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Mahmud, right, stands by the empty water taps as workers from the Tell dream of washing up.

One Day at a Time

by Joyce Rochat

At the Heshbon dig there are some things in large supply—sand, heat, camels. Sometimes even excitement. Other things, like money and water, are alarmingly scarce and about equal in value. When either one or the other runs out, the morale graph dips. But the Lord takes care of us, one day at a time.

Water runs out daily and we joke around a lot about being dirty. One of my friends pointed out that her lack of a shower was more my problem than hers. But yesterday it ceased to be a joke. Water got so low we began to wonder about the drinking and cooking supply.

That is why Mahmud came back early from the *Tell*, which is the Arabic name for the mound where the digging is going on. Mahmud is the senior representative of the Department of Antiquities. In his official capacity he inspects the property upon which people want to build, and if he thinks there might be ancient relics buried on the site, he has to refuse permission to build there. This makes him unpopular with some disappointed people. To us, however, he is pure gold; he is today's camp hero.

Because he knows the Fire Chief who is in charge of water distribution, Mahmud went into town to talk to

him about getting some water out to the camp before the group came in. "There are about a hundred people out there," he explained, "and digging is very dirty work."

The Chief refused to give us any more water, however. We had had our quota, he said, and he was disgusted with the amount of water these Americans consume. Mahmud exhausted all the official and unofficial arguments but the Chief remained unmoved. Mahmud switched to a more intimate appeal. "We've been friends for a long time," he told the Chief. "I would appreciate it if you could do this for me as a personal favor."

The Chief refused to be moved by that either, though he likes and respects Mahmud. "But these Americans use more water than they can possibly need. One American uses more water in a day than one of us uses in a week. They have to drink so much, and wash themselves and their clothes all the time and brush their teeth every time they eat. Nobody needs all that water. They must learn to live like everyone else while they are here with us in this country."

Mahmud could see there was no use in pursuing his argument any further. The Chief was obviously determined and his word was final law where the

water supply was concerned. He dropped the subject. "O.K., let's just forget it. We won't ruin our friendship arguing over a little thing like water. How've you been lately?"

They chatted for a while about this and that and finally, Mahmud said, "You know we haven't had a game of backgammon for a long time. I miss it."

The Chief's eyes lighted up. He missed the game, too. "You'd like to play now?"

Mahmud thought it over. "Yes," he said finally. "I would like to play. But on one condition.

"What condition?" The Chief sounded suspicious.

"Well, if I lose or if we tie, you don't have to give us any water. If I win, you give us water now so that when the people come in from the *Tell* they will be able to wash."

The Chief laughed. "Back to that, eh?" But he wanted a game of backgammon. "We will play three sets. You will give me a handicap, O.K.? Then I will accept your terms."

Mahmud agreed to that. "I'll give you a handicap of two points to start with. But I warn you. I am going to win."

"We'll see about it," the Chief said.

In the first set, Mahmud won two points and, with the two points he had given the Chief, the score was even. He won the next set and the score was then 4-2 in Mahmud's favor.

"One more set," the Chief said. "I want a chance to catch up." So they played again and Mahmud won two more points. Mahmud had six points; the Chief's score still stood at the two handicap points that Mahmud had given him to start with. Mahmud had won and that day we again had water.

And so we go on, knowing that somehow each day our needs will be supplied—though perhaps not abundantly. Each day we seem to have just enough water to get us through. Each day the budget seems to stretch enough to cover another 24 hours. Each night when "Dr. Larry" faces a mountain of problems, he knows that somehow, tomorrow, a few more of them will be solved. But we need you. When you talk to the Lord in the morning, think of us. When you turn on the endless flow from your water taps, ask Him to raise the waterline in the Heshbon cruse.