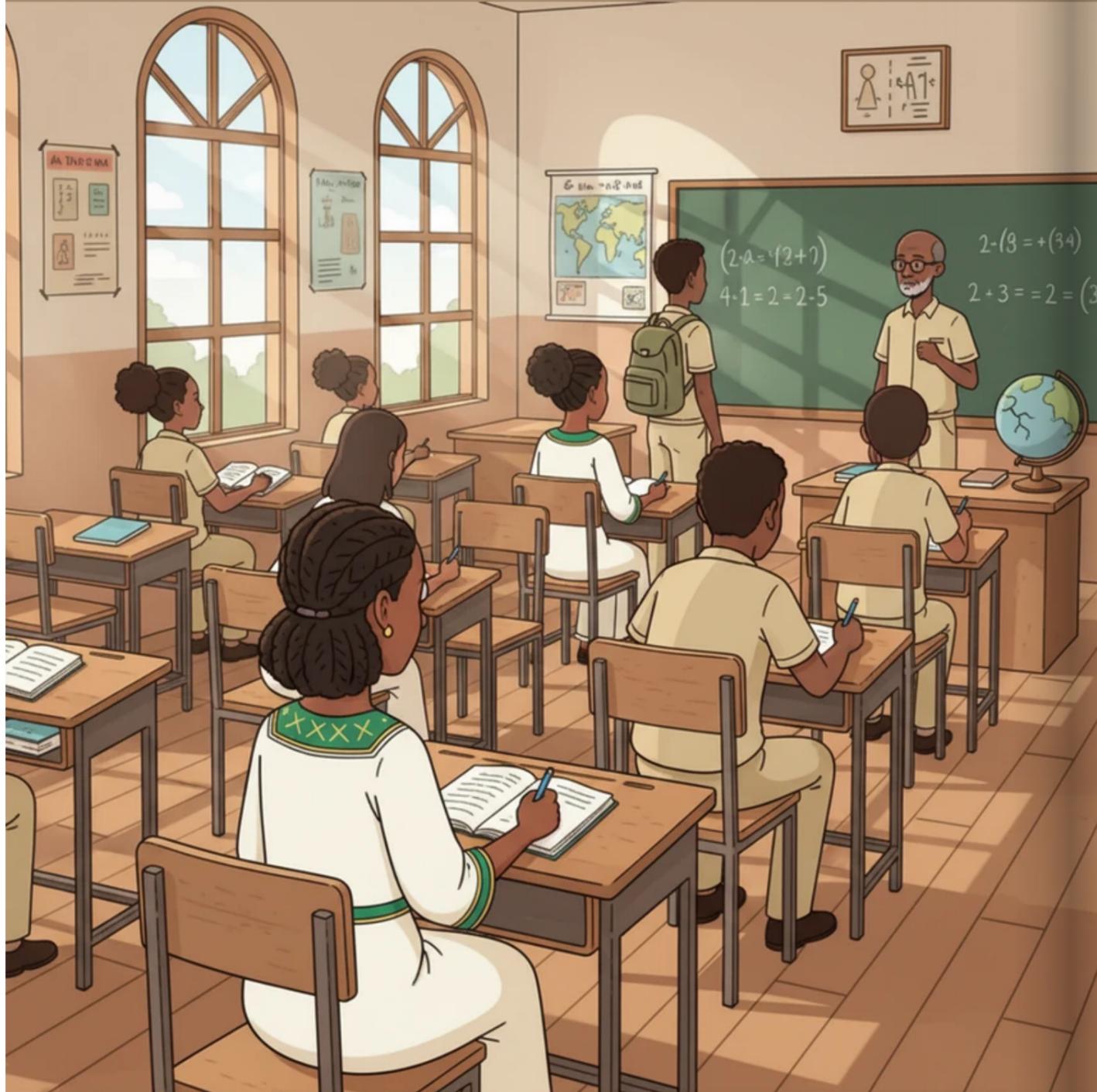


# The Bridge of Golden Dust

Yosi Best



The afternoon sun filters through the dusty windows of the Grade 11 classroom in the Arada district. While the teacher's voice drones on about history, Dawit focuses on the rhythmic creak of the ceiling fan and sketches his father's old blue-and-white Lada taxi in the margins of his notebook.



When the final bell rings, the school courtyard transforms into a surging sea of beige uniforms and excited chatter. Dawit weaves through the crowd, his eyes searching for Selam amidst the chaos of students rushing toward the street side kiosks for a quick snack of kolo.



He finds Selam near the heavy school gate, her braids slightly loosened after a long morning of difficult exams. She looks exhausted, her backpack sagging as they step out into the hum of the city's constant traffic and the low-frequency vibration of the taxis.



As they begin their walk, Selam explains that she cannot go to the café because her aunt needs help with a traditional coffee ceremony for the neighbors. The scent of roasting beans already seems to linger in the air, a reminder of the domestic duties waiting for her at home.



Dawit suggests bringing her chemistry books so they can study complex formulas while the beans turn dark and fragrant over the coals. Selam smiles sadly, noting that her aunt believes scientific equations are a distraction from the soul of a neighborhood conversation.



They trek toward the neighborhood of Megenagna, the afternoon sun bathing the cracked sidewalks in a hazy, golden glow. Around them, the city is a vibrant tapestry of street vendors shouting the prices of avocados and the constant motion of a city in flux.



At a familiar corner, they pass Gashe's shop, where the elderly owner is in the middle of a heated argument with a delivery driver over a stack of water crates. The scene is a typical snapshot of the neighborhood's daily rhythm, loud, spirited, and full of life.



Dawit pauses and asks Selam if she ever feels like they are stuck on a bridge between their parents' rigid expectations and the changing world outside. He wonders aloud when the 'real' Addis Ababa will finally begin for them, or if they are just spectators.



They reach Selam's home, where the blue paint on the corrugated metal gate is peeling away in long, thin strips. She looks at him with a softening expression, reminding him that even if they are standing on a bridge, the view of the distant mountains is still beautiful.



After Selam hands him a handful of dabo kolo and disappears behind the heavy metallic latch, Dawit walks the rest of the way alone. The dry wind kicks up dust around his shoes as he wonders if he will ever be the one driving out of the city toward a new horizon.