials and said, "There we are. That's done." and helped Mayanna off the table. Jaimie said, "Is anyone going to explain this to me or do I have to come to my own conclusions?"

"What do you think?" said Mayanna.

"I think that was your birth control being shut off or maybe opened up?"

"You guessed it!," said Mayanna. "We're in business." Its amazing what a little magnet can do to open and close gates and make thing happen or not happen.

That night as they lay together, the enormity of what was happening overcame them both as they realized that something had been added to the life of this planet which had been absent for hundreds of years.

Tuesday morning, Jaimie said, "This morning, I have an appointment for us. We will meet with the elders representing Distribution and Transportation, and Manufacturing and Conservation. We'll sit down and figure out how the contributions fit together like the good jig-saw puzzle that it is."

When they had settled down around a table, Jeffrey Brooks took the initiative and outlined the plan. The trip would require four punch-holes and the spaces between them. They would be approximately a month per stage.

"Health has advised us that it were well to spend the first trimester here on Agape where help is available if needed and things will be better after they have settled down. We think we can time things so that you are awakened during each punch-hole which may even require a little navigation. From punch-hole to punch-hole you will sleep. I think you will find that the journey will pass quite comfortably this way." We will sleep this way as we do during most of the journey. We have had to modify one of the drug so that it does not threaten the baby in any way

He explained the permanent listening post which they had referred to before was at the last punch-hole and more thoroughly disguised than was thought necessary for the others. Jaimie was asked some questions about re-entry into Earth's space and whether they would be challenged or if there would be any difficulties of that sort. Jaimie thought that it was straightforward as they would be returning with their own spacecraft, which was known to be lost, and which had

its identifications intact. Everybody nodded understandingly but with some reservations. Earth would be relentless if it was thought to be a spy ship disguised as a lost spaceship.

Mayanna wondered what would happen if she had insomnia. Harold Morton laughed and said, "With these drugs you don't get insomnia, and that's that! But the doctors assure us that they will be safe for you and the baby. So, all you have to do now is go off and get pregnant. When the first trimester is over, you are on your way."

They sat in silence for a few minutes, each in his own thoughts about this really momentous occasion. Then they shook hands all round, everyone wished the young couple well, and they were off to their new quarters, close to the Huttons and to Mayanna's parents.

One morning about six weeks later, as they had breakfast with the Huttons, Laura looked closely at Mayanna and said, "Whatever happened to the hearty breakfasts you used to have every morning, Mayanna?"

Mayanna grinned and said, "For the moment, something seems to be deciding that I'm better off without. But perhaps it won't last too much longer."

Laura said, "That's what I was afraid I was going to hear. I haven't done a very good job of preparing Mary or myself for this day. You're going to be sadly missed, Mayanna."

Mayanna smiled cheerfully and said, "Of course I know that! But from the earliest times of our race, it must have been happening over and over and over again. The new families moved away and dug new ground and founded new civilisations. There will be many aspects of this which will not be easy for any of us, but I'm convinced it's worth a try. It seems like the obedient thing to do. I also think there's a good chance we'll be back some day. Early pioneers must have had much less certainty that they could return to their homeland if they wanted to, and we will be able to keep in touch."

Mary was looking from one to the other with dismay on her face. as she realized what they were talking about. "Golly," she said, "I knew everybody was talking about this, but I didn't think it would happen. It seems out of this world."

"You could come and visit us, Mary," said Jaimie grinning a little because he was mostly teasing.

"Oh! Could I possibly, Mommy?"

Laura looked at Jaimie and said, "Why did you have to bring up that idea? You'll go away and we'll never hear the last of it."

"Well," said Jaimie, "After it's been done a few times and everyone thinks of it as routine, will be soon enough to think about it. I guess I'm hoping we'll be able to establish some interaction between the planets to give old Earth a break. Goodness know Agape has many good idea for Earth could use".

Early on a pleasant morning later in the week, Jaimie found himself escorting Mayanna to see the refurbished space vehicle. She was intrigued by all the detailed routines they would encounter as they travelled these long and tedious kilometres. He showed her the capsule-like bunks in which each one would sleep

with life support systems to make waking up rarely necessary. He showed her the monitoring systems to make sure nothing could go awry while they slept. He showed her the two-way guidance systems that made sure that they were on course and needed no human attention. Mayanna was both entranced and appalled as she realized how different this adventure would be from anything she had previously experienced. She thought wryly that many pregnant women would be happy to sleep away the months of nausea and awkwardness as the child grew within. She worried a little about what she would be missing in relation to the child.

She remarked to Jaimie, "What if I'm missing some part of the bonding that goes on before birth?" He said that he wasn't sure that the bonding depended on consciousness, but he was sure that they would find ways to deal with that.

As they rode back to the settlement, Mayanna realized that she was excited by the reality that this visit had given to all of her speculations about the trip to Earth.

She brought up one thing that she had not yet discussed with Jaimie. How would she be received, not being from their planet, being brought back like a war bride from a distant civilization? Jaimie said that he could understand her concern about this. He had friends that he could rely on to make the adjustment as comfortable as possible and he hope that she could accept his certainty that they would have whatever help was needed to make finding her place within Earthly society as comfortable and joyful as possible. They, of course, would, give very few details of what this ancient plant was like. Perhaps almost suggesting that it was barren of fauna and flora and with almost nothing that would be exploitable by a greedy Earthling.

During the first three months of her pregnancy, Mayanna was feeling a need to prepare for the baby. She suspected that women from the beginning of time had wanted to do this, making ready tiny clothes, and bedding, and nest-like places for the new baby. She found herself asking Jaimie an infinity of questions about what the baby's environment would be like. These were to help her make wise choices. Jaimie had set what seemed like a generous limit to what she could take with her. He had also warned her that on Earth the skill in engineering that went into the making of baby specialties such as the beautiful play things of sturdy polished wood for toddlers beginning to understand wagons and riding toys, of easily handled construction materials like blocks and material to stimulate the imagination. The toys often seemed to be made to show the child what the toy could do, rather than stimulate her to explore her own capabilities. was not as great as here on Agape. She found herself examining each item from the point of view of an example of standards as well as for its aesthetic value and usefulness. Her friends were constantly bringing her small farewell gifts which had been devised to exemplify the best of Agape to the people of Earth. All in all, Mayanna felt well supplied for this journey and her hopes were buoyed up by the care her associates were taking to make every aspect of this pioneer effort a resounding success.

One Sunday morning as they sat at worship, Mayanna realized that this would be the last such occasion for her to join in such a gathering until who knows when. Although no one pressured Jaimie to participate, after they had married, he had begun to attend with Mayanna. When Mayanna realized how deeply she felt about leaving her Blessed Community, she spoke to the group of her sense of loss and

her need to carry her belongingness with her and her need for their help in doing so. Various members of the group expressed their determination to support this aspect of Mayanna's adjustment to this huge change in her life. From then on, everything seemed to be a 'countdown to blastoff'. Jaimie had explained that he would be waking up for a few minutes in each 24 hours to check the monitors and make sure that all was well. He showed her a button that she could push in case she need to speak with Jaimie when she spontaneously awakened for her long sleep. Everything seemed to be falling into place, even though the place it was falling into seemed quite bizarre, unlike anything she had experienced in her life. The night of the launch, everyone in the community had planned a big send-off which would end in her climbing into the capsule with Jaimie. Her heart was pounding as they settled in, and Jaimie had said that she might as well stay awake for the launch, as there would be plenty of time to sleep when they were off the ground. She found herself in her bunk feeling cozy and well tended. Without thinking about it, she dropped off to sleep.

Mayanna stirred in her bunk. She felt comfortable, not stiff as she was afraid she would be. As she lay there, aware of being awake, suddenly there was a big thump from somewhere inside her, and she realized that this was the baby kicking. Mayanna was overjoyed that she had awakened in time to experience this important moment. She had been afraid she would miss this experience. Feeling very guilty about her self indulgence, she pressed the button which would wake Jaimie. She had to share this moment with him. Soon he was by her side. "This baby is certainly vigorous," Mayanna told Jaimie. "It felt like she was trying to kick her way out right now. We're going to have to teach her patience." As she told him why she had called him, he was so relieved and delighted that tears welled up in his eyes. That finished Mayanna's composure too. There they were, clasped together, laughing and crying and hardly knowing which was which. After they had thoroughly enjoyed this important milestone on their journey to parenthood, they drifted off to sleep again. Mayanna slept for periods which astonished her, waking up occasionally for nourishment, and slipping quickly back into sleep when that was accomplished. Jaimie had notified her each time they passed through a punch-hole so that she would have some idea of their whereabouts. Finally they reached the last punch-hole which stood as a sentinel of their entry into Earth-space. This last part of their journey would be the longest.

Mayanna's sleep was becoming more fitful as the end of the journey neared and her system was preparing to awaken. The baby's kicking made this even more evident. Then came the day when Jaimie sat beside her capsule and said gently, "We are coming up to the point where we get our first glimpse of Earth. Do you want to wake up for that, or would you rather sleep?" Mayanna was quickly awake saying, "I would hate to miss this. It's a really exciting moment."

Jaimie took her hand and led her to the cockpit. They peered out the window at the shining blue green jewel quivering in space. Jaime heard a little gasp as Mayanna said, "Jaimie it's so beautiful. I had no idea it would look like that." After a few moments of careful examination Mayanna added, "But why are there those grey and brownish spots here and there? Is our windshield dirty?"

"I wish it were something that simple. The truth is that the brownish spots are huge cities covered by polluted air and the greyish ones are forests burning, some of them for a hundred years or more. Ecologist would have the fire put out for a

time, but poacher and squatters would start them up again. Each time the land is abused.”

“Oh Jaimie, how very sad. And such a beautiful planet too. You and I have at least some of the answers to how to keep this from going on. Oh, I hope we can find a way for them to hear us. I can’t wait to get started. Have you thought much about how we get started?”

“I have thought something about it. As a matter of fact, I sent out an e-mail letter. I hope that we can start by gathering a small community around us from among those I knew before I left.”

“I am sure that’s right Jaimie, but it’s going to be difficult from time to time. I hope your friends have staying power.”

“Indeed they do. You can’t be an astronaut, for instance, without it. I think I’m more concerned about their buying the idea in the first place. We just have to see when we talk to them.”

Even Jaimie was surprised at the crowd that waited to greet them at the airport. They were mostly Jaimie’s friends but there were more of them than he expected who turned out to this event. After a short presentation by Jaimie and Mayanna, Jaimie spoke of the way in which many of the concerns of the day were just that while others sounded like concerns of a lifetime. Much to Jaimie’s surprise, the group seemed ready to take a first step or two in exploring intentional communities and ways in which they operated throughout Earth’s history. Committees were set up and a date chosen for the next meeting. After the guests had left Jaimie made Mayanna aware of how pleased and excited he was at the degree of interest shown by a special circle of friends.

As the crowd began to disperse Jaime’s best friend, Alden Walker, dropped behind to exchange a few more words. “I thought I was going to be best man at your wedding,” Alden started out, “and now you’ve gone and jumped the gun. My, she is lovely though. I can’t say I wouldn’t have done the same thing.”

“Alden,” Jaime remarked questioningly, “Have you any idea why there was as much interest as there was in response to my e-mail?”

“Oh, here’s Mayanna. I think I should tell both of you a little of what has been happening while you were away. We were, of course, dismayed when we heard that you were missing and a bunch of us got together to see if there was anything we could do--perhaps a search party or something. There didn’t seem to be any leads to go on that would make that fruitful. But in talking about it, we realized we were making reference to how much you would have done with your energy and optimism to find a hopeful way to move in the situation. We found we were quoting you, and reassuring one another that you might still find a way to get back to Earth or even to send a distress signal. It was this latter thought that made us prepare to respond to such a message. And so we met about monthly to see if we had any ideas or progress. We kept minutes so a lot of this was written down. You’ll probably be interested in reading it.”

Mayanna exclaimed, “I think energy and optimism are two of the most important characteristics of people who are successful in community.”

Well," said Alden, "You probably weren't aware of the degree to which the gang looked to you for leadership. When you turned up missing the whole group felt directionless for a while. We've been getting together occasionally to talk about the old times and about you. Now here you are, in some ways a quite different person, aglow with a faith that we all aspire to and willing to share with us what you see as the source. Naturally many of us jumped at the chance to find out what is giving you so much confidence and joy."

Jaimie's "Wow!" was all he could manage for a few minutes while he digested this potential for 'spreading the word'. Much later after they said good night to Alden and settled down in the room they had booked at the spaceport hotel for their first night on Earth, they marvelled together at the happy turn events had taken.

"It's funny," Jaime remarked, "I had no idea I had any special influence with that group, though I must have known something to have chosen those particular people to e-mail. It seems like a good group to start with anyway. If they don't take up our concerns, we may have to find another group."

Mayanna smiled cheerfully, "I liked your friends. They mostly seemed the kind of people who do well in an intentional community - sensitive, cheerful and energetic. It may be a matter of being careful not to go too fast too soon. The Quakers used to speak of running beyond their light. Let's be careful we don't encourage too much 'progress' along the lines of community living and not enough spiritual community development to sustain it."

Jaimie thought for a few minutes and then said, "I hear what you're saying, but we must also be careful that we don't feed their desire into a time frame of our own making. I guess like everything else it's a matter of being open to whatever comes and trying to be faithful."

The next few days were taken up with a flurry of apartment hunting, ordering furniture and consulting over the establishment of a lifestyle that would satisfy them both. It sure wasn't easy. There were whole parts of their life which Mayanna was not used to having to worry about at all, knowing very little about them and finding her basic values very different from those with which Jaimie was raised. However, there was almost no conflict in these decisions and it was good practice for the decisions being made in the group.

"How are we going to deal with it when people start asking us questions about my adventure and this burgeoning group?" Jaimie asked one day.

"If we are careful and we don't say more than we know," Mayanna mused, "We probably won't say very much. We'll have to be careful not to mix our imagined picture of the future with reality. If we said something simple like, 'We want to tell the people here how people live together on Agape', that might be enough--sort of a travelogue without pictures."

"That's something to go on, anyway." Jamie concluded. "If we only say what we know, we won't say much."

"Okay. Let's finish the decisions around the apartment. I wondered about one room looking like a room on Agape, and the others still Earthbound."

"Interesting idea," said Jaimie. "Which room would it be?"

"The kitchen would be over dramatic," said Mayanna, "Because we'd have to redo practically all of the equipment and furnishings and then do practically no food preparation for ourselves there. The living room would be kind of stark by earth standards. How about the bedroom?"

"Fine," said Jaimie, "Why not? What we'd have to do is take everything out; put the bed, a chest of drawers, and two chairs back in; and refinish all the woodwork so that it is natural looking and easy to clean. It would probably mean we could sleep more comfortably there, too."

"What about the baby's room"

"A separate room for the baby? I'd never thought of that," said Mayanna. "Would we want to leave the baby all alone by herself in a room?"

Jaimie laughed and said, "You'd be more comfortable with the aboriginal idea of where a baby sleeps. They put a double piece of strong cord diagonally from bedpost to bedpost across the bed. Into that they fasten a blanket folded so that the baby can lie in it. If the baby wakes and cries in the night, the parents in the bed below can just reach up and give a swing, and unless the need is very real for food or something, the baby settles down again and goes back to sleep."

"I do like that," said Mayanna, "Let's try it for starters. It means we have to have a bed with bedposts, but we can manage that somehow. Are we only looking for a one-bedroom apartment, then?"

"Well," Jaimie pondered, "We're going to need a place for books and music. Maybe we should have that as a second bedroom for the time being."

"People here own that much books and music for themselves alone?" exclaimed Mayanna. "What a waste of paper that must be. When you look around you on Earth there is so much waste. We might make a stab at changing that, starting with so many books. You do have libraries, don't you? And nobody can read more than one book at a time, if that. Let's start with that."

As they walked into the birthing room of the local hospital, Mayanna thought how fortunate it was that they had not put off their visit to it any longer. Yesterday they had visited it and found it homey, comfortable, welcoming and not at all daunting. Today they were here to use it. Mayanna could feel the baby quite restless, especially in the longer spaces between the contractions. She was so excited to see this little one that she had to remind herself of patience and being in the present and of the exercises they had done to prepare for these times. Jaimie was excited too. He had felt very close to the baby during the last three months, being aware of her movements and feeling her kick. Now he was about to see her. Finally the time and breathing and contractions were over, and the baby lay in Mayanna's arms.

"It's a boy!" she exclaimed. "I never thought about a boy. This must be the first boy born to an Agapean woman in many generations. Oh Jaimie, we are privileged! We must remember to be thankful and to take it as a special responsibility. Of course it should always be like that with new babies. Let's call the community together and have some kind of recognition of this birth, and perhaps to give the baby a name. The doctor seems willing for me to go home very soon. We could do it really right away. Let's call it for three days after the baby

was born to present him to the community and give him a name. Jaimie, we haven't even thought about names for boys!"

"No," said Jaimie, "and this is an important one. Perhaps we'll get an inspiration."

Three days later, the group of people Mayanna called community had gathered together in the living room of their new apartment. While they were sitting in silence, waiting to understand what this new little one's name should be, a voice said, "Perhaps we should name him Adam, after the first man." and murmurs of "yes" and "agreed" expressed their unity in this.

"That's a good idea, but let us give a sense of progress and growth. I would like to call him after both Jesus and Mohammed to represent the coming together of very different factions of Earth's population."

"That would mean that his name would be Adam Jesus Ali," Jaimie agreed. They all sat contemplating for a while. Then one of the women exclaimed, "It says so much about what is happening here," and people signalled their agreement.

Alden's wife, Ruth, with wonderment in her voice, said, "This boy is the living embodiment of something, and I've been trying to find an expression for it. It is that the sum is greater than the parts and this baby has the heritage of both Earth and Agape. He has saved us from believing that, while Earth had need of Agape, Agape recognized no need of Earth. But Agape did need us if only for the diversity of a new gene pool. I'm sure it will turn out to be a metaphor for many other needs."

One of the men remarked, "It was a lucky thing that the settlers to Agape recognized the value of diversity and took as much of it as they could. It is also fortunate that a new diversity is being presented to us with which to grow. What a calling we have! I must say I find it exciting."

At that moment, Adam hiccupped and all eyes were turned toward him. Across his face settled one of those beatific baby looks, that we always argue are either a smile or gas. But those who saw him felt sure it was a smile.