



A Lynne Lewis West Africa Mystery

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Murder in the Peace Corps

*Appointment in Togo: Murder in the Fulbright
Program*

*Cotonou Means Death: Murder at the
American Cultural Center*

**MURDER AT A SMALL EMBASSY:
EVIL IN BENIN**

by Rosemary Yaco

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Published November 2006 Anlex Computer Consulting, LLC, Madison,

Printed by CafePress.com in the United States of America. Anlex Computer Consulting, LLC, Madison, Wisconsin

November 2006

Dedicated to the Togolese, Beninese, and Americans that I encountered in my thirteen years in Togo and Benin who inspired me to recreate imaginatively in these mysteries my life as an American in West Africa.

This is a work of fiction. The characters did not exist; the incidents did not happen. But the details of life and ambience are based on my time in West Africa from 1983 through 1996, first as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Togo, then as a Fulbright Professor in Togo, and after that, as Director of the United States Information Agency English Language Program in Benin.

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Chapter 1: Strike Up The Band

The night of the Admiral's concert, as Lynne rode up to the gate of the American Embassy Annex in Cotonou with her new husband in the long black Cadillac limousine with official American flags flying at each side, she was struck by her recent change in status. The gate swung open as they approached it and the guard almost bowed to acknowledge Everett Knowlton, the Political Officer. Lynne was conscious of looking, in her new role as State Department wife, like a different person, with her brown hair freshly shampooed, modishly cut and arranged by the French stylist at the Benin Sheraton, and wearing a black sleeveless dress she had bought in Paris on her honeymoon.

The Beninese guard, teeth gleaming in attractive contrast to his dark face, waved them through. Everett drove the car to the point where the pitted cement drive ended, then parked the car near the area set up for the concert. Another Embassy guard leaped to open the door for Everett. Lynne had been in Africa for eight years, first as a Peace Corps Volunteer, then as a Fulbright Professor, and until a month ago, Director of the English Language Program at the American Cultural Center. Accustomed to living in those lower ranks, Lynne opened her own door and jumped out.

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The stubbly tropical grassland stretching from the side of the modest one-storey painted cement block Embassy Annex Building was transformed by night and strings of twinkling lights to a mysterious place of beauty. The palm trees waved in the welcome breeze. As usual, it was hot and humid. A stage had been set up on the far left of the field, artfully lighted and filled with attractive young American naval musicians in sparkling white uniforms. The Admiral of the African Area American fleet was on a tour of the Bay of Benin with his special flagship band. The musicians were practicing a lively jazz version of Stars and Stripes Forever. It was loud and brassy. Everett had to shout to her. "Let's go and see if we can get a drink right now." Constant thirst was part of the constant heat. "Even though things haven't started, they might make an exception for us." He was confident and should be. In this small Embassy, he was the second in command. He was held in awe by the Beninese staff, but treated more like an undeserving rival by the three other American state department officers vying for the praise and high ratings of the all powerful ambassador.

A festive tent sheltered several rows of seating. Behind that were rows of folding chairs and to the far right there was a long gala decorated serving table covered with printed African cloth, punctuated with vases and bowls of tropical flowers--bougainvillea, hibiscus, and several kinds of exotic lilies.

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Lynne and Everett were attending an official event at the American Embassy in Benin as man and wife for the first time. When they came close to the table, Lynne, startled, wondered what she was seeing. There were several people standing still in postures that showed some kind of emotion--excitement, shock, alarm? Louis, the Beninese of highest rank at the Embassy, assistant to the administrative officer, rushed away from the tableau of seemingly frozen people up to Everett. "Mr. Knowlton. We need you. We just found the ambassador. He fell. He is not well."

"Have you contacted the medical office? Is the nurse still there?" Everett responded. Right behind him, Lynne saw Ambassador Waldo Edwards, lying still on the grass near the festively decorated buffet table. His polished black shoes glowed reflecting the gay holiday lights. Near him was a glass, lying on its side. She could see there was still a little liquid in it.

Because of the knowledge she had gained from running into suspicious deaths in Africa, she picked up the glass and popped it into her purse, wrapped in a clean napkin, so quickly Everett, harried by events and his duties, didn't notice. She knew, if the ambassador was as dead as he looked and this turned out to be suspected foul play, no one else would preserve important evidence while it was uncontaminated. She was careful to keep the purse level. As soon as possible she would put a better cover on it to protect the brown liquid remaining.

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Everett sent her to run to the telephone inside and alert the guards to send a messenger to the Embassy/Peace Corps medical office. Soon, the nurse and a worker arrived with a stretcher from the medical unit which was stationed on another side of the building. The nurse, Lynne's old friend Sally, pushed Everett aside, looked down at the motionless man on the grass, looked up, and said what seemed obvious to Lynne, "The ambassador is dead."

Everett, second in command at the Embassy responded with authority, after years of service in emergencies. "We need a doctor and a death certificate. The Beninese government will want it as well as Washington." One of the guards was dispatched on his motorcycle to the house of the Official Embassy doctor, retired from the Ghanaian army, who accepted patients at the medical office several hours a week.

Now that it was almost the stated time for the concert, the crowd had arrived. Lynne noticed Stella, the arrogant USAID Administrative officer with her amusing, tattooed, wild man husband Gerry and Dr. Roland Dobato who had taught in her English Language Program, in a stately white embroidered complet and bou bou combination, like a glorious embroidered pajama suit topped by a long flowing robe. Lita, an old Peace Corps friend who now had a job with an American non governmental aid agency caught her eye and managed to convey sympathy and concern in a gesture. Trying to

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avoid the pushing crowd she saw pale, gentle, Matthew, head of Catholic Relief Services, despite his unusual religious combination of Evangelistic Christian and Buddhist. About two hundred people milled around, some drawn by curiosity to the area near the table. The Embassy was policed by its own guard staff, good natured Beninese who deferred to any American, and were given little training in police procedures, and headed by the administrative officer who despite his title as Security Officer, had had only a two week seminar to prepare him for that responsibility. That administrative officer, Brett Bickford, an intense little man with beady eyes and an aggressive manner came running. Panting and trying to catch his breath, he still managed to shout orders in the air. "Keep back. Let me through, don't leave!"

Despite Brett Bickford's efforts to safeguard the area close to the place where the ambassador fell, every moment more people arrived and pushed up close. Everett sent Louis to hurry to the commander of the naval unit, asking him to send the naval doctor and also to tell his men to control the crowd. Before the deputized navy men could set up a guard line, the area was trampled by many careless feet.

Brett frantically continued barking orders to no one in particular as far as Lynne could see, "Examine him. Watch for suspicious characters. There are terrorists around!"

As it turned out, the Ghanaian doctor and the visiting navy doctor appeared together.

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They both examined the still body. The two doctors did traditional on-the-spot pulse tests. Then the Ghanaian doctor took a small mirror from his pocket and held it an inch from the unmoving mouth. The two doctors nodded, solemnly. "Yes," the naval doctor said. "The ambassador is dead."

Suddenly, it seemed out of nowhere, a strikingly attractive woman with a mane of red curly hair appeared. She gave some penetrating shrieks. "You have finally done it. You have killed him!" And she threw herself dramatically and picturesquely on the inert body of the ambassador.

Chapter 2: Tell Me What You Know

The next events were hazy in Lynne's mind, with many people pushing, crowding, and milling around. Some Lynne knew, some she didn't. A group of young naval men, their once smart white uniforms crumpled in the relentless tropical heat, after a struggle, convinced the onlookers to go back to a semicircle some feet away from the fallen ambassador.

Brett's Beninese secretary, Harriet, looking splendid in an embroidered damask robe and towering headdress showed up and tried to calm the shrieking red-haired woman who someone identified as the ambassador's wife.

"I thought she was stationed in Paris," was the surprised comment of the nurse, Sally, a friend of Lynne's from Peace Corps days, five years ago.

Lynne answered her, "She is, but I heard she visits occasionally. I never saw her before."

"Where did she come from?" someone asked, in English.

"She just came in the front gate," someone answered in French. "She came too late," someone said in Fon. Lynne was used to this Tower of Babel language situation. The Peace Corps had taught her French and she had recently been taking Fon lessons and could understand a few phrases. She looked around, trying to see who had made that last remark.

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Harriet convinced the flamboyant lady to go with her into the Annex building. Lynne wished she could go along. She wanted to know what she had meant by her remark, "You have finally done it" and who was it she felt had wanted to hurt the ambassador. But Lynne stayed close to her husband, now looking almost majestically official, conscious of his new responsibilities in this emergency situation. One part of her felt this whole Embassy was somewhat ridiculous. Here, in a tiny, impoverished country, there was an Embassy with four self important American officials and twenty happy to be employed Beninese.

The two doctors followed the stretcher bearers to the medical office. Everett went with them. Lynne tagged along, pleased to be part of the official group. After all, he was her husband and she had discovered the body with him. She really felt she could be helpful, having been involved in mysterious, violent episodes in her previous years in Togo and Benin. Since her earlier years in Africa, she was an off and on girlfriend of Everett's, but he had scrupulously avoided giving her special privileges in public. She felt her life would be different now, with the status of being the wife of a US State Department officer.

The doctors examined the body more carefully. The naval doctor did the talking. There were no marks of violence on the ambassador and no obvious signs of foul play. They would fill out a death certificate stating

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death by causes unknown. But a real determination would require medical records and also an autopsy. "How soon can you get the body to Washington?" For some reason, Everett looked at Lynne, questioning.

Lynne said, "There will be a plane tomorrow night at eight that flies to Paris where it can match up with a plane to Washington."

"Ok," Everett said to the nurse. "Make the arrangements and follow the usual procedures. You probably have never had a death, but you have done medivacs."

"Yes sir. I have the proper forms." Sally had only been on the job in Benin for six months.

Everett started making telephone calls from the medical office phone, a frustrating business because the Embassy switchboard was closed. The medical line was functioning but required special handling for long distance. Still talking on the telephone he said, "Lynne, ask a driver to take you home. I'll be tied up for a long time. In a few minutes I'll go to my office in the main Embassy building and start notifying Beninese diplomats of this."

The only Embassy car available for her was the van that had delivered the food. She squeezed in amidst empty containers. Still an outsider! Lynne felt miffed and unappreciated.

Her mind was racing, her imagination flowing. As they pulled away, she heard a naval musician, perhaps joking, perhaps wanting to solemnize the event, playing the funeral march

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on an oboe. A local sea bird squawked as if in accompaniment.

The van dropped her off in front of the big, showy official house provided for them as part of the deal for the second in command at the little Embassy. She greeted by Kwami, the guard, grinning a warm greeting. He was neat and smart in the short sleeved khaki outfit, with a tiny embroidered American flag on the shirt pocket. "Welcome home, sir!" His accent reminded her he had learned French in primary school and English much later and not very well. As Lynne unlocked the door the telephone rang. She hesitated to answer it. Was it really for her or this household? The week before the house had been empty and hurriedly painted and repaired. Everett's furniture had been moved from the other State Department mansion he lived in before the wedding. But, maybe the call was for Everett. It might be important, from Washington. She ran and answered it on the fifth ring.

"Lynne Lewis?"

"Well actually, I'm Mrs. Knowlton now, but I may continue to be called Lynne Lewis. I haven't made my mind up yet." She thought she recognized the voice. Someone from the past, someone a little ridiculous, a little ominous, who?

"Lynne, this is Tony Mariani. I'm in Washington. I'm regional security man for West Africa. Mc Duff's old job. He was kicked upstairs."

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“Tony! Mr. Mariani! The memories flooded back. He had been the security officer in Togo who had solved the murders that occurred when she was a Fulbright professor there. She had helped him with her knowledge of local people and customs.

“It seems everywhere you go, Lynne, people die.”

“There’s a lot of that going around in Africa.”

“Yes, but the people that die around you tend to be Americans on American property. Your administrative officer, Brett Bickford called me. I don’t like the sound of Waldo Edwards’ death. What do you think about it? He was under fifty and doctors had just checked him out in Paris and said he was ok for duty.”

Lynne was pleased that he called. At first, when he came to Togo to investigate a case, he was scornful of her help. She tried to speak concisely. “Soon after I entered the concert area, I saw him deathly still on the grass.”

“They are going to send me to Benin before all the evidence is destroyed in case the death wasn’t natural. Everyone is nervous because of all the talk of terrorism, even bioterrorism. I want to ask you to do something for me. You may not be up to doing it.”

“What do you mean?”

“They are going to ship off the body early tomorrow evening to get it to Washington for the autopsy as soon as possible.”

“Yes, I understand that.”

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“I can’t get in until a later plane, at midnight. Will you, do you mind, looking at the body again, seeing if you notice anything unusual or meaningful?”

“What should I look for?”

“You have good instincts. I noticed that in Togo. And Mc Duff said you know Benin well. Maybe you’ll see something.”

“It sounds unpleasant, but I’ll try. But Tony, I have no official status. Will they let me look at him?”

“I’ll do something about that”, he said, firmly. “Also, In the meantime, see what you can find out about Ambassador Waldo Edwards. What kind of person was he? Did he have any dirty little secrets? Or dirty big ones.”

“Tony, did you hear about the fuss after the doctors arrived?”

Some of the old impatience crept into his voice. “Fuss? Lynne, I have a call on both my other lines. We can gossip when we see each other.”

She undressed and tried to relax on the luxurious queen sized bed in the carefully coordinated bedroom, comfortably air conditioned as so few places were in this constantly hot country. Her mind was whirling with possibilities, most unpleasant. She would be working a few yards away from the place the dead ambassador had fallen. She shivered.

A little after twelve, Everett came home. When she started to tell him about the Security Officer’s call he said he too wiped out to talk to her. He gave her a little peck on her cheek, lay

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down, and was almost instantly asleep. A few minutes later, the telephone rang. This time, Lynne reached for it immediately. "Yes," she said. There was a hesitation on the line. Then a woman's voice said in English. "Oh. Never mind." And the phone was dead. Lynne stared into the darkness for a long time, wondering what kind of life she had gotten herself into.

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Chapter 3: An Unsafe Work Environment

When the bright sun woke Lynne at dawn, 6:30, as it always did it in Benin which was right on the Equator, she saw that Everett was gone. His short note said he was sorry he had to leave so early, but hoped to be home for lunch. Good. After they both had a good meal she planned to ask him who he thought the rude midnight caller was. She decided to put him and the horrible events of the previous day out of her mind and concentrate on getting ready for her first day at work in her new job. When she showered in the tiled bath room, despite everything she delighted in the, unusual for Africa, plentiful running hot and cold water. Another treat was her breakfast of fresh croissants, butter and French imported preserves and cut up papaya served with coffee on the dining table with a white linen cloth by Marcel, the cook. He reported for work early every weekday, producing three meals a day for them as well succulent dinner parties for up to fifty on short notice when requested. He was always pleasant. His cheerful service improved her mood a little.

Since her marriage, she now had Everett's nicely purring American Ford for her own use. The Embassy provided her husband the chauffeured Cadillac. Both had been shipped from America at government expense. Today she drove to the Embassy Annex and got past

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the gate without any question because the guard was an old friend. Raoul welcomed her warmly. His dramatic high cheek boned face had what Lynne privately called pussy cat scarification, three thin lines on each side of his mouth, that indicated that he was the rare Embassy guard from the north of the country. He had greeted her the same way he had many times when she came to deposit with the Embassy Cashier bags of 1000 CFA notes paid in tuition for the English Language Program at the American Cultural Center the previous two years. After she drove the car into the Annex area, the guards used mirrors to check the underside for bombs. Someday she would ask them why they didn't check for bombs before cars entered the gate rather than after. She was amused at the thought of another bizarre thing in this country where the American government was almost as inexplicable as the French and African speaking Beninese population.

The one story Annex building, made of cement blocks painted a pale yellow, was no larger than a suburban American super market but it was headquarters for much of the Embassy business like purchasing Embassy supplies, hiring the Beninese personnel that routinely performed most Embassy functions, managing repairs of all American Government property, and though a window in the cashier's office paying mountains of dirty and mended CEFA, African francs, to all the Beninese guards, secretaries, and assistants.

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Since some officials absconded with Beninese Funds, all local banks were closed.

Today, she had just stepped into the building when she saw the hostile beady brown eyes of Brett Bickford the Administrative Officer, the only American State Department officer in charge of all these functions.

Brett spitefully challenged her. "We are not letting the public in today. We are holding an investigation."

Lynne waved a letter from that same gentleman. "Mr. Administrative Officer, you hired me. I'm the new community liaison officer.

"Ah yes. The wife of a fellow State Department officer. Come into my office." He led her into room with a big desk. He sat in the majestic seat behind it, looking a bit like a child in his father's place, since he was a little man. He didn't ask Lynne to sit.

"You married the political officer and they gave you this job. They haven't found work for my wife, a graduate of the University of Taiwan. Does that seem fair to you?"

Lynne bit her tongue. She knew this furious young man did not want the truth, that his wife annoyed everyone by her cold, greedy behavior. And, as an English language professional, she noticed Blossom's English was often hard to understand. She seemed to just take a wild guess on how to put words together and often made an unusual choice. When he remained quiet, obviously expecting an answer, she said, "I am qualified. I ran the English Language

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Program and before that was a Fulbright Professor in Togo.”

“Whatever. They hired you,” he said with annoyed resignation. “You can start work. We’re disrupted because of the death of the ambassador. We’re expecting a security officer from Washington to come this evening to help with the investigation. Ask my secretary, Harriet, to show you your office. Look through the files and see what the former Community Liaison Officer did. I’m too busy to be bothered with your make-work chores. Go ahead and do whatever she did. But, don’t cause trouble or offend anyone.”

The phone rang, and at the same moment Harriet tapped on the door and entered. Today she wore an American style dress in a dull brown that fit the mood of the gloomy expression on her smooth skinned dark face.

Lynne fled.

Lynne knew where the CLO office was and went directly to it without waiting to be taken by Harriet who she knew had the reputation of being sullen and unhelpful. She had certainly been a non-cooperative student when she was required to take the advanced course in English that Lynne had taught. She had been the Director of the Cultural Center’s secretary, working hard, but seeming to have a constant grudge against the world and every person that needed her to do something. Recently, after problems in getting a coveted new job, Harriet had been made Brett’s secretary. The two of them deserved each other.

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She went toward the back of the large main room, to a small corridor leading to several offices where one door had on it a painted sign: Community Liaison Office. Lynne turned the door handle but then decided to do some exploring before going in. And, too, she was thirsty. She knew the Annex, unlike Beninese buildings in Cotonou, had a water cooler. She had gotten fine cold water from it in a nook in the back of the big lobby room, not far from the CLO office. It was the same kind the English Language Program where had, which required a janitor to periodically replace the four gallon bottle of distilled water, imported from America. She noticed there was a small refrigerator next to the water cooler. She had just opened it when she heard a harsh voice behind her. Brett. What sharp eyes he had, to see her here, in the back of the long room.

“What are you doing?”

“Looking for some water.”

“In the frigo?”

“Just curious.”

“I am making the frigo a crime scene. Now you have contaminated it. Washington asked me to seal up the whole crime scene.”

Her mouth an O, first of stifled protest, then of dismay, Lynne was silent. Of course it was important to investigate the frigo if there was a question of willful killing of the ambassador. It should have been sealed yesterday. Since she had it open, she stole a look. Yes, there was a row of cola drinks, all ready perhaps in case the ambassador, who

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worked in the main Embassy building, visited. Everyone knew he loved cola.

"Wow. You're right. Those things might be poisoned."

"I'll tape it shut and put a sign on it. When the investigator from Washington comes, he can deal with it."

"How about the water cooler. Do you think it's safe to drink the water?"

"No, he said, pulling himself up officiously." No. Leave it alone. That must be checked by the officer too."

Oh dear! It would be a thirsty day. Well, she had had many in Africa.

Brett said, "I've been preserving evidence to turn over to the security officer. We sealed the container that had ice in it and all the bottles of soda that were open. We even saved unopened bottles and have sealed the contents of the punch bowls. The medical office lab technician packed a bottle of liquid from each. Probably when Mariani comes he will fly these things to the labs in Washington on the next plane that makes good connections to Washington." He didn't mention the missing glass that had been next to the dead ambassador. Of course he didn't know that Lynne had it.

Brett went back to his office and shut the door. He couldn't see her right now, at least. But after Brett's hostile warning and orders, her planned excursion was more difficult. She felt she should go to the medical office and check the body as Mariani had asked her. She went

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back to her office door, then tried turning left on the corridor to see if there was an exit. She found one, and slipped out. She felt a blast of heat and was momentarily blinded by the glare of the hot sun. Then she saw she was on a narrow, weedy corridor in front of a cracked cement block fence and behind the building. She followed it to the right, picking off bristles and burrs, going toward the front of the lot until she reached the medical office. She almost stepped on a big, colorful pushup lizard, sunning himself in the path.

She was pleased that she had evaded Brett. But now she would have to look death in the face again. Maybe a close look at Waldo's body would reveal some secrets. She had never deliberately looked at a cold body, laid out a slab for in a morgue or ready for shipment. She started to shiver, despite the beating heat. She took a deep breath and reached gave a strong push the door that had on a taped, printed sign, US Embassy-Peace Corps Medical Office. She couldn't let Officer Mariani down.

As she stepped in, mustering a decisive stride, she was greeted with a puff of cool air and the sound of a high-pitched scream.

Chapter 4: A Beautiful Lady Scientist

Lynne found the nurse, Sally trying to give a shot to a screaming and protesting lovely, tall, young woman with a flowing shower of golden hair, and a fair Scandinavian complexion that made the hair color seem natural, even necessary.

“I hate needles. I don’t need this. I’ll only be in the country a few months!”

“These shots are required of everyone. You have to have them, or go back by the next plane. It’s regulations.”

Sally acted strong and confident. She was, like many other Americans who liked to work in sub West Africa, someone Lynne had known earlier in another role. They had been friends and companions from Peace Corps days in Togo. Then they lost track of each other. When they first ran into each other in Benin a few months ago, Sally told Lynne about her life in the intervening years. After her somewhat reluctant marriage to a controlling young doctor, she went back to college and got a degree as a nurse practitioner. The marriage ended quickly in divorce and, partly because of her Africa experience, she was appointed to serve in the Peace Corps/ Embassy Medical Office in Benin. Most of the time, she ran it alone, but was helped by visits from a Ghanaian ex-army doctor three mornings a week.

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Sally was even prettier than she had been as a volunteer, small and lithe with high energy. Lynne had heard the husband of Stella, the USAID Administrative officer, Gerry, the irreverent manager of the American Club, call her that staple of science fiction movies, “the beautiful lady scientist.”

Lynne watched while Sally administered the shot by asking Gabriel, the lab attendant to hold her arm firmly. Once her shot was accomplished, like someone coming out of an enchantment, the young woman turned on a bright smile, regathered her careful charm, thanked Sally and walked out, her high heeled shoes making long, graceful strides. Sally thought, “She'll break her neck of the uneven pavement here.”

“Your job has some interesting moments, doesn't it?”

Sally giggled in reply as she had back in the days the when other volunteers called her Sunny and said, “Some of these contract types are something else!”

“Sally, Tony Mariani, the security officer who is flying in from Washington tonight wants me to help check out the death of the ambassador. Can you tell me something about his health? I heard that he had some sort of attack a few months ago and got treatment for it in Paris. Did he have a mortal condition?”

“Lynne, that was all cleared up. They couldn't really be positive, but it turned out he was drinking about twelve colas a day and neglecting his diet. They said he had gotten his

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gall bladder in bad shape. After a good lecture, some treatment and medication, he was approved for active duty again.”

“No apparent heart problems, then?”

“Well, they will have to do an autopsy. But he came to me for regular heart checks and had an EKG in Paris. We had no record of a problem. This really upsets me. Remember when we were in the Peace Corps together? That ambassador died then, too. I start wondering if I’m bad luck for ambassadors,” Sally said, half jokingly.

“Sally, Mariani wants me to look at the body again.”

“I guess it won’t hurt any thing.” She took her to the back room where a long canvas bag with a zipper, imprinted with the words US Government lay on a table. Lynne took a deep breath. She liked to feel she was up to whatever her work in Africa called for, but this was difficult. Although she had seen the ambassador dead on the grass and then carried away. But somehow this seemed different and more gruesome. She took a big swipe at the zipper. The smell was distressing. Even though the medical office was air conditioned, somehow the room was warm just as almost everything in Benin was always warm. Taking deep breaths to prevent nausea, she looked at the body carefully. Did his skin look green? It wasn’t a pleasant sight.

“You’ve got him in a hospital gown.”

“Yes. It was easier after they gave him a quick full body examination. If you want to see

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his things, they're on this table." She saw them neatly folded. She felt in all the pockets. They were empty. Sally said, "See that plastic bag, that's what was in the pocket."

The bag had a handkerchief, a set of house keys on a ring with a metallic American flag, an Embassy identification card and what looked like some notes for a speech in French, about general good will between countries. There was a wrist watch set with two dials, one set on Beninese time and one on Washington time, six hours earlier. There was also a small, ugly three headed figure, wound with twine in which nails had been inserted. Voo doo!

Sally was getting ready for her next patient. Lynne called over to her, "Is that all you've got?"

"That's all."

She went back for a long look at the dead ambassador. How slight and helpless he looked, dead and starting to decay, and without his finely tailored clothes. "Well, Waldo, I didn't know you well in life, but now I will work to really understand you and learn why you are dead here in Cotonou."

"Did you say something?" Sally asked.

"Just talking, to the departed. Tony Mariani starts by assuming in a murder case that the victim was somehow being punished for past behavior. I wonder what he is guilty of."

"From what I've heard, he seemed to be a decent man." In one way, he was a coward. Like that silly lady today, he had a terrible fear of

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needles. Only the threat of losing his post for not following regulations would bring him in here for his inoculations. I used to tease him, Say, sorry I can't just slip your booster into a coke."

Chapter 5: A Woman of a Certain Age

She returned into the blasting outdoor heat and hurried down the narrow, rutted corridor. She swerved to avoid two push up lizards, performing an act of love. She entered the little side entrance without meeting anyone, went to her office and turned the knob. It was unlocked. Good. This time she went in. The part of the room near the door had magazine racks and file cabinets and a table with several arm chairs around it. There was a desk piled high with what was probably the unopened mail from the two months since the previous officer left. The bright African sun streamed in through the windows. But, here, as an official building of the American Embassy, electricity and large amounts of money provided a stream of air that was almost cool.

She decided to begin her duties that Brett and others called Mickey Mouse and make-work. She could see a fine desk in the back corner of the room and briskly walked to it. She busied herself pulling wrappers and envelopes from catalogs on the top of the mail pile. She chose from the most recent ones which had left their senders in the US from three to six weeks before arriving. There was a varied assortment of good looking catalogs, extremely rare in this country. And in English too. She arranged them on the rack, removing some others that were a dated the year before, and covered with dust.

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She was pleased with the colorful display. How attractive the illustrations were. Some even showed people wearing heavy coats. She hadn't worn a sweater since she moved to Benin. She was enthralled with this bright display that she knew Americans at home called junk mail!

She was startled when the door opened and she saw a middle-aged woman wearing a badly fitting American woman's suit walk into the open door. "I'll be leaving tonight on the plane and I'm bored to tears. Do you have something to read?" she said in a distinct and well modulated voice.

"I don't think we've met." Lynne looked at her carefully. She was very pale, older than most Americans in Benin and looked gray and dowdy.

"I'm Myra Delaney. I was sent here as an expert on health, a consultant to the Embassy. But I'm going home now."

"You have finished your assignment? Or is it because the ambassador is dead?" Lynne asked.

"If he had died earlier, I might have been able to do my job."

"What do you mean?"

"When I came here, the ambassador took one look at me and decided he didn't want me. I had been invited to attend a dinner party at his house to meet others in the health field. Did you ever hear of disinviting someone? That's what he did. A few hours before the party I got a message that the ambassador had changed

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his mind and didn't want me to attend. I learned he decided to give my post to someone else. He told me the travel desk would arrange for a seat to America for me. I'll leave tonight."

"I hadn't heard of this."

"I'm going to complain, to sue. I've been completely humiliated. At one meeting, when they asked for suggestions on what big projects we should offer to help with in this country, I started a presentation on AIDS prevention, had charts and statistics showing this would be a huge problem for the country in a few years if preventative measures aren't put in place."

"That sounds like a fine proactive plan."

"The ambassador mocked me. He asked if I was looking for a fashionable cause. He said, what the country needs is more people who can read and write and the money should go to elementary education. She looked indignantly at Lynne.

"Oh, poor Benin. Of course it needs both."

"Well, they are completely ignoring AIDS. What a narrow-minded man. I could just kill him!"

She realized what she said. "I forgot for a moment that he is dead."

"Yes. It's hard to realize." Lynne worked to keep her answer matter of fact.

"Young to die suddenly like that."

"Yes. When did you see him last?"

"Actually, maybe I was one of the last people to see him alive. I was here Thursday night just before the concert that was later cancelled. I had the same mission I have today.

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I hoped the Community Liaison Office would have something to read. There's nothing to do in Cotonou.. I don't read French and French books are all the stores have. The ambassador was here and he gave me such a nasty look I left without trying to find a book."

Lynne looked at her intently, trying to read the round, wrinkled, face. Here was someone that hated the ambassador and admitted she was with him just a short time before he died. She said she left almost immediately. Was she lying? Lynne said, "I have some catalogues, but I don't have any books here; they're all at the American Club. Your mission was doomed to fail."

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Chapter 6: A Real African

The woman left immediately, but remained in Lynne's thoughts. She was eager to see the Security Chief who should be arriving that evening. Now she had at least one suspect to tell him about even though all her intuition and instincts told her that drab woman would not murder.

She saw it was noon so she went home, hoping she would finally see her husband again. She was beginning to get used to the abrupt changes from the American climatized Annex into the naked natural Beninese heat. She navigated through the throng of lunch goers. She saw one of the thirty thousand motorcycles in Cotonou, A lithe African man, unhelmed, and behind him a woman with three children, one a baby strapped to her back, in the ordinary way with a broad pagne, panel of printed cloth with one child on her lap and another somehow clinging to her.

At her spacious Embassy official home that still amazed her, she was greeted at the door by a suave, impassive Marcel. He told her the Embassy had called to say that Monsieur would not be home to eat. She sat at the damask covered dining room table. Marcel had prepared a salad and cheese sandwich. He probably felt there was no point making a big meal just for her.

She packed up some water to drink now that she knew the water cooler was out of

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bounds until the security chief could have it tested.

And once again, she walked out into the blasting one o'clock heat and got into her superheated car. Unlike most of the cars she had ridden in Africa, this one had an air conditioner so was soon a tolerable temperature. As always, she loved the street scene, palm trees, bright multicolored bougainvillea, hibiscus and some Africans in bright print dresses and complets, like pajama suits, or embroidered bou bous, flowing robes. A thin sheep that looked much like a shaggy goat tottered across the rode.

"Despite it all, I'm still glad to be in Africa", Lynne said to herself, wonderingly.

Now, the guards at the Annex were used to her and opened the gate and cursorarily inspected the car's undercarriage. A line of Beninese employees was waiting to deal with the cashier. Again, there was a glorious show of fashionable African clothes, mixed with careful attempts to follow western, that is European or American fashions. Lynne noticed that every dress and shirt was spotless and well pressed.

Lynne scattered smiles and nods at everyone. Africans didn't like to be treated as non-people as Americans in big cities were accustomed to. She knew most of them by sight, some of them had worked with her at the Cultural Center and she had seen others at the Embassy and its functions. She was glad to see that neither sulky Harriet nor hostile Brett were in plain view.

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Entering her office, she planned to get some real Community Office work done. But she was distracted by her thoughts about Everett. The French called this period at the beginning of a marriage *la lune de miel*. The moon of honey. There was supposed to be a month of special sweetness after the wedding. She and Everett had had a short wedding trip to Paris. Now they had been married only 15 days and already, it seemed she was unimportant to her husband. He hadn't even called her, but had his secretary call the cook.

She thought he would call her and apologize for his absences, but the hours went by and her phone didn't ring. She was making a little headway on the pile of mail when she heard a light tap. The door opened. It was Louis, the head Beninese administrator at the Annex.

Since she first met him three years ago, Lynne had thought Louis was a really good looking man. He was short, like many Beninese, about six inches shorter than she was and had a delicate bone structure. His skin was the color of newly cut mahogany and his high-cheek boned, heart shaped face showed he was a member of an Eve or Fon southern ethnic group.

"I'm happy to see you, Louis."

"And I, you." He had the dignity of long responsibility working for the official Americans. "I want to welcome you privately and tell you to ask me any time you need help or information."

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"Thank you Louis. You were always kind to me when we worked at the Cultural Center. There is one thing you might be able to tell me. The ambassador's wife, where is she now? What is she doing?"

"That unhappy lady has barricaded herself inside the ambassador's mansion and will see no one except her cook. Brett had me deliver to her guard an official notice that she only had the right to live in the ambassador's residence one more month and then she must move out her and Waldo Edwards's things."

"That Brett. That's a cruel way to treat a new widow."

Louis' was impassive. "He is the boss. I do what I am told."

"Yes. Well, another thing, I need your viewpoint. The security officer asked me to find out what I can. What do you think was the cause of the ambassador's death?"

"Let me close the door and I will tell you." He shut it, waited a moment, then said quietly and firmly, "You are an American and will not like my answer. But I will give it to you anyway."

"There are things here in Africa that are hard to explain, Lynne. We Africans know about them. But you too should understand-- you are almost a real African after eight years here."

"Yes, please tell me why you think he died."

His eyes were sad and serious. "Voo doo!" She could see he wasn't joking."

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She asked him, doubtfully, “Do you mean there are people here in the Embassy that use witchcraft?”

“I am a Christian and my faith is strong enough to overcome voo doo curses. But others have suffered.”

“Louis, it isn’t like you to spread unfounded rumors. Please tell me more about it. Who do you suspect?”

“Lynne, these are not rumors. We have a person on the staff here that everyone knows is an evil witch. “

“Who is the witch? Do you think she did something to the Ambassador?”

“Lynne, I have been unwise. I will not tell you more. But be careful of what you eat and drink. When witches do not succeed with their spells, they sometimes use poison.”

Chapter 7: Moon of Honey

A voo doo witch here! Louis left Lynne quickly after his disturbing remark. She wrote out a report about it and also told about finding the voo doo object in the ambassador's things, addressed an inter office envelope to Security Officer, Tony Mariani, and added the word, Urgent in big block letters. She dropped it in the Inter Embassy mail. Tony Mariani could read it as soon as he got in from America and started working on the case.

At four o'clock, she got a call. "Everett, how nice to hear from you." She hoped she didn't sound sarcastic. Her husband said, "Sweetheart, I'm sorry I'm so busy. I will definitely be home tonight for dinner, about eight. Marcel will make us a fine dinner before he leaves. I've asked him to put some champagne to chill in the frigo. After all, it is our lune de miel!"

When she left soon after five, the sun was still yellow and bright and only a breeze that made the palm fronds dance kept the heat from being unbearable. Her car had been in a little shade but was still hot enough to fry an egg, she was sure.

In a moment or two she adjusted to it and watched the panorama of hundreds of Beninese in costumes made of hundreds of different bright prints, zipping by on loaded motorcycles and making their way on the dusty, broken, crowded streets.

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“Madame, I make a fine dinner for the ambassador.” Marcel seemed to revel in the importance Everett now had since the death.

Lynne had plenty of time to enjoy the luxury of a long, cold shower and dress in a robe bought for her honeymoon.

Marcel left at six, with their dinner in the oven and refrigerator. At seven Lynne lit some candles on the formally laid table with the Embassy crest on the dishes.

Soon after, Everett arrived, carrying a yellow, pink and red bouquet of the kind sold on street corners. “In partial atonement,” he said as he handed the bright bunch of bright tropical flowers. He kissed her, and looked deep into her eyes for a long moment. “Wow. He’s actually thinking about me for once,” Lynne thought.

But then he said “Lynne, once again my job is overwhelming. As you know, this should be a time of relative tranquility in Benin. Two years ago there was the first free election in seventeen years and democracy won out and our candidate, Soglo won. Then they had a second election. The results will be announced any day. We’re afraid that Kereko the old Communist dictator, who somehow got on the ballot, will cause big problems when Soglo is announced as the winner again. As acting Ambassador, I’ll have to deal with all that, with Washington and the rest of the world looking closely at the situation.”

Maybe he was trying out phrases for his next speech or report. He wanted her sympathy

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for his difficult situation. But, she could tell that part of him was pleased to be thrust into such a visible and important role. She knew he had felt his career had been stalled. This was the year a decision about his tenure would be made by Washington. If he handled this important temporary assignment well, he would probably get tenure and a good promotion.

She made wifely, commiserating, but noncommittal noises.

Then she added, "And here we are again, with a mysterious death on our hands. I know it's really too much for one person to deal with. And I'm trying to reconcile myself to not seeing much of you, even though we are married at last."

"Well, we have tonight. I refused to go to a dinner affair, saying it was because of mourning for the ambassador."

While Everett changed into a casual shirt, Lynne got out the salad and the chicken dish and rice. It was fragrant. She hoped Marcel hadn't put too much hot pepper in it.

As they started eating, Lynne wanted some relaxed, loving talk. Everett was really a fine looking man, and could be charming in certain moods. He seemed preoccupied and said, "The ambassador's death trumps all the other things the Embassy should be doing right now. Washington wants everything to be handled carefully. They're sending a security officer from Washington. We know him. Tony Mariani."

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“Yes, I know.”

“You know. Why? How?”

“He called me as soon as he heard of the death.”

“So you are the reason they are treating this as a crime, trying to make a scandal of it, with no real evidence?”

Lynne was silent for a moment. She didn't like his suspicion. She counted to ten, then calmly said, “No. He had already made up his mind to come before he called me. Speaking of evidence, I have a confession to make. I knew that everything was confused and everyone was thinking in terms of a heart attack. But just in case I...”

Everett sounded impatient, “You what?”

“The glass that lay on the grass near the ambassador still seemed to have a little liquid in the bottom. I wrapped it carefully in my handkerchief to be sure I didn't ruin any finger prints and put it into my purse. I'll give it to Tony to be analyzed.”

Everett barely controlled his fury. “Lynne, your friend, Lita, accused you of playing detective. Here you go again.”

Lynne didn't have a good answer. It was true. Her only defense was that if she didn't help when she could here, with the casual crime detecting facilities the Embassy used, the investigators would miss important information she had access to. She just looked pleadingly at her new husband.

“I don't like to displease you. But I feel I had to.”

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As they drank the coffee and ate Marcel's delicious flan, Everett was mostly silent, looking as if he was deciding how to react. They both got ready for bed early, each taking one of the splendid marble bathrooms and taking advantage of the plentiful supply of water.

She knew that Everett was annoyed with her. He carefully arranged his body on his side of the bed, avoiding even accidental contact. The sumptuous comfort of this mansion didn't translate into mental comfort. They had taken seven years to decide to marry. Had it been a mistake?

The next morning, Everett woke before the alarm, when dawn arrived at six thirty. He gave Lynne a kiss on the cheek. His eyes looked warm and loving. Lynne touched him tenderly. This was more like a honeymoon. But then he said, "Junior G Woman, I thought of a way to use your unstoppable need to meddle in security affairs." The words didn't sound completely friendly, but the tone did. "You know here we have a skeleton career crew and our officers have to fill several roles. I have something like five jobs to do, my own as Economic Officer until they get a replacement, Acting Ambassador, whatever. Now this security character is coming from Washington."

"What are you lecturing me for at this hour of the morning?"

"You will like this. You can save me a lot of bother just keeping Mariani out of my hair so I can do my work. I'll appoint you to be liaison to Tony Mariani, have him give his reports to you

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to pass on to me. And you will have the good sense not to bother me with any of them unless something important comes up. He'll probably only be around a short while. There's no real mystery, no reason to suspect a crime. The ambassador died from the stress of the job.

“Everett, I will like that. For once, we'll be partners!”

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Chapter 8: An Unstylish Detective

She made her usual trip in the furnace like car through the streets that thronged with Beninese, walking and on motor cycles. She admired the slim dark men in the marvelous pajama suit-like outfits called complets, and the women in three piece African costumes and elaborately tressed hair. Motorcycles bore riders of both sexes in the long embroidered damask robes called bou bous ballooning in the wind. As she drove she listed in her mind the colors she saw, rose, peach, purple, lavender, grass green, sun yellow, maroon, teal blue.

When she reached the Annex she greeted all she saw, happily not encountering either sulky Harriet or hostile Brett.

She was feeling happy. Just before Everett got into the big Embassy limousine, he gave her a long, tender kiss and told he planned on having lunch at home with her.

Once in her office, she enthusiastically threw herself into sorting the inter-embassy mail. She made a pile of announcements about meetings involving the tiny American official community, notices of local events for Americans, rugby and soccer and for Sew What, the craft group. Soon she would get around to putting out an edition of Drum Beats, the Embassy newsletter. Then she thought about what she could do now that she was a sort of partner of Everett's in crime detection. She smiled at the thought that Everett was showing

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his appreciation of her. Somehow she had never got around to mentioning to him the rude woman who had called two nights ago. Oh well. Another time. She was waiting to hear from Tony Mariani who probably arrived about ten last night. After she talked to him, she could get to work on collecting clues about the death.

About ten she got a call from Everett's secretary. "The Acting Ambassador regrets that he has Embassy business and can not come home for lunch."

She said, in a robot-like voice."

Lynne tried to stifle her disappointment, and went on sorting mail, no longer with joy. She was now working on the accumulation that had come before she was on the job. Some she could throw away. But she carefully kept the catalogues and magazines of any sort, highly aware of how precious they were in this unmodernized country.

About eleven Francois at the main Embassy building called. "Mr. Mariani wants you to come and see him at the main Embassy building right away." Lynne hurried out and drove her car, once again like a preheated bake oven. It did not cool down while she drove the four blocks to the main Embassy building. She left her car on the street outside.

Lynne entered the main Embassy building guarded by two very small American marines, sweating in blue dress jackets. She knew there were only six of them attached to the post, newly sent because of unrest in the region. She went through the little guard house. She

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recognized the guard who had once been an English teacher she had taught at a seminar when she first came to Benin as a Fulbright professor at the University. She knew in this country, his present occupation was a step up, much coveted because it carried with it an American salary and some health benefits. He was tall, unusual in this country of mini-men, wearing in a carefully pressed khaki suit of the type once called Mao. He gave her a big grin of greeting, but dutifully asked for Lynne's ID card. He let her enter though a corridor past another guard check point. She went through a stretch of casually tended tropical garden and passed another Beninese guard. She spoke to the male receptionist who told her to go to the first door on the right.

When she knocked, Mariani snarled, "What is it?" She entered, with trepidation. She had known his hostile side in Togo. Mariani was probably about thirty, typical for a low level State Department officer. But already he was almost bald with a thin swatch of black hair carefully combed from left to right to give a passing illusion.

She remembered his strange pin striped suit, tie that clashed with it, and hair style in Togo three years ago. He looked different now, but still somehow like he needed help in his presentation of self.

He looked up from the stack of papers and not bothering with a greeting said, "Have you found anything of value?"

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She gave him the glass that she had found near the dead ambassador, explaining why she had it.

The scowl left his face. "Good job. I asked if anyone had the glass he had been drinking out of, but Bickford seemed stunned, hadn't even thought of it. This is important. There's a plane to Abidjan tonight. I'm going to take this to a friend who runs a good, modern lab there. He will do me a favor and give me at least a rough analysis very quickly. I'll be careful of it the fingerprints. Those we'll send to Washington for careful scrutiny. I'll be back in two days."

Now he looked approving.

This would be a good time to get permission to do some real investigation. "I want to talk to the ambassador's secretary and see if she knew why he went to the Annex early the night he died."

"That's a good idea. Take good notes. She probably knows a lot. Anything else?"

Thinking quickly to pick out the most important thing, Lynne said, "I sent you a memo. I met a furious woman who was supposed to be a new contract assistant to the ambassador, but was fired before she could start her job. She said she saw the ambassador in the Annex just before the concert the night of his death. But she took a plane to America. I had no way to stop her."

"We'll check her out. She probably isn't dangerous. By the way, I know why your complaining lady wasn't given the Embassy job. In just a moment I have an appointment with

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the person who replaces her. Her name is Daphne ????. She has good academic credentials and a long list of successful contract appointments. And..."

There was a light tap, and the door swung open. Lynne saw the gorgeous blonde woman who resisted getting an injection. Yes, the ambassador probably thought she would be easier on the eye than the unhappy mousy woman he sent home. Lynne thought of what she, herself, looked like, brown hair, straight features, a passable figure. People were never knocked out by her looks. Well, not usually. Her gorgeous Togolese lover had constantly told her how beautiful she was. But, she later learned that his word could not always be trusted.

The Nordic vision nodded at Lynne and said, in a musical voice, "Tony, How nice of you to see me."

Daphne continued, "I want to ask you something, but I only have a few minutes. I'm going to lunch with the Acting Ambassador."

Lynne thought she might be having a nightmare. Daphne looked a lot like Adriana, the Fulbright professor in Togo who had won away Everett's love for a while. She realized now that she heard that musical voice before, another time when it wasn't high pitched from fear of a shot. That midnight call!

Lynne moaned inwardly, "Oh, I've been through this before!"

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Chapter 9: An Art Object in Bronze

Lynne bolted out of Tony Mariani's office and started for the outside door. But she changed her mind and turned toward the reception desk. She would try to distract herself from her anger and disappointment with Everett. "May I speak to Claudia, the ambassador's secretary? I have a message from Mr. Mariani."

Eight years ago Lynne, in the Peace Corps, had met the imperious Claudia when then too, Everett had acted as ambassador for a time. Claudia as his secretary had somewhat intimidated him then. But Lynne knew that after years of successful State Department positions, he could handle her now.

Lynne hoped she too had gained enough confidence not to be cowed by Claudia. When she entered the large, luxurious office, she found that Claudia was, if anything, more polished, more carefully dressed, and more generally bronze. Her hair was carefully dyed bronze and perfectly neat. Her skin was tanned to a golden apricot. Lynne wondered how she could avoid skin problems with so many years of exposure to the hot tropical sun. Her presence wafted the odor of expensive cosmetics that perhaps helped ameliorate the damage. Her outfit was a symphony of bronze related colors.

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“It has been too long since we have seen each other. You are married now, a member of the State Department family! Welcome.” she said, in a throaty voice like a grande dame on a soap opera.”

“Yes, Claudia. And once again we have the sad death of an ambassador.”

“You say that, but have little feeling behind it. He was the center of my life!”

Lynne remembered how much pride Claudia had when she had the position of ambassador’s secretary and how closely she identified with the great man.

A bit daunted, she persisted with her plan. “Tony Mariani, the Security officer from Washington, has asked me to try to get some information. My husband, the Acting Ambassador has asked me to cooperate with him.”

“I’m very busy winding up ambassador Edward’s things and keeping up once more with the important duties as temporary secretary to the temporary ambassador, your husband, Everett. But I’ll help you if I can.”

“Do you know any contacts the ambassador might have had with practitioners of voo doo?”

Claudia sniffed, and lifted her nicely shaped nose higher. “The ambassador disliked and scorned it. He felt it was a throwback to a primitive age. He didn’t even like any of the African arts or masks. He was a modern man.”

On her big, executive sized desk there was a bronze statue of a stylized African woman that

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looked like Nefertiti. “ He liked this one. She looks like the right sort of African.”

Lynne swallowed her dislike and asked in an even voice, “What can you tell me about Waldo Edwards, his life and his death?”

“His wife is stationed in Paris. But she used every excuse to leave her post and visit him here. She is a flashy, emotional woman, an embarrassment to him. Now, she is supposed to get out of the ambassadorial residence, but has herself barricaded in it and won’t budge.”

“Is she a violent woman?”

Claudia looked annoyed. “ No, she’s weak. Just a whiner.”

“What else can you tell me?”

“I was his confidential secretary. I know many things. Most are state secrets. I keep his secrets.”

“Of course. But don’t you think he would want his murderer found? Telling what you know may help the investigator find who killed him.”

“Well, you know, his health had been bad for about a year. One day he would feel pretty good, the next, he struggled to get through the day.”

“Do you know of anyone who hated him? Wanted him dead? Can you tell me anyone who had a grudge against him or threatened him?”

“He had life and death power over the careers of the official American community in Benin and also over the hundred or so Beninese employees who do most of the day to day work in all our American agencies. He was the one

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who decided what to report to Washington, what offenses should be forgotten or buried and forgiven, and which would mean instant dismissal, if they were Beninese, and for Americans, ejection from Benin. In his position, there were many people who resented him. There were many who grumbled and even muttered threats. There are things I really am not free to tell you about them now." Her tone reflected her satisfaction at her official position.

Then she seemed to remember she was talking to her boss's wife. Her tone began to soften a little.

Lynne persisted, "You said he disliked voo doo. But, do you know anyone who was disgruntled with him that has the reputation of using voo doo to threaten people?"

"Oh, I don't pay attention to the gossip of those people."

"Who?"

"The host country nationals, the Africans."

"But what is their gossip about it?"

"They say that you have a powerful voo doo fetisher working in your Annex. This person had a serious grudge against the ambassador. The person's career was at a standstill and an attempt was made to get an upgrade of the official description of the job. Of course that would bring more duties, more money, more power. When it was rejected, this person blamed the ambassador personally. Bitterly."

"Who is it? Tell me, who?"

"No. I am not allowed to. You'll have to ask someone else to tell you."

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“But Claudia, would a person harm someone for a reason like that?”

“Of course. When you block someone’s career you make a wound that will never heal.” The look in Claudia’s carefully made-up eyes reminded her that she learned earlier how much of the career state department secretary’s life values and interests were invested in the reflected power of ambassadors.

“You, Claudia, you personally liked the ambassador, didn’t you?”

Her bronze eyes glowed with intensity. “It was more than that. I admired him and did everything I could to help him succeed. Now that he is gone, I will be back to bidding for a new position. I’ll be lucky if I end up working for some second level officer in a huge Embassy. Yes, I liked the ambassador. I would have killed to save him!”

Chapter 10: A Sulky Secretary

Lynne couldn't get Claudia to say another word she and left when she heard Everett on Claudia's intercom, asking her to tell his limo driver he would be leaving soon for lunch.

Still pushing her new evidence of Everett's underhanded behavior from her mind as much as possible, she got into the burning hot car and drove home. She found a fine lunch, prepared by Marcel in the expectation that Everett would eat at home. In her discontent, it tasted like straw. She ate what she could and hurried back to work, still feeling like a shamed dog. She decided that work was the cure for her hurt feelings.

As she started on the stack of papers on her desk, she heard a light tap and saw Harriet, the Administrative Officer's secretary with some papers. Harriet always looked neat, but except for grand occasions wore American type suits and dresses in dull colors that did nothing for her complexion. Her hair was straightened and medium length. What might have been an attractive appearance was dulled by her habitual gloomy, sullen expression. Now, she did not greet Lynne, barely looked at her, and muttered, "These came to Brett's office by mistake." She was almost out the door when Lynne decided to try to crack the nut of Harriet's unfriendliness. She was very careful. She had heard that Harriet had complained all the way to the President of Benin through

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cousins in high places when she didn't get the job she wanted. When they had both worked in the American Cultural Center building, she noticed that though Harriet carried with her in almost every human interchange a cloud of sullenness, Lynne had noticed a difference once when she heard her speak of her little boy that she doted on. Today, when Lynne started to talk her, Harriet had her usual unwelcoming look that said, "What is she going to bother me with now?"

"Harriet, I remember you have a son. How is he?"

A glow suffused Harriet's smooth skinned brown face. Her eyes were tender and smiling. Her usually low pitched monotonous voice, with its French accent, was light and melodious, "Oh yes, I have a son, a fine son. Would you like to see his picture?"

When Lynne said, "Yes," she pulled from her purse a studio photograph of a handsome, dark, serious boy, with an alert, intelligent look.

"Oh, he is wonderful. I hope I can have a fine child someday. I just got married a second time. My first husband didn't want children." She was surprised at herself, revealing such a personal thing to habitually unresponsive Harriet. But talking about this subject, Harriet was transformed.

"I hope you are fortunate. It is not easy to have children. I want many. But my second child..."

Now her eyes were vats of sorrow.

Lynne felt deep sympathy.

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Harriet continued, "My child died soon after birth."

Lynne knew that medical care was underdeveloped here. She didn't know what to say but just silently tried to show her empathy.

Then she said, "What...?" Not knowing how to frame a question.

"Not what, who. A witch with strong powers, she cursed him."

Lynne knew that voo doo was a part of life here, but even after eight years in West Africa, it seemed inexplicable to an American used to the idea that reason and science answered most questions. Two years ago when the democratic president had finally been elected, he was stricken with debilitating illnesses. French doctors said he had typhoid, a slipped disc, and a liver problem, but the Africans said it was witchcraft and his supporters countered it with a united effort of prayer of all kinds, Catholic, Protestant, Moslem, and voo doo or animist, as the professors called it. The Monsignor, head of the National Assembly for Change and the highest official in the Catholic church in Benin made a national address, asking every school child in every family, practicing any of these religions to pray everyday, "Dear God, take care of President Soglo. We have need of him." Dramatically, this or something else worked and Soglo was well enough to be sworn in, saving the country from anarchy, revolution or return of the communist regime. In Lynne's time in Africa, she had met some practitioners of voo doo, but they always swore they were

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good witches, only intent on keeping evil away from people. Lynn tried to keep her face expressionless and her reaction calm and caring.

Harriet went on. "This evil witch, very strong, knew I had applied for her job and she hated me. She used all her powers against me and my family. And that witch works right in this office!"

She pointed toward the personnel office door at the far end of the hall. Obviously, she meant that the witch was Victoria, the personnel manager!

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Chapter 11: Voo Doo Woman

Lynne tried to get some details from Harriet about her accusations of witchcraft, but she replied, “Not here. Not now. I must do some work for Brett Bickford now.”

Lynne was surprised to hear Harriet’s characterization of Victoria, a woman who had been an excellent student in Lynne’s Extra Advanced English Class two years ago. She had been a delightful participant, friendly and cheerful, intelligent, hard working.

When Harriet left, Lynne decided to get better acquainted with Victoria. She saw her door was open, poked her head in and said, “May I come in?”

“You are always welcome. It is good to see you again. Congratulations on your marriage.” Victoria’s English was fluent. She had a musical voice and a slight French accent.”

She had long glossy, black curls which were probably fake since often African hair did not easily adapt to such a hairdo. She had straight, somewhat delicate features in her golden brown skin. She rose to meet Lynne, tottering on extremely high heels. With her artful makeup and a stunning high style dress, made of African fabrics by a skillful dressmaker who obviously knew the latest from in Abidjan, she looked like a model in the magazine *Amina* from Ivory Coast, that Lynne liked to read.

Lynne decided to hide her investigation of the accusations against Victoria. “Victoria, I

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need your help. I just started my job as Community Liaison Officer and there's so much I don't understand. As Personnel Director, you know the structure of the Embassy. I'm a newcomer in this agency, even though as you know, I was English Language Program Director at the American Cultural Center the last two years, before my marriage."

"Yes, of course I know that. I was in your class that first year you were in Benin. You helped me very much. I will be glad to tell you what I know. But I work mainly with Beninese personnel and all of us work for Americans. I'll sum it up quickly. You probably know most of the Americans that work for the US Mission in Benin. There are four agencies in the American official community here, the Embassy, which is in charge of the other three, the United States Aid in Development called USAID, the United States Information Service which includes the American Cultural Center and the English Language Program, and the fourth is the Peace Corps. All career State Department Officials, a total of 12, are American and are all hired by Washington. You know you have a special position, on a lower level, and the Peace Corps Director is lower too, and always temporary, here only about two years. Did you know that Claudia, the ambassador's secretary, is a State Department Officer, but in the support personnel category? Even so, she gets a high salary. Have you seen the huge house the US provides for her? There must be at least ten

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bedrooms and a big room for entertaining that could hold 100.

“Nobody gives me a house or big salary. Yet I have crucial responsibility.” Victoria’s lovely dark eyes had a playful or was it malicious look in them. “Don’t tell my boss I said it, but the real work of the Embassy is done by Beninese employees. Americans come and go, but we keep these American agencies working over the years. I hire most of the 112 lower level employees. Louis is the top Beninese officer, here at the Annex. There are some Beninese with graduate degrees, especially at USAID, who have highly responsible jobs like mine.” A cloud passed over her face. “We are overworked and underpaid. You probably know, most of the Beninese that work here, even the janitors and guards come from the finest Beninese families.”

Lynne knew Victoria came from one of the respected old families in Benin with many relatives in Ouidah. She was married to Maurice, the mail clerk in the ambassador’s office. In this almost jobless country, there was high respect for any Beninese that worked in an American agency in any capacity and of course, a job like Victoria’s was rare and prestigious. Was she the one Louis warned her to beware of? Was she the person Claudia mentioned who was bitter because the job wasn’t upgraded?

Thinking she really should get to the reason she had come in Lynne said, “Since you know so much about all the people who work here,

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can you tell me, do you think witchcraft might have been involved in the ambassador's death?"

A big change came over the previously smiling woman. "That Harriet has been telling her lies again. The spirits can be used for good. She hates me because her husband wanted to marry me. She comes from a good family. But look at her! She has no chic. No wonder her mother in law wants to replace her."

"Let's forget about her. The ambassador. Did anyone dislike him?"

Victoria didn't answer.

Then Lynne asked her in an insistent voice, "Can you think of anyone so displeased with the ambassador, they will be happy that he is dead?"

Victoria hurried to the back of the room towards her file cabinet, and started sorting and putting away the papers she had in her hand. She acted as if she was very intently doing her job.

Lynne knew she had been dismissed, but pushed harder.

"Victoria, tell me!"

"Please, let me do my work." Victoria fumbled wildly with her files.

Lynne gave up and started to the door. Her back was turned to Victoria when she heard, "Big chiefs, men in high places, make arrogant, prideful decisions. They chose their favorites and push aside the rest. They always have enemies. And special African ways are sometimes used to deal with them."

Chapter 12: Tastes of Africa

After Victoria's fierce reaction to questions about the ambassador, Lynne thought she might have found the murderer. With her disappointment at not getting career advancement, she had a strong reason to be extremely displeased with the ambassador, perhaps to the point of killing him. But there were so many unknowns. So far there was no clear official finding of murder. She hoped Tony's lab friend in Abidjan would, very soon, give them some answers about the contents of the fluid in the glass the ambassador had dropped. If it was murder, Tony's staff should get busy and find out if Victoria was at the Embassy and saw the ambassador before he left for the Annex, or if she stayed late at the Annex and met with him just the concert. And if she met him, did she have access to something she knew he would eat or drink?

As she was thinking, she got a call from Claudia at the Embassy. She started with her cool, impersonal voice. "The acting ambassador regrets he has official business tonight and will not be home until late." Then, sounding more like a human she said, "They have to have some meetings to be prepared for the country's reaction to the election. The results could be announced any day."

Lynne was so upset with Everett over his desertion of her at noon, that she didn't know if she even wanted to see him. She accepted

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Claudia's message apathetically. In fact, for once she was almost glad.

Soon five o'clock came and her work week was over. She decided she would share companionship with her friends without her difficult husband. One diversion for her in her two years in Benin had been an informal monthly dinner group called Explore that she organized. The monthly meeting happened to be that night. Despite the ambassador's death, the group planned to have the meeting as usual. She knew that the policy in these unstable African posts was to somehow keep on going despite terror threats and coup attempts. If the American government closed something down, it gave a signal that things were not going well. And that signal might make it go worse. This group was unofficial, but was used to carrying on despite some horrendous local events

Each month the group met at a different local eating place. Each month the group met at a different local eating place. Part of the fun was to try places that yovos, white people, and Europeanized Africans rarely patronized. Members took turns in searching for and recommending sites. She had invited into the group only people she felt comfortable with. She picked pleasant, non-threatening people on roughly the same level of diplomatic importance as she was. Lynne knew that Everett would be out of place in the group, since he had high official status. As time went on, the people attending had become less predictable. Members brought along friends

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who then later brought their friends. She was sometimes surprised and not always pleased by newcomers.

They had chosen this time to eat in a really African restaurant, L'Ambiance, a place frequented mainly by middle income Beninese. Both cooking and eating took place outdoors. When she arrived just as dark was falling, about seven o'clock, she saw there was a good turnout. Matthew, head of Catholic Relief Services, called Cathwel or CRS, which provided a baby food supplement program in the country. He was looking mildly scruffy as usual. She was surprised to see Claudia, as usual expensively dressed in bronze, with her boy friend, a Lebanese diamond merchant. Innocent Mensah, who worked for a United Nations agency pointed to a tall, good looking African man in American style pants and dress shirt. "I invited Roland Dobato to come along with me. You know him. He's taught in your program." Lynne shook hands with both of them and told Roland it was good to see him again. Something teased her mind. She remembered he was related to someone she knew. But who?

Lynne's old friend/ enemy Lita who somehow, like Lynne remained in Africa four years after her Peace Corps duty was there with Omar who wrote occasional pieces for the BBC. Lynne wondered if Lita still had her tendency to fall in love with dangerous men.

Twenty beaming buxom women, called by some, market mamas, presided over vast

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caldrons filled with delicacies, various kinds of gravies that were called sauce, mixed with vegetables cooked to a pulp with bits of meat, chicken, fish, all seasoned with hot red pepper and a choice of rice, pounded yam called fu fu, corn cakes, and cassava mush and dried ground maniac to sprinkle and add some grit. There were beef brochettes, what Americans call kebabs, and pieces of grilled chicken and fish. The group made its way around, filling plates. The adventuresome tried the mysterious stews, not frightened by the occasional chicken foot or fish head they found. Most of the sauces were red, based on French imported tomato paste. One was green with a viscous consistency.

Lynne, knowing the prevalence of various kinds of infestation in the area, as well as being more recently consciousness of the dangers of poison, stuck to brochettes, taken directly from the fire, and coli cos, pieces of igname, the potato like yam, fresh from the hot oil.

They heaped their plates high and paid the cashier in worn, crumpled, often mended CFA, African franc bills and coins. The moon lighted the exotic scene, with the glowing halos around the small charcoal fires under the pots and grilling surfaces and some candles and lanterns made of old tin cans and kerosene fuel. It was still hot but there was a breeze. They all sat in the semi darkness at picnic tables lighted with occasional candles..

As they started to eat. Her friend Sally, the Embassy nurse arrived. She had a guest. Victoria! "Everyone, you know Victoria, I think.

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She works at the Embassy. I persuaded her to join us tonight.” Lynne greeted her pleasantly and decided to keep a close eye on her.

A new person Lynne had not expected joined the group. It was Brett Bickford’s wife. Nai Chang, a long time member of the group, an administrator at Catholic Relief services introduced her.” Everyone, meet May Ling. She spends too much time home with her husband and child.”

Lynne noticed that May Ling seemed extremely shy.

As Lynne and her friends ate, they talked about a variety of local matters. Some of the European and Beninese expressed rather formally, condolences of the death of the ambassador.

Sally the nurse, who had had to examine the body shuddered and said, “Thanks. It was really dreadful. He looked so sad and broken. It scared me too. I hope it isn’t that Ebola virus or something. I’ll be the next one to go if it was.”

Then they started speculating about possible causes of the ambassador’s death. Some said they were sure it was murder. Any ambassador could get a lot of people mad at him because of the policies he had to follow. And the French just hate us. Any time our Ambassador succeeds in something, they probably gnash their teeth. Maybe they would like a more inept ambassador here.

But don’t forget, he died at the Annex. There were no outsiders there yet, just Beninese staff and an American staff member

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or two. Lynne, you and Everett were about the first people. There was the marine band. I don't think any of them wanted him dead.

"My friends are saying it was probably voo doo."

One of the foreign educated Beninese English teachers said, "When people in Africa talk about voo doo, I think of poison. Do we know if he ate or drank anything?"

Lynne tried not to be too obvious in watching Victoria to see her reaction. But she acted as if she hadn't heard it.

Wild Gerry said in his exaggerated British Cockney accent, "The drinks weren't out yet. The punch bowl wasn't filled, the ice cubes weren't out, all the soft drinks and beer were still in bottles."

"You know an awful lot about it. Maybe you did it and know how the murderer got around all that." They had a good laugh at the manager of the American club, the husband of Stella, a USAID officer.

"He was at the drinks table. He must have gotten a drink somehow. Obviously it was poison."

There was a moment of quiet as if everyone was thinking this over. Lita, now director of an organization called International Neighbors, among the hot, sweating group, wilted by the end of a long, hot day, stood out with her fresh grace. She was demonstrating her Peace Corps skill of eating fu fu the African way. She used her delicate long fingers to pick up a bite sized ball glob of the tasteless goo, dipped it into the

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mucous like green sauce made from okra boiled to a glutinous stage called by volunteers, green slime, and popped it into her mouth. She paused in her eating and looked thoughtful.

“Who would kill him?”

“In order to know that, we have to know more about him. He hasn’t been here long, and stuck to official affairs pretty much. I shook hands with him once, but that was it.

Sally said, “He wasn’t a bad guy.” We had to get some approvals for our agency and he was nice, asked a few intelligent questions, then signed the papers.”

“I’ve heard that one member of the Embassy staff was furious with him over a personnel issue.” Someone else said.

And still another chimed in with, “Oh, no one would kill over that!” Indiscreet Matthew Carey, the head of Cathwel, a kind, pale, nervous young man, said, half joking, that he knew who killed him. When challenged, he said, “I really think I know. I have a friend who’s a waiter. He told me someone acting suspicious was hanging around just before the concert.”

Some else broke in, “How about that strange wife of the ambassador’s? Did she love him or hate him? Often the two are mixed. But how could she do it? She wasn’t even there until the death was announced.”

“How would anyone do it?”

Lynne listened carefully, trying hard to notice who talked and what they said. She

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decided to follow up some of these remarks with private conversations later on.

They lingered long after their feast, drinking the fermented beer made from palm juice. Finally, reluctantly she returned to her house, and the problems associated with it.

The guards greeted her, pleasantly, and she entered the house. Everett wasn't there. She put on a deliberately ugly nightgown and got into bed. Later, she was awakened when Everett crawled into bed.

"Those meetings went on and on. We're making plans to deal with trouble if it comes when they make the announcement, any day now. Did you have a good time at your Explore dinner?"

Half asleep, she murmured "Good, but scary. Matthew says he knows who killed the ambassador."

"How would he know that? Who does it say did it?"

"He said someone saw someone at the Annex that night. But he won't say who it was."

Everett's response was swallowed up in a big yawn. Lynne closed her eyes again, but said very quietly, half to herself. "I think he does know."

"Go back to sleep Sherlock," Everett said, in a tender voice. 'I will have a nice surprise for you in the morning.'

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Chapter 13: Fu Fu Is Pounded

The next morning, Everett woke Lynne with a gentle kiss and said he could spend the entire day with her. She was eager to take advantage of this rare situation. She didn't want to spoil the day by a confrontation over the lunch with Daphne. Maybe she was just being suspicious and jealous. A lovely day together would help cement their closeness.

First they made love. Everett was tender and passionate and Lynne felt herself falling in love with him all over. This was going to be a honeymoon after all!

"You take a nice cool shower and put on something pretty and comfortable for a long, wonderful day. I have to make a few phone calls first, then I'll get ready." He went to the big downstairs room that he used as his office.

Marcel didn't work on Sundays, but had prepared the coffee maker ready to plug in. He had bought fresh croissants and put them on a plate in the refrigerator along with papaya cut so it that looked like little gondolas filled with chunks of the juicy pink fruit. Lynne set them it all out on the table and when Everett joined her, they had a leisurely breakfast. Then they went to the center of Cotonou to the shopping area to do errands.

The roads were crowded with throngs of people wearing the brightly printed African fabrics and embroidered damask in glowing colors.

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As they passed L'Ambiance, the restaurant she had eaten at last night, Lynne was charmed by what looked like an exotic ballet, but was really the practical activity of pounding of the igname to make fu fu, the wallpaper paste-like staple. Three young women circled a large wooden vessel that looked something like a big American butter churn. Each had a big paddle, much like a canoe paddle but with a rounded bottom. They circled the vessel hitting the cooked yam in a regular, rhythmic dance. The whole thing acted like a giant mortar and pestle with the strong, graceful young women as the power for mashing the root into the much prized pliable goo. Everett stopped the car for a while, so they could watch the beauty of the process. She wished she could have a photo of it, but knew that people here were wary of having their picture taken. If you succeeded in convincing them to allow it, they wanted to be paid and also to have a copy of the picture. A friend visiting from America has almost caused a riot when she snapped a series of photos.

Lynne and Everett went to the Sheraton Hotel for late lunch at the side of the big Olympic sized pool in sight of the crashing waves of the ocean. The big hotel was much like an American version of the chain except for its tendency to have almost daily electrical failures which were sometimes remedied by noisy generators. And another difference, in the big, comfortable lobby there was a huge intricately carved statue of one of the gods of Dahomey with a massive, erect phallus.

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Since it was extremely hot as usual, Lynne and Everett had a long swim in the cooling water. "This was what I had fantasies about before I came I first came here," she said to Everett. As they lounged under tall palm trees, she inspected him, lying in the deck chair. After eight years off and on of going with him and three weeks of marriage, she decided he was a good looking man. He also was good company when she could get him away from his work. They sat in the shade near the pool, knowing their skin would get all the sun it could take in this climate without deliberate exposure. It was good to have a little pleasure and try to forget the shocking death of the ambassador and the barely suppressed fear that they and any of the other Americans might be next.

Maybe Everett was thinking the same gloomy thoughts. He seemed edgy, but determined to try to relax. Dusk fell at six thirty as it always did here so near the Equator. Within fifteen minutes, it was dark. The lights and candles reflecting on the water were pleasant and peaceful. They decided to stay and see the floor show with African musicians playing French popular music and eventually eat dinner there too. They were enjoying the musicians and the African spin they put on the sentimental French songs. They were just starting to think about ordering a late dinner when they saw a commotion at the lighted entrance to the pool area. They saw one of Everett's main assistants enter, talk to a waiter, and then the manager. They were all looking at

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Everett. A few minutes later the aide made his way around the big pool and came close to Everett.

“I’m sorry sir, to interrupt you.”

“What is it?” Everett asked tensely.

“There has been a murder.”

“Who? Where?”

“The Director of Cathwel, you know, Catholic Relief Services, was at the L’Ambiance where he often eats. Someone called him over to a dark area and hit him with a fu fu paddle.”

“Someone is killing Americans! Damn that Security Officer. Why isn’t he back from Abidjan? He should be here to handle this. And why didn’t he get me the test results about the ambassador’s last drink that he promised from his so called friend with the Abidjan lab?”

Everett’s voice went from loud indignation to a whine as he continued. “Benin might be in an upheaval soon when the election results are announced. It’s too much to have to deal with. And now, this too!”

Chapter 14: They Also Serve

Lynne went along with Everett while he performed his official grim duties involved in one more violent death of an American. The Ghanaian doctor was called in and made a cursory examination of the body in the medical office and Sally, the nurse put it in a zipper bag for transport on the next plane to America. Everett and Lynne went to Everett's office where some of his assistants told him what little they knew about the death. They had questioned several people who were at the restaurant that night and had seen a fou, a local madman lurking in the bushes near the cooking kettles. Everett made contact with local Beninese officials and sent cables to Washington.

Lynne felt frustrated and bored. There was nothing she could do to help except to stay out of the way.

She tried to wait patiently. They finally got home at midnight and fell into bed, distressed and exhausted. Sunday was frustrating. When Everett got up at eight, he didn't seem interested in Lynne's speculation that Matthew was killed because he had said he knew the murderer of the ambassador.

He gulped down his breakfast of coffee and fresh French bread that Lynne had asked their guard out front to buy from the woman selling it where she had set up shop on a patch of dirt outside their gate. His driver came for him soon

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after and he was at gone all day, presumably at his office and performing official duties. He didn't return until close to midnight.

In the afternoon, Tony, the security officer, called Lynne from Abidjan. The line was crackling and weak. "Amazing, but the lab got their best technician right to work and we have a partial answer. I told your husband. After I get back to Cotonou we have our work cut out for us. But, one thing is sure. The ambassador didn't die a natural death." At least she thought that was what he said. About every third word was inaudible. She started to tell him about Matthew's words at the Explore dinner. But the line started getting worse, and as usual, Tony wanted to talk, but not listen. "We'll talk Monday." And he hung up.

Chapter 15: A Clever and Devious Woman

Lynne was on duty at her office in the Annex at eight o'clock Monday morning. She vowed that tonight she would really make Everett talk to her, straighten things out, and clear up all her nagging doubts about him. For several hours she did a little work and a lot of thinking. Her mind kept going back to the two murders. Since this office, unlike the Peace Corps or English Language Program provided a fine, modern computer, it was convenient to type out a neat resume of what she felt, knew, or had heard about the ambassador's death and some suggestions on suspicious people to investigate. Victoria was first on the list. But, the ambassador's murder was probably connected to the killing of Matthew. True, Friday she had probably heard him say he knew who the murderer was. She wasn't strong enough to wield the big fu fu paddle that killed Matthew. But who had she got to do the actual killing? And the witnesses said a fou had called Matthew out in the darkness under the trees. In the midst of her thinking, Lynne got some of her official work done. She was finishing up an issue of Talking Drums, the newsletter of the American Official community in Benin which she was supposed to put out every month. This issue had almost been completed by the previous CLO before she left several months ago. Many of her articles had to be discarded,

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since they were out dated now, but others could be used with a few changes

Lynne didn't mention Matthew's death in her pages. She had to ask the Security officer what she should say about that. She went to the photocopy machine to try to make a copy the some of the articles she had prepared, but the machine seemed jammed. She couldn't figure out how to fix it.

She decided to ask Harriet's advice. Harriet's dress of dull dark blue made some kind of gloomy statement among the colorful, elaborate African costumes of the other workers in the office.

"Harriet, the photocopy machine is jammed. Can you tell me how fix it?"

She could almost physically feel Harriet's sulkiness. There was a long pause, during which Lynne continued to look at her questioningly. At last she said in a low voice, "That's not my job. Ask Marguerite in the cashier's office to help you."

Obviously she didn't want to amplify right now the accusations about Victoria she had made the last time they had talked in private.

Lynne wished she could think of something friendly and slightly personal to say, but she was afraid to take a chance offending her somehow. She remembered hearing that several years ago a new young American woman assistant cheerfully said to Harriet, "Are you going home now?" The proud Beninese woman took it as a criticism of her habit of leaving a few minutes early and

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complained in the staff meeting held by the director that she would not take supervision and interference from that person. The young American almost lost her job over it.

Lynne just said "Thank you" and started toward back to her office. She was still in earshot when Harriet asked, "Did you enjoy yourself Friday night?"

When Lynne turned around she saw anger on Harriet's face. She searched her mind. The time before the discovery of the body on Saturday seemed long ago. "Friday? Oh, L'Ambiance. Yes, it was pleasant."

Harriet stood up. She said clearly, enunciating each word distinctly, in her level, French accented voice, "My husband was there."

"Your husband?"

"Yes. Roland Dobato is my husband. I was not invited!"

And before Lynne could think of a response, she stalked away, into the office of the administrator, clutching a pile of papers.

Lynne, slunk off to her desk, wondering if she would ever feel like she understood Africa. She was shuffling some papers when the telephone rang.

It was an educated voice in precise English with a French accent. "Am I speaking to Lynne Lewis?"

"Yes."

"This is Dora, the librarian at the Cultural Center."

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“Yes, hello, Dora. It’s good to hear from you.”

“Do you have time to come and see me? I have some things I want to say to you.”

Lynne decided to go there, but to be on her guard. When she had worked at the Center, her secretary had told her that Dora was a clever and devious woman. She got promoted after denouncing the previous librarian to the American government for being closely tied to the communists, this during the era when all Beninese had to at least pretend to be communist to stay out of prison in the Marxist regime.

At the American Cultural Center, Lynne’s old friends and colleagues Center greeted her warmly. She went directly to the library, on the ground floor close to the entrance.

Dora, neatly dressed in subdued American clothes, with her hair braided in an intricate African pattern met her at the door. She began to talk about Beninese politics. She said that she was related to the president running for reelection. She was sure he would win again, but felt that the previous communistic president would refuse to accept the results of the election.

“Dora, I really am not involved in politics. My husband deals with all that.”

“I know. He is a fine man.”

“Yes, I have always felt so,” Lynne said.

“About the ambassador’s murder,” Dora looked intense. “You Americans always look for

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an American for a killer. Africans too kill, and in subtle ways.”

“What do you mean?”

“Did Harriet tell you that her first baby was killed by Victoria with a voo doo spell? Victoria probably did the same with the ambassador. She was extremely dissatisfied about his decision. I hear that Matthew at CRS told everyone at your dinner Friday night that he knew who killed the ambassador. My cousin, Innocent Mensah, was with you. I think Matthew was killed for knowing too much and talking about it.”

“But Victoria isn’t big enough or strong enough to kill a tall man with a fu fu paddle. And a cook says Matthew was called into a dark place by a fou.”

“Ah, it is very simple. Everyone knows at least one fou. Victoria has impoverished relatives who will do anything to please her and get some money from her. Give the poor man a few francs and tell him some story, saying someone is an evil spirit. And poof. He is dead! Victoria convinces people easily, with her powers as a witch.”

Dora looked calm, but her eyes glittered with malice.

“Do you hate Victoria?” Lynne asked.

“I am a Christian and hate all witches. Besides, she uses her power evilly. She refused to hire my highly qualified niece at the Embassy.”

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Chapter 16: An Uneasy Careerist

Late that afternoon Tony Mariani, the security man, burst into Lynne's office, shut the door behind him, and made a loud moan.

"Washington is after me. They want to get something on me, they want to get me off the promotion list, they're trying to save money."

Lynne searched for something tactful to say, then gave up and just said, "What's this all about, Tony?"

"I just got back here from Abidjan when my desk officer called me from Washington. He's giving me a terrible time. You would think that I killed the two Americans."

"Then they're interested in the fu fu paddle death?"

"Yes. Some sneaky reporter told them a big tale. We'll get him. He works for BBC, always looking for a scandal. I think he worked for you once."

"Omar?" She remembered he had been at the Explore dinner with Lita.

"Yes, he sent out a story saying the fu fu death was obviously an attempt to cover up the murder of the ambassador and authorities should look for a plot at the Embassy as a cause. We have to get these murders solved soon or they'll recall me, demote me, ruin my life!" He was off again on a self feeding cycle of worries.

"And then, that crazy widow of the ambassador. She's got herself locked into the

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mansion, won't talk to people sent to help her, but keeps calling Washington, talking about a plot, a conspiracy, a power take over. She left twenty messages for me while I was in Abidjan. I keep telling Bickford to deal with her. Fat chance of that happening."

Lynne wanted to get him off his free form ranting, onto some specifics of the investigation. She told him her strong suspicions of Victoria. "I think Victoria murdered the ambassador. Several people say Victoria is a killer. They accuse her of killing Harriet's child with her curses and spells."

"Really? Our Personnel manager, a witch. That's Africa for you. Often what they mean is she used poison. Who knows how much of that is based on reality and how much is fantasy. I know she was mad at the ambassador. She tried to get her job upgraded, thought she had it all settled, but the ambassador said no, then upgraded some people on his personal staff. But, the thing is, some people told me they know Victoria was at her home village, Agbomy, helping a sick relative the afternoon the ambassador died, starting about 2 pm until the next day. There's no way she could have poisoned the ambassador."

Distracted for a while from his worries, Tony then went on with his flood of personal problems. Tony complained to her about the terrible pressure for promotion in his job. State Department officers were selected after a tough testing process in which only a few out of every hundred applicants were chosen. But that was

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only the start of their problems. They were rated every year on performance. If they didn't get promoted to higher grades at a fast enough rate, they knew they had to get out. Lynne hated to hear all this because it reminded her that Everett was in the same situation. Once he was considered a young official of especial talent, but after eight years he was still only second in command in this small Embassy in Africa.

Tony went on to use Everett as a particular example. "A piece of luck having the ambassador die right now. If Everett helps solve this and cleans it up without notoriety, he has a good chance to act as ambassador long enough to impress some people and it probably will result in his being given tenure, a make or break hurdle for him at the end of this year."

Finally Tony got back to some specifics of the investigations. "I told you the results we got so far. Now, they are trying in Washington to zero in on the exact poison that killed the ambassador. They have decided it isn't an organic substance, no strange African herbs, or snake oil."

"Then what could it be?"

"Something complex. They'll let us know. In the meantime, I'm starting a list of people with motives. Who would you put on it, besides your stylish witch?"

Lynne hoped she didn't look guilty. Two people had said they suspected Everett. But, Tony himself had brought up his possible

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motivation without seeming to have any suspicion of him.

“You’re a clever young woman. Set yourself to planning a way to set a trap for people with a grudge against the ambassador.”

“Okay. I’ll think about that.”

“Okay.” As he went out the door, Tony said, “Keep your eyes open. There are rumors that there was a big blow up between the ambassador and...I’m embarrassed to tell you...”

“Blow up between the ambassador and who?”

“And, your husband!”

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Chapter 17: Books Can Be Hazardous

When Tony left her office, Lynne was in a foul mood. She was displeased about her husband's recent behavior, but even more annoyed at what looked like a conspiracy to direct suspicion toward him.

She tried to think of a strong suspect now that she knew that Victoria was in Abomey at the time the ambassador was poisoned. She realized she had been concentrating on and had not been working on the vow she had made when she saw the ambassador's pathetic dead body in the medical office. She had said then, "Waldo, I didn't know you well in life, but now I will work to really understand you and learn why you are dead here in Cotonou." She hadn't done much about it. She really didn't know this man who had come to this dangerous land to serve his country and had lost his life. Tony, in his security work, was noted for the method called, prosecute the victim. He had used it to good advantage when an American had been killed in Togo. He had asked her to find out more about the ambassador.

How could she learn more about him? She decided to talk to her friend Louis, the top Beninese administrator in the Annex again. She knew that he had close ties with all the Beninese Fon Embassy employees. Also, he had civil but distant relations with the rest, the ones that were Yoruba, Barabo, and Hausas. With

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that network, he probably knew what the ambassador had actually been like in his daily activities in Benin. She poked her head into Louis's office. He was looking relaxed, making notes on some papers on his desk.

'Have you time for a chat?'

"Yes. For once. I'm waiting for the next pile of work from the bosses. How are you doing?"

"I guess as well as can be expected with all that's going on here. Tony Mariani has asked me to help him figure out who killed the ambassador. Do you know anything that can help me? What was the ambassador really like? You must have seen a lot of him. And some of your friends worked with him every day."

Louis said, "There is an proverb, in African languages and English too-- have you seen in the market the three monkeys carved from one piece of wood showing it? Being like those monkeys is what is expected of people that work in the American Embassy. See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil. We Beninese at the Embassy follow that to keep our jobs. There are no other jobs in Benin that pay as well, give sick pay and pensions. We don't do anything to end our job. So, anything the boss, the white man demands, we do. You know, an ambassador is like a little emperor here. He not only has the other Americans under his control, but the larger group of professional Beninese too. Evil thrives and grows under tyranny. I shouldn't say these things, but you and I have worked together for several years. I think you will not repeat what I say and get me in trouble."

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“You know I’m your friend. I’ll be discreet. But I don’t understand. Waldo, most people say he was basically a good guy.”

“Yes, many did. But, people thwarted in their ambitions or caught and punished for their wrongdoing, thought of his control as evil. There is evil here. Some of it by Americans, some by Beninese, some by spirits>”

“Spirits?”

“Yes, some voo doo spirits are left over, despite Christian struggles to conquer them. The evil men do lives after them. I got a British education. Shakespeare said that.”

“Well, aside from that stuff, what else? I know the French ambassador was furious with him. But the killer had to have access to the American Embassy at that time of night. That means Americans and Beninese. Did he have any money problems?”

“His financial dealings were pretty much under the control of his secretary and the Embassy cashier’s office and Washington. He followed the rules and never got in trouble.”

“Did he have any vices, bad habits,? How about women?”

“Ah, women. When there are powerful men, there are women. His wife was stationed in Paris. What would he do you when she was gone?”

“Are you just guessing, or do you know any specific women?”

“I once heard some Americans talking about him, all excited. They used a strange

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word. Maybe it is American English. Do you know it?"

"What word?"

"Groping."

Lynne was interested now. "Who was talking? Who were they talking about?"

"That was last year. I don't remember. I was trying to understand what the word meant. Later, I looked it up in the dictionary. I still don't see what was so interesting about it."

His phone rang. He answered it, said a few words, then covered the phone and said to Lynne, "I have to work now."

Lynne left him, puzzling over his remarks.

Did they help? Not really. There must be some people with a strong grudge against the ambassador. Tony had told her to think of a plan to flush them out. Her eyes idly roved over her desk where there were pages she had prepared for the new issue of Talking Drums. She flipped through them with new eyes. The previous Community Liaison officer had prepared a column called Book Notes, four simple reports of books in the Recreation Club Library, a ragged collection of discards. Lynne had the start of an idea. She would write a report on a mythical book in which an important person was murdered in an enclosed community with a mysterious poison. She would put it on the front page in a box that drew attention to it. She would hint that it was factual and say it had been submitted in manuscript by someone who knew the truth. She would end it by saying, she didn't want to

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spoil the ending by printing it in Talking Drums, but anyone who was really curious could read the book or talk to her and she would privately tell them “who did it.” Maybe the guilty person would be driven to contact her to find out how much she knew.

She shivered. Like all the Americans here in Cotonou she was always in danger, not only from the diseases, sudden holes and open ditches in the roads, the threat of coupes and terrorist attacks, even tornados that came and went with almost no public notice. For her, sometimes the greatest menace had been from someone very close to her. With this plan, she would be deliberately daring the murderer to take her on. An inner voice kept telling her, “Lynne, this is the dumbest thing you have ever thought of. You’re making yourself the target of the murderer.” But she started thinking of ways to minimize the danger. She really could watch herself. Her house had a guard, there were many people around her all the time at work. Once in her car, she could lock it. Since poison was the murder method, she would have to be careful what she ate and drank. She trusted her cook, Marcel implicitly. When she went out, she could be careful only to eat things that someone else had tasted first. If someone seemed to have a suspicious interest, she would immediately tell Tony Mariani and get protection.

She would have to be very careful to notice anyone that seemed to threaten her. And when she found the real killer, people would have to stop hinting terrible things about her husband.

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Somehow, she felt buoyed up by the idea of doing something about solving the mystery.

She went on with the writing. Her years as English professor at the University of Michigan Dearborn and the hundreds of mystery books she had read made it possible to write a fairly convincing report of a non-existent book. She decided to take a few days to think before she really put in motion plan a plan that would make her the object of murderous attack. Maybe the murderer would be caught by then. Even so, she checked her spelling and that about a title. What should she call it? Hummm. Who Killed the Boss?

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Chapter 18: Danger in the Streets

As Lynne walked out the door after five into the still stifling heat she was rehearsing dialogue in her mind to use when she saw Everett. She would talk calmly to him and tell him that she felt he had not been candid about the blonde colleague that he had lunch with. Probably, she was unnecessarily jealous and he had no personal interest in the contract diplomat who looked like a starlet.

And she would tell him that Tony had heard that he had a fierce argument with the ambassador. He hadn't even hinted that such a thing occurred. She would feel so much better when they got these things out into the open and he could explain them away. She got into her hot car and started to go out the gate. But, the guard stopped her, speaking excitedly. "Lynne, Madame, do not go into town. They are shooting there. There is danger in the streets."

She wanted to question him further, but he urgently waved her on to let out the car behind her.

She decided instead of going to town and home she would go to the American Club which was the other way, out toward the university. She could get some news and if necessary, stay there for a while. The American Club, a small modest sand block building, had a swimming pool, a bar that served some food, a television hooked to a satellite which gave access to

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Armed Services Network news, and a tiny room for viewing a collection of videos.

When she reached the club, she found the main room crowded. An agitated woman, seeming to speak for a group of missionaries, was in the middle of a dramatic account. "And here we were, at the market, when the crowd suddenly turned hostile, shouting something in some African language, started pushing and saying in French, and that part we understood, 'Americans, allez! Go.' We ran away from them, jumped into our car and came here." Heads bobbed in agreement.

Gerry, the manager of the club, husband of Stella at USAID, said on the radio, people seemed excited about something, but since he didn't know French he couldn't find out anything.

A Peace Corps volunteer who had been drilled in French told them, "It's about the election. One candidate, Soglo, who used to work at World Bank and is associated in many people's minds with the US was running for reelection. They announced the results this afternoon. It's a shock. The old dictator, Kereko, won."

One of the missionaries, a man, said, "The old dictator is not the old dictator. He's a born again man. I had a meeting with him and other religious leaders. He is saved, is a Christian, and wants to run the country on democratic principles."

"I'll believe that, when I see it," the Peace Corps Volunteer said, scornfully.

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“Right, mate. He’s just playing a game. He was the communist strong man for seventeen years,” Gerry put in using the cockney accent he hung onto despite ten years in various international posts with his American wife performing her official duties.

“But why should that cause the scene in the market?” Lynne asked.

“Because the rumor is that Soglo will not accept the results. That is the curse of Arica, leaders who get in and think they should be president for life,” a knowledgeable missionary replied.

“Yes, think of Togo, which has had the same dictator for more than 30 years. The people have to chant ‘Eyadema, toujours’,-- always, forever, every time the dictator appears at a public meeting. And despite attempts at elections, which he sometimes loses, somehow, he is still there.” Lynne knew this was true from experience when she was in Togo for five years, first, as a Peace Corps Volunteer and then as a Fulbright professor.

“But Soglo seemed like such a modern, enlightened man,” she protested.

“Well, maybe it’s an unfounded rumor”. The missionary said.

“I was told there is shooting in the center of town. What’s that about?,” Lynne asked the group in general.

“Someone came in, said that several enthusiasts were shooting guns off, saying, ‘Vive Kereko’. The police came and talked them into giving up the guns.” This was a

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contribution from a teacher at the American run Brilliant Stars School.

“Do you think that means I can go home now? My husband will be wondering where I am.” Lynne said.

Someone laughed. Then someone said, “Do you really think he’s at home? He’s acting ambassador. In a situation like this, you might not see him for days! But really, we don’t know yet if there is still danger in the streets.”

Lynne asked Gerry to call the Embassy for her and tell her husband where she was. He tried several times, then got through to the receptionist. He reported to Lynne, half mockingly, half sympathetically, “The acting ambassador is too busy to talk to you, but they have given him your message. He said to tell you not to expect him until you see him.”

So once more, with a dangerous climate in the city, Everett was too occupied with other things to even talk to her. She tried to call her house, but couldn’t get a connection. She tried ten times. Then, she finally got a call through. She seldom talked on the phone with Marcel. Since his English was slight, she did it in French. She told him he could put the dinner in the refrigerator and leave. She and the acting ambassador both would be home late.

“D’accord. Okay,” he said, but went on to tell her he would stay a while because he was afraid to go out. The whole quarter was talking. Someone in an official car had shot at the house of the election commissioner a few houses away. Marcel’s brother was with him, hiding in

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the kitchen. He said he was afraid to go on the street because people were shooting at each other with bows and arrows.

“Bows and arrows?” Lynne asked incredulously.

“Yes. Bows and arrows.”

Chapter 19: A Diplomat's Mate

Still worried that the election results had kicked off a coup attempt, the missionaries decided to go to the house of the one that lived nearest and wait there until they felt it was safe return to their own homes.

The Peace Corps volunteer and some of the others stranded at the Club chose to go to the little back room and watch a video movie.

Lynne told Gerry about the strange conversation she had just had with her cook, Marcel. His wild story about bows and arrows sounded like rumors inflated by near panic. But, whatever, since Everett wasn't coming home for dinner, she decided she would stay there for a while.

Gerry's cheery voice said, "Let Cyprien fix you one of his fine hamburgers. Eat a little and relax. This crazy country always has some unbelievable kind of crisis."

She agreed to the hamburger. She knew that it would be edible. Cyprien grilled a week's supply outdoors over charcoal, then froze them and heated them up one by one in the microwave, an unusual appliance in this undeveloped country. The results had a fair flavor, but were rather rubbery. Even so, it was closer to a taste of home than Americans could get in the pseudo burger place in Cotonou where the meat was boiled and then left unrefrigerated for hours. While Cyprien worked on her order, Lynne was entertained by

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Gerry. "You know, you and I are alike, both the kept mate of State Department officers. They know we're in their power and that's how they treat us." He said, half jokingly, half bitterly.

Gerry was far from a State Department type. He was in his thirties, good looking in a beat up way. His hair was a little too long and not too clean and his face showed scars from the many fights he liked to tell about in his various jobs around the world and also from the savage beatings he said his father had given him for his own good. His muscular arms were decorated with tattoos of mermaids whose bare breasts writhed as he waved his arms to emphasize his talk.

One of his stories, in which a scar was not featured, was about being stopped and almost arrested by French police at the airport in Paris when, with a gun in his luggage, he was traveling with his diplomat wife. He said he always carried a gun in South Africa because of the unrest there. Lynne remembered at a dinner party here in Cotonou with three staid State Department types and their proper wives. Gerry, laughing, told the gun story, then talked about his experiences in South Africa and made a reference to a kaffir, a word with strongly racist connotations. The atmosphere seemed to freeze. Everyone studiously avoided looking at Messan, the waiter, who was related to half the aristocratic families of Benin.

Despite his lack of discretion, she sometimes enjoyed talking to this undisciplined man. Many of the State Department Americans

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that she knew in Africa tried so hard to behave properly that the life seemed dried out of them. Right now, she liked having Gerry express clearly out loud what she wouldn't even admit to herself, annoyance at a subservient position.

Gerry always seemed happy at American Club. There he could laugh and joke and talk. Lynne suspected that he sampled amply the cold beer that was one of the attractions of the club.

He sat down next to Lynne on the beat up couch as she ate her meal. The radio was on, in case there was an announcement or alarm about the situation in the city. At the moment, African High Life music was playing.

"Well, what do you think about the murder of the ambassador?" Lynne asked him.

"Mixed reviews. The ambassador wasn't a bad guy. He was good company sometimes when that crazy wife of his was visiting."

"Did they get along well?"

"Do any married people really get along well? But, they only saw each other every few months. They could be on their most charming behavior in short spurts. Then they seemed to enjoy each other."

"If you had to guess, who would you say killed him?"

"Some Beninese bloke. These kaffirs hold grudges when you get between them and a dollar."

Lynne was disgusted. "Didn't we tell you we don't use that term here? I have great respect for the Beninese."

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He laughed. "You're so politically correct. Don't mind me. My father used to beat me black and blue because of my unfettered tongue."

Feeling estranged from the sometimes amusing man, Lynne left the corner they had been talking in and wandered around the room, looking at the tattered collection of books along one wall. There were three tiers of shelves containing the rag tag donated unsorted library of mostly paperbacks for pleasure reading.

There was a twenty year old exercise bike. She tried the pedal and heard it squeak because it wasn't oiled. She didn't feel like leaving the sanctuary of the Club yet and returned to the comfortable couch.

Gerry went on as if there hadn't been any interruption. "A lot of people are probably happy that the ambassador is dead. For one, there's that husband of yours. Always, so nicey nice. But there's ambition under all that. The ambassador's death will give Everett a chance to show his stuff."

"But he was acting ambassador once before, several years ago."

"Yes, but now he's at a crucial spot. If he doesn't get tenure this year, bye bye Charlie!"

"You are so insulting. Everett isn't like that!" Really annoyed now, she started to walk away.

"Oh, come on mate. He's just one among many I'll tell you someone else that is glad he is out of the way."

Intrigued, she stopped. "Who?"

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“Well, there’s me. Nothing personal. But he was all set to ship me off to the US. He said I have a drinking problem. The bloke was ready to ruin my life!”

An aide worker ordered some drinks and Gerry got busy dealing with them. Lynne joined the group in the tiny viewing room and arranged herself on the floor with a pillow in front of the TV which was screening *The Year of Living Dangerously*. She usually loved to see it, always felt it was similar to life here, fascinating, dangerous, beyond understanding. But now, her mind was half on Gerry’s surprising revelation. Would wild Gerry kill to keep from being sent away from the country and his family? When the movie ended just before ten, she went to the main room again. Ordinarily the club closed at ten. Cyprien told her he had been listening to the radio and said there was no news and no warnings of danger. Then the telephone rang. Gerry jumped for it.

“Yes. Hello. Good to hear from you.” He alternated short periods of listening with short responses. “About to close up. Just a few volunteers and some aid workers. And our new Community Liaison Officer. You know her? She used to run the English Language Program. Now she’s the acting ambassador’s wife.” He turned to Lynne, “The ambassador’s wife wants to talk to you.”

Surprised, Lynne took the phone. She remembered the red haired woman screaming and throwing herself on her husband’s body.

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The ambassador's wife still or again sounded hysterical. She said, "I'm all alone. I heard terrible rumors, of violence in the streets. The guard is here, but he's outside. All my other servants went home. We're not allowed to have them spend the night inside the house. No one will talk to me at the Embassy. I can't bear it. I know we don't know each other, but I need help. I know this isn't your job but I've heard you're a kind person. Will you come and stay with me a little while?"

"Yes. I will. I was just leaving the club."

"And another thing, can you bring me some books to read? I know there are a lot of them on the shelves in front of you?"

"This woman is strange," Lynne thought. "She's hysterical, afraid of the riot in the streets, her husband just murdered, and she wants books?" Feeling like she was humoring a madwoman, Lynne said, "What kind of books do you want?"

"Anything. Just be sure every one has a woman in it." Reaching on the shelf, Lynne grabbed ten paper back books that had women pictured on the covers. If she helped this strange woman, she might find out something that would lead to the ambassador's killer.

"Good, I am going mad, thinking ugly thoughts over and over. I need some distraction. And, I still don't feel up to facing the world."

"But you will face one small part of it, me."

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“Yes. That’s true. And I want to tell you something. Maybe it will help them to find the murderer.”

“You’ll see me in ten minutes.”

She passed the sleepy guard at the gate. He said the neighborhood was calm. She jumped into her car. Even at ten at night, it was hot, but there was a breeze. She went to the ambassador’s house. The guard let her in without checking, obviously told to expect her. The ambassador’s wife opened the door. Her mane of red hair was drooping and disheveled. She had fear in her eyes.

“I don’t know if you are the one to help me. But maybe you’re on my side.”

“I’ve been wanting to talk to you. I saw you the sad night your husband died. You said ‘Now they got him. Who got him? And had they threatened him?’”

“Yes, they sent him a voo doo curse. You are newly married, an outsider, really. I’m taking a chance that you didn’t really know, aren’t part of all this.”

“All what?”

“A plan to kill the ambassador. They tried many times before by bribing Beninese servants. The Beninese are so poor it’s easy to bribe them. But that didn’t kill him, just made him sick. My husband was in poor health for a year even though he bravely kept on doing his work here. When he finally went to Paris for expert medical advice, of course they didn’t find anything. The poisoners were all back in Cotonou. They found only some tiny gall

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stones, told him not to drink so much coke and sent him back. I made him promise not to eat anything at a public gathering. He got a new cook for our house here that he trusted completely. But when I visited him here, I went into the cook's room and found an assortment of clippings from my husband's nails, all ready to do voo doo with. I sent that one packing, immediately."

"But who do you think planned all these things?"

"Your husband, Everett," Gloria said this emphatically, like a second rate actress in a melodrama.

"Oh, come on now!"

"One time, when we had invited him to dinner, I saw your husband talking secretly to our cook. Then, the next night, my husband was eating, his food gritted, and he looked carefully and saw ground glass in his rice. We told the police. They beat the cook until he confessed. But he wouldn't admit that a white person put him up to it. He said he was wanted revenge the ambassador hadn't loaned him money for his sick child. Then, we got another new cook."

Lynne wished she hadn't come to talk to this disturbed woman. Now she felt trapped and forced to hear her rantings.

Gloria gave Lynne some wine and filled her own large glass to the brim. It obviously was not the first one this evening. As she drank, she seemed to relax, and then started yawning. She said, "Some day we'll talk again. There are

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things I'll reveal about my husband, but I will only tell a close friend like you."

Lynne opened her mouth to protest at this designation from a woman she had just met. But she thought of Tony, the security officer's maxim In order to find the murderer, investigate the victim. Someone disliked the ambassador enough to kill him. Maybe this out of control woman knew something that would lead to the truth.

Chapter 20:Husbands and Other Strangers

The ambassador's wife got Lynne's avid attention when she said she would reveal secret information about her dead husband.

"Yes, Gloria, what can you tell me?"

"Hide things for his career. Ambassador's wife, like a queen." Her words were barely understandable.

Lynne held her breath, afraid to do anything that would break Gloria's chain of thought. But after a pause while her face was contorted with intense stress and concentration, Gloria started mumbling words that were only half audible and stopped talking about her husband or his death. Instead, she deluged Lynne with sleepy, half incoherent talk about her life in Paris, her clothes, and her hair. She said she had taken a sleeping pill and Lynne could go as soon as she went to sleep. She talked more slowly, less meaningfully as the minutes went by. Lynne had trouble keeping awake.

Finally, Gloria drifted off to sleep. Lynne left quietly, without waking her. She was too tired to be afraid of the uncertain neighborhood streets. On the surface, at least, everything appeared calm. At the door of her house, she found her guard asleep. Drowsily he told her in imperfect French that there had been no trouble since the shots were fired many hours before.

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Lynne fell into bed and immediately was in deep sleep. She was startled awake by the telephone. She looked at the clock. It was 3 o'clock. She leapt for the phone. It was Everett.

“Are you all right Lynne?”

“Yes, but I have some things to talk about with you.”

“Well, another time. I just have a minute. You're going to extremely proud of me. You probably heard there was trouble about election results. Washington sent me to see our defeated candidate.”

“You?”

“Yes, me. Try to remember, I'm an important man now; I'm acting ambassador. When Washington learned that Soglo was reluctant to accept the results of the election and was behind the shooting of guns in Cotonou, they made it clear to me that I should use every peaceful means to get him to accept the results and keep Benin on its track as a democracy. You know I had met Soglo when I was Economic Officer and I delivered a message to him when the ambassador was out of town back in the days when the American Press was calling Benin the Hope of Africa. I felt he was a charming, intelligent man.

“Well, anyway, he was willing to see me. I managed to talk him into accepting his loss. I told him about the upper level World Bank job our government has arranged for him. He said in the morning he will announce that Kereko won.”

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“Everett, you saved the country from a civil war!”

“Yes. Probably. Sometimes this job can be satisfying. Now Washington will give me a promotion and tenure.”

His tone showed joy and fulfillment. He sometimes complained about the terrible pressure of being acting ambassador, but Lynne knew he loved the power. And, of course, after remaining on the same level for six years, he had known that unless he had some kind of dramatic achievement this year and got the tenure, he would be side lined, would gradually get worse and worse assignments and eventually he would have to resign.

A shiver went down her back. Were his accusers right and had Everett foreseen what a fortunate career situation he would be in if the ambassador died?

Everett still was a mystery to her in some ways. Sometimes she felt he was nice and bland and reliable. Other times, he seemed stand offish and elusive. The thought flitted into her mind, “Was Everett a murderer?” But she chased it right out. “Of course not.” She turned off the light and hoped to get right back to sleep. But her heart was still pounding. She tossed and squirmed for a while, looking for a relaxing position. But sleep didn’t dome. She decided to turn on the light and do some real thinking about other people that had access to the Embassy Annex and wished for the ambassador’s death. There were probably many. She grabbed the black pen and a pad of

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yellow lined paper from her beside table and propped herself up with a mound of pillows. She started to write, then she decided to do it the other way around. Who was above suspicion, completely approving of the ambassador? Well, Dora, the librarian hadn't complained about him, and Sally, her old friend the nurse, seemed to think he was all right. That brazen blonde Daphne probably adored him since he gave her the job promised to the drab woman. Who else? Even his wife wasn't surely in this group. She might have something very bad to tell about him if Lynne could find her sober, willing, and awake enough to talk.

She leaned back on the pillows, half awake and half asleep, taking her mind back to the first people she had suspected. Some seemed cleared. The drab lady was in America at the time of the second murder. Victoria, the voodoo sorceress, was in Agbohy, her village, the day the ambassador died. She scribbled names, words, ideas. She struggled to think who could have been at the Annex shortly before the band arrived and the ambassador was found dead.

She couldn't keep her eyes open; her thoughts were fragmented and disordered. Who else could get into the compound? Why was the ambassador there so early? Was he meeting someone? Who helped him get that early drink of coke? Were there fingerprints on that glass? And Matthew's death probably was caused by someone that heard him say at the Explore dinner that he knew who killed the ambassador. That meant someone at that meal,

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or close to someone there. Visions of huge cauldrons of stew, faces and lines of speech floated through her mind, unchecked by logic or reason. Sulky Harriet, May Ling, Brett's wife, with downcast eyes, Louis and three evil monkeys, Gerry and gyrating mermaids, three cooks with poison shakers, shattering glass in a fu fu pounder. A fou in the Hilton pool. Lita and Omar and a typewriter behind a bush. Somehow, in her half dream, a voice asked. How about Brett? Yes, Brett. Obnoxious little man. Her boss. Greeted her rudely. Where was he? Administrative officer, in charge of public events. She forced her eyes open and started to write his name on the now scribbled and disordered list. But the pen fell out of her hand. She slept again.

In her dreams, laughing cruelly, jeering, they all menaced her. Only the dead ambassador reached out a friendly hand.

Chapter 21: Traveler Beware

When Lynne's alarm rang the next morning at 6:30, she shut it off without opening her eyes. She wasn't ready to face the day. Was the city going to erupt in revolution? If so, would Everett remember he had a wife and help her? Finally, at eight she struggled out of bed and ate the good breakfast Marcel served her. She took a sandwich with her to be prepared for however the day went. Her car was especially blistering hot, since it was later than her usual morning starting time. The streets were hot and quiet with only half the ordinary traffic. When she got to the Annex, the guard let her in with his usual politeness, but stopped the car for a careful check under her wheels. He hadn't done this since her first days on the job. She tried to read the expression on his mask like face. He looked solemn, she decided.

The big room with its desks and had the usual people at the desk but there was no line waiting to see the cashier. She said good morning to Harriet who responded in a way they was no more sullen than usual.

Brett came out of his office and his beady eye fixed her with a glare. He was probably pleased to catch her doing something wrong.

"You decided to join us this morning, after all?" He said with heavy sarcasm.

"Yes, Brett. Good morning."

She hurried to her office.

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She realized there was one unusual thing, a low hum coming from portable radios on most of the desks. Once inside her room, she turned on hers.

The local station was playing music. Then, there was a long period of radio silence. At 11 o'clock, President Soglo was introduced. He acknowledged that he had lost the election, wished Kereko well, and asked the country to unite to bring about stability and prosperity. Lynne flipped her dial and heard radio France say the same thing and BBC also, followed by a translation into English. Voice of America had a neat little story about the forces of democracy expressing the will of the people, followed by Soglo's announcements and wishes. They added news of Soglo's appointment as a director of World Bank in another French speaking African country. All the stations went on to say that Cotonou was calm and people were back to everyday activities.

As she worked, she continued to keep one ear on the radio. News bulletins continued saying that the country had settled down and accepted the results of the election. She, waited impatiently to hear from her husband, and hopefully, called Marcel and asked him to make a specially nice dinner before he left since possibly, at last, tonight, Everett would be home to eat with her.

She looked over her story that she had written to publish in *The Talking Drum* as part of her plan to the lure the murderer out into the open.. Bu t last night's dreams had frightened

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her. She didn't know if she had the nerve to go ahead with her plan. She would decide later, maybe tomorrow.

At three o'clock she got a call from Everett, for once, in person, not through t his secretary. "I'll be home for dinner Lynne. I'm eager to see you." As it turned out, he didn't get home to eat his by then dried up dinner until ten o'clock. He seemed irritable and preoccupied. Lynne thought after he ate perhaps she could ask him some of the things that were bothering her. But even refusing dessert, he said, "I 'm really wiped out." He seemed so groggy that once again she didn't have the heart to ask him questions that in a sense accused him of unfaithfulness and possibly murder. She made him a cup of warm cocoa and tucked him into their queen-size bed.

Despite it all, it t was good to be with her husband again.. She vowed to work harder to find the truth about the murders and make people stop hinting at suspicions of him and his political ambitions..

After the light was off and he seemed almost asleep, he suddenly bolted upright and said, "I hope you're free tomorrow. I have to take a trip up north and want you with me."

"How about my job?"

"I had my secretary talk to Brett. It's all set."

Pleased at being included, and annoyed at being treated with such perfunctory authority, she had a short internal debate, then, set her alarm for 6 and got into bed. Everett was asleep

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almost instantly. She repressed all thought and soon was dreaming of traveling in the African bush.

The Embassy had told Marcel their plans and he came early and had delicious coffee and croissants waiting for them in the morning. At six Everett leapt out of bed, muttering, I, we will be late." Moments later, he was intent on some papers he reviewed while he ate.

"You'll get grease marks all over your papers," Lynne said, just for something to say, to show that she was there.

"Huh?"

"Croissants are full of grease. Your fingers are oily."

"Oh. Well, tough. I need to look at these and I'm hungry." He looked at her and blinked. "Oh Lynne, I have so much pressure. It's good to see you." He even managed a smile before he went back to the documents. "They believe it's important that I meet with the village leaders and chefs to solidify our relationship to Kereko's administration. We have some indications that he is a born again Christian now and wants to ally himself with the US.

They were barely ready when the driver rang the bell. But they hurried out to the waiting Embassy limousine. She was immediately wonderfully cool in it, with the luxury car's powerful air conditioning. And so they were off. Once again, they had the English speaking driver so Lynne was not able to have the serious, probing conversation she had been looking forward to having for days.

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She consoled herself by looking out the window at the African scenery she loved.: little round huts, made of mud bricks and thatched with straw, the big gnarled banyan trees, some as big as a shack and shy children peeping from their mothers' skirts at the unaccustomed sight of a big back car.

Everett explained that besides the crucial political meetings on their trip, but he had one errand suggested by Tony Mariani, the security man.

"You'll be helpful on this trip. You know this country. I have only visited the North once."

They were on the only road from the south to the north. Before that road was built and improved a few years before, it took two days to get to Natitingo. Now with luck they would make it in about 12 hours. The road was good up as they drove for a few hours, but then got difficult. Sporadic road improvement led to detours, barricades, sudden holes, all without warning. They were tense about the timing because they knew that careful drivers avoided being on the broken, lonely roads at night. People who could avoid it did not travel after dark which came about 6:30. They ate the lunch packed by Marcel in the car to avoid stopping.

Suddenly, they saw a road block ahead. Someone had dragged a log across the road. Four men in rag tag clothes armed with 50's style Russian army guns stood before them.

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When they stopped, they met the car, pointing the guns.

Lynne managed to hide her fear. She had heard that recently there were incidents of highway robbery in once peaceful Benin. The driver rolled down his window. The men talked to him in an African language, a northern language Everett's driver knew a little of. They were joined by a man in an almost complete army fatigue uniform in fair condition. He spoke in French, to Everett "Sir. Travelers must beware. There is danger here. The road is being repaired and has holes. And also, Nigerian bandits sometimes stop big cars like this."

Lynne knew people in Benin said criminals were Nigerians, just as the Togolese claimed bad elements were Ghanaian.

Lynne still didn't know whether this forced stop was a masked way of extorting money from them or menacing them.

Everett remained calm, authoritative, and polite.

"Thank you. We know the danger and are almost to our hotel. Then we will stop for the night. I represent the Embassy of the United States. I have meetings with Beninese officials in your region."

The soldier nodded his head. In the half light of the moon, his glistening dark face with its tribal scars looked threatening and mysterious.

But he replied, "Then, good luck to you sir. Good luck to you madame. He pointed at the little American flags that were mounted on

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each side. Your Peace Corps built a school for my village. We wish you well. But, be careful! Beware!”

Chapter 22: A Dangerous Liaison?

They followed the soldier's advice to be cautious and had the driver go slowly, watching carefully for road hazards in the growing darkness as they proceeded up north. They finally arrived at the Hotel Natitingo safely and were soon in their room, a little mud brick and concrete cabin made to look like an African mud hut, but covered with a new coat of paint and nicely furnished and air conditioned for monied visitors,

Someone had provided cheese sandwiches made with fresh French bread baked in a local mud oven and two bottles of Bier Benin, the excellent beer the Germans had taught the Togolese to make in the surprisingly spotless brewery in Lome. They wanted to take showers and remove the dust of the long journey, but only a trickle of water came out of the faucet, then none at all. They knew that water shortages in the north often resulted in the water being turned off at night. They were delighted to find the electricity was on and the air conditioner worked to some extent.

For once, instead of his usual moaning, groaning, and complaining about fatigue and stress, Everett made love to her, energetically and sweetly. She drifted off to sleep in a haze of pleasure and love.

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The next morning the cold water was running so they felt fresh to start another hot, dusty day.

They walked down to a little paillote, the straw covered shelter that served as an eating room. As they drank coffee and ate French bread, Everett explained his plan for the day. He had to meet several village chefs. They both knew the country well enough to envision those meetings. The chefs were probably old men, wearing the flowing African embroidered robes called bou bous. In a little shelter in the shade of a straw roof, they would sit on whatever stools, stumps, or benches the chef could provide. There would be hand shaking to start with all around, they would be offered Lion Killer, the local lemon soda or Beer Benin. They would chat a little and exchange wishes and complements. Everett had to show his respect to these men even though they both new that at the present time, their power was social rather than political or economic. Then he would have a meeting with the district commissioner, here called the prefect, who was official and paid a modest salary by the Beninese government to administer the district. Nothing could happen in the district without his approval. And, again, Everett's main task was to show plenty of respect and patience with sometimes long winded expressions of welcome and greeting and desire for cooperation. Everyone knew yovos, white people, had money, and there was always hope that some of it would come to the prefet and the district.

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After that, he would probably go to a meal with a group of the most important men in the area at the home of the prefect. They both knew the menu would be some variety of the ever present pate and sauce, which millet or cornmeal and a gravy made of tomato paste, a little canned fish or bits of chicken all seasoned with very hot pepper. Sometimes Everett came away from these feasts with the amoebas and other unpleasant intestinal infestations. But they had brought a supply of medications with them. And this time, they would be home by night and could visit their own medical office, if necessary.

Right now, it was crucial for him, as acting ambassador, through his personal behavior in these meetings, to show that the United States was still a cooperating friend of Benin despite the triumph in the election of the old dictator, the man America opposed.

Everett asked Lynne to help him in another one of his ambassadorial duties by meeting with a group of Peace Corps Volunteers. Someone had gotten in touch with them and told them to get on their motorcycles and meet at the Lafaia restaurant on the outskirts of the little town. She would spend the morning with them. Then, the driver would pick her up and take her to the hotel room where she could pack and be ready to start home when the driver came back with Everett.

The driver dropped her off at a dingy restaurant with several big Yamahas outside it.

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Everett said, "Thanks for your help. With you seeing the volunteers for me, we can get back to Cotonou tonight. It's important for us to keep their morale up and reassure them that things will be all right despite the threat of trouble after the election. I can't really predict when we will pick you up, but it will probably be early in the afternoon."

Remembering from her days in the Peace Corps in Togo the problems of volunteers in getting enough good food and infestation free drink she bought ten young people attending platters of beef kabobs called brochettes, and the french fries made of yam known as colicos. They gobbled them down and each drank about four Fantas or Lion Killers. They told her stories of problems and joys, with much laughter over the bizarre situations they dealt with in whatever way they could. They said they weren't worried about the political situation because they had so little access to information they scarcely noticed there was an election. One lovely but dusty young woman with curly blonde hair said, "I have been busy trying to deal with the knowledge that my neighbor ate my dog."

The hours flew by. Lynne was really happy, for the first time in many days. Everett had been so loving and cheerful. And with this very enjoyable meeting with volunteers which was helping him, she was acting like a partner.

About one, the driver returned and drove her back to her room. She took another shower while she could and packed her things. Everett

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had packed his before he left in the morning. The driver put them in the car and went back to Everett.

The manager knocked on her door and said excitedly in schoolboy French, "You have a telephone call. From Cotonou. It is important."

Lynne was surprised since she knew the phones in the north were unreliable. And she wasn't expecting to hear from anyone. "Yes, this is Lynne Knowlton." She heard Tony, the security man's voice. "Lynne, I finally got through to you. I have to talk to you I may have..." The connection was bad. His voice kept wavering and becoming inaudible.

"Why? What's this about?"

"I feel guilty, maybe I put you in harm's way. New evidence against your husband. We got word from the lab in Washington. Everett's fingerprints are on the Ambassador's glass." There was a series of distorted words and crackling and buzzing. "And then you know there is that incident." Then she understood some words. "We don't know how they got there. But it looks bad. Extremely bad." The line went dead.

All her previously repressed concerns about Everett's suspicious behavior leapt to full consciousness. There still might be an explanation, but for now, she had lost her trust. She was afraid to be alone with her husband. What should she do? How could she get home without going with him? There was no train. There was no way to rent a car. The bush taxi

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system that she knew from Peace Corps days was wretchedly uncomfortable and unreliable.

She decided that she would be safe if she just stayed in sight of their driver until she reached home. She got her bag packed and waited on a bench at the entrance of the hotel compound. About two o'clock she saw the State Department limousine drive up with Everett waiting in the back seat for her to join him..

She got in, grateful for the dark, faithful presence at the wheel. But after driving for a short while, the driver turned onto a rudimentary road. Everett explained, "Lynne, we have to make a stop. I have to do that errand for Tony Mariani." The driver turned off to a narrower, road that was now only two tracks between millet fields.

"Tony wants me to talk to someone, an Embassy employee who got sick the day after the ambassador's death and went to his family's village near here to recuperate. I have to ask him some questions since he worked at the Annex the day the ambassador died."

After about a quarter mile they passed a few huts, with straw or tin roofs. They turned right, then left, came to an area with a neat tall fence made of thick bamboo. The driver sounded the horn. The door was opened by a beaming face so black and moist in the heat that it glistened. "You are welcome." He spoke English. I am honored. Please come in." A frown as if of pain clouded his face and he clutched his brow. He led them to three broken

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chairs under a palm tree that gave some shade from the blasting sun.

“Raoul, I am sorry you are sick. But I need some information. You told someone you know something about the night the ambassador died.”

Three tiny children, dressed in ragged scraps of pants and shirts, barefoot, crept from behind the house and stared at the visitors.

A scrawny chicken scuttled past them, then stopped when it found a tiny shoot of green pushing from the bare, sandy court yard. In the distance, a woman with bare breasts, pulled a long rope, and emptied a bucket of water into a wash tub.

Raoul squinted. “I regret, the pallude, the malaria, it gives me pains. Yes. I worked in the Annex that night. I was in the building before the concert commenced.”

“Ah. Who did you see? The office was supposed to be closed. No one should have been there except for the serving staff.”

“I was there to clean.”

“Who did you see?”

“The ambassador came in. His office is in the main building two blocks away. But there he was.”

“Was he alone?”

“When he came, I think so, then someone came in.”

“Who?”

“You want me to tell who?”

“Yes. Tell us who.”

He looked imploringly at Everett.

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Lynne added her urging. "Yes. We must know. Tell us who."

He looked at her briefly, they looked directly at Everett. "Well sir, you must know. It was you!"

Chapter 23: The Taxi Park

Lynne was horrified to hear from Raoul that Everett was at the Annex with the ambassador not long before he died. But Everett calmly went on with the questioning. “Did someone else enter?”

“No. I was almost finished. I was just inside to get a cloth. I went home soon.”

“Are you sure no one else was in the building, in the offices or back rooms?”

“Sir, I saw only you and the ambassador. I know nothing more.”

“Thank you for your help. If you remember more, contact me or Mr. Tony Mariani, the Security Officer. Or, you can tell Louis who will tell us. Now, rest and take care of yourself.”

Before they got into the car, Everett stopped and said to Lynne, somberly. “Yes, now you know I wasn’t frank with you. I did see the ambassador at the Annex briefly just before I came home to take you to the concert. He wanted to talk to me. He was well when I left. I told Tony Mariani.”

“Was he suspicious of you?”

“No, I don’t think so. He said he would sort it all out when he got the finger print report from Washington and learned who handled the glass.”

A dagger of anxiety went through Lynne. Everett didn’t know that Tony had called to tell her that besides the ambassador’s prints, only one other set was on the glass. His!”

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He went on. "When Tony learned that I was going up North to check out the political situation he asked me to do this little interview with Raoul. He wanted to know if he saw anyone else in the building at that time. Someone could have been in the back offices. He suggested that I take you along, probably to keep me honest."

"Ah, I see." So that was why Everett invited her to go along! And why Tony was feeling guilty now that he had the damning fingerprint results for putting her alone with a possible murderer. Now she distrusted her husband. But, as long as the driver was near them, she should be all right.

But, instead of going back to the usual road south, the driver took them on another series of broken roads, little more than car tracks in the midst of the weeds and vegetation. When they reached a branching of the path, the driver stopped the car and jumped out. Everett slide into the driver's seat and started driving immediately. Lynne was stunned. What was going on? As he drove he explained. "When he stopped to visit his family up here earlier in the day, he learned there's an emergency, his father is sick. He begged to stay with him. I said I will drive the limousine back to Cotonou and he can stay a few days and then take the bush taxi back down.

"Oh no!"

"Why, what's the matter. Don't you like my driving?" He continued down the bumpy tracks, the car lurching and sliding.

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“I can’t go with you. I don’t trust you.” She wished she could take the words back. Why did she say that? Now he knew she believed he was the murderer. Maybe he would kill her or have her killed, just as poor Matthew was killed because he said at the Explore dinner that he knew who the murderer was.

He laughed. “Oh come on. Where’s your spirit of adventure. And anyway, you have to go with me. How else would you get home?” He continued toward the main road rushing on the rutty roads with reckless speed, the car careening and sliding. Soon they were at the center of the next town, the market area. He stopped to let a man cross with a herd of the local skinny, rangy goat-like sheep. Lynne, opened the door and started to get out.

“Lynne you can’t do that. I’ll drive more slowly if it bothers you so much. How will you get home?”

“I’ll find a way.”

And she dashed off, pushing through the outdoor market with its stalls made of twisted tree branches, old boards, and bits of old tin roofing, struggling through the crowd, running to the back of one of the shacks, hiding in an out building. She went in one of the big concrete buildings with stalls and out the back door. She knew Everett would look for her. She peeked through a crack between shacks. Yes, Everett was looking for her, but he could scarcely move the car in the packed market area. Even so, he managed to circle the whole

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area. He tried talking to some people. She saw them shake their heads.

She didn't know this village well, but had noticed when they passed through it that the taxi park was within walking distance. When she saw Everett leave the area, she started walking in the direction of the taxi park.

She thought Everett was likely to go to the prefect's office to get a translator and some help. She knew there wouldn't be much of a police force in this small town. The nearest effective law enforcement was the army post 20 miles away.

Careful to stay hidden from any road that Everett might be on, she was soon at the muddy, dirty, taxi area. It was a large square with places for various bush taxis, beat up station wagons or pick up trucks with rigged up roofs and sides of canvas or old boards. She had spent many hours at similar ones when she was in the Peace Corps. People went to the designated place, paid a driver, and waited until he had accumulated twenty two people for the ride. That was the number they could jam into each vehicle, adding some chickens with legs tied together, perhaps a goat on the roof, and many bales of goods on the roof that made the whole precarious thing top heavy and unstable. She knew sometimes it took hours to get the required number of people.

She was hungry. She saw people selling the coli cos, fried igname, oranges, skin removed with razor blades, a few plates of boiled eggs,

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coffee with canned condensed milk, one big lovely papaya, loaves of french bread.

She didn't have time for food. She looked for a vehicle going to Cotonou. There were no signs. She asked a man, in French. He said, "Pas francais," and then talked to her in an African language she didn't know at all. She thought the people up here spoke Barabo, something like Kabye in Togo, but she didn't know any words in those languages.

She tried asking a boy. Usually the schoolboys knew French. But this market boy didn't. She was terrified. She had to get out of here before Everett got some help and came back. She gave up trying to really communicate but ran from car to car saying to each, "Cotonou? Cotonou? Cotonou?"

At last she found a tall dark man with pussy cat scars on each side of his mouth wearing a dirty pink bou bou who answered her firmly, "Cotonou."

"How much?" she asked. He didn't even know that much French, looked questioningly at her and said something in his own language. She pulled out some 100 CFA notes and tried to have a questioning look on her own face. The man understood, and counted out ten of them.

"Cotonou," He said with satisfaction. She gave him the money, hoping she was understanding. Now, if she could only leave before Everett came back. She knew this was unlikely. She might have a long wait. She looked at the row of people, sitting on stumps and rickety benches, waiting. She saw a woman

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with a baby, a huge market mama with a basket, three men in bou bous, two men in the pajama like suits called complets, five women with stylish African dresses, three with tressed hair, probably unmarried, three with head dresses folded in intricate pleats. She saw a workman with the striped hand-woven vest of the northern people, another with the wide strange pants of some villagers. There was a man who was a fou, a wandering mad man, talking to him self, another woman, pregnant, with a toddler. As she counted she realized she was might be in luck. There were including her, 19 people. She anxiously scanned the area. So far, Everett had not returned. Oh, if only three more could come!

She remembered when she was in the Peace Corps, a friend had been in a hurry and in the same sort of situation. He had agreed to pay for the empty seats. The driver had accepted the money, loaded the truck, but then still waited to fill every nook with a paying body.

She didn't have much money with her and didn't know if she could attempt to explain a proposition like that when they had no language in common. Her heart pounded. She had to get out of here. She tried again, asking the eighteen people in French if they could understand her. Then she tried the rudimentary Fon that she knew. This caused an active and excited babble of comments, but none of it was in a language she understood.

Oh, what could she do?

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Just then, three nicely dressed young men, black skin glowing, neat hair in short Afros, smiling and confident arrived, talked to the driver and paid the fee. Within moments, they were all jammed into the truck, chickens at their feet, well behaved babies on mothers' laps. The ancient truck, groaning and creaking, coughing and sputtering, started and was soon on the bumpy, broken highway down south.

She hoped Everett had to waste a lot of time talking to the prefect. Now that they were on the road, she hoped the toggled together bush taxi would get them past the police army checkpoint twenty miles away before Everett could manage to get a message to them to stop her. And she was afraid that Everett would get back on the road in his powerful limousine and overtake them. She had a nightmarish vision of him coming with a translator, stopping the bush taxi and dragging her away by force.

At one point the driver stopped for a gaggle of guinea fowl. Then the car decrepit car wouldn't start again!

What to do?

The five strongest men jumped out and pushed. When the motor coughed and caught, they leaped in, one barely making it, hanging on the back of the truck with one hand, a grin on his handsome face.

They were on their way again, but of course, all that took time. The rattling truck went on, slowly, fast down hills, but barely moving up hills.

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Lynne tried to calm down. But she dreaded the coming encounter at the check point. She knew that Everett, as acting ambassador of the U.S, if he spoke to someone in a mutually understood language, would get as much cooperation as the rural army of this undeveloped land could give. They would believe anything he said. And do anything he asked them to. She knew the police habitually beat suspects. It would be up to Everett, a murderer, to suggest how she should be treated!

Her heart was pounding. She wanted to be brave, but she was afraid.

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Chapter 24: An Irate Encounter

After eight uncomfortable and anxious hours, Lynne got to back to Cotonou without Everett or the police finding her. From the market in Cotonou she took a taxi to her house. There, she asked the driver to wait for her, promising him extra money. The guard at her gate greeted her impassively. She could see that she had arrived before Everett. She rushed in and packed a suitcase with enough clothes for a few days and stuffed a wad of the African francs into her purse. She couldn't stay here. But where could she go? She still felt enough loyalty to her husband not to want a public scandal before his guilt was proved. What could she do? Should she once again ask Lita for shelter? Eight years ago she had stayed with her when democratic protesters burned her house in Sokode. But she suspected Omar was living with Lita now and staying there would be awkward. She didn't really get along well with either of them well right now. While she was thinking, the telephone rang. She took a chance answering it. If it was Everett he would know where to find her, but on the other hand, she might learn how far away he was so she could avoid him. But the caller was Gloria, the dead ambassador's wife.

"Lynne, I want to ask you a huge favor. I know you're on your honeymoon, but in a week I'll be out of here and won't bother you again."

"What is it? What can I do to help you?"

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“I have to pack up my private things and get out of here. They’ll really throw me out soon. But I’m afraid to be here alone. I don’t do too badly during the day, but at night I’m terrified, I can’t sleep, then the next day I’m too tired to get my packing done. Could you possibly come and stay with me for a while?”

What a wonderful coincidence! Lynne said yes and ran to take her bag out to the waiting taxi. In a few minutes she was at the ambassadorial mansion.

Gloria showed her pleasure at seeing her. With Lynne there, she seemed almost calm and normal. It was late and she said. "Now that you are here, maybe I can sleep. I’m so tired! I hope you feel like retiring.”

This suited Lynne, who wanted to escape into the non awareness of sleep and hopefully forget the terrible things that had happened to her that day. She set her little travel alarm and fell asleep immediately.

She woke early the next morning. Gloria’s cook her coffee and fresh bread and butter.

Gloria was still asleep. Lynne left a note:

Dear Gloria,

I have to go to work. I will be back about 5 o’clock.

See you then, Lynne.

She was at the Annex building at 8 o’clock. Neither Harriet nor Brett were in the big main room when she entered. She nodded or waved to her more pleasant colleagues and went directly to the Community Liaison office. When

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she got there, she found the door unlocked. She walked in to see Everett, pacing the floor. She gasped, afraid, and stayed near the door which she kept open. If he got violent, she would scream for help.

“Lynne, what is going on?”

“I'm going to stay with Gloria for a few days. I don't want to be with you right now ”

His eyes were like burning cinders. “What is the matter with you? Why did you turn on me abruptly up north?”

“You haven't been truthful with me. I keep learning more suspicious things about you. I hear you argued at the Embassy with the ambassador early the day he died. And you know that the servant saw you at the Annex just before he died. You kept all this from me. And Tony Mariani called me up there to say your prints are on the murder glass. Tony thinks you may be the murderer.”

“And you. Do you think so?”

“I don't know what to think. But I don't feel safe to be with you. If you move toward me right now, I'll shout for help.”

“Oh Lynne, don't be silly. I can explain everything. I didn't kill the ambassador. Where would I get poison? And even if I had it, would I be feeding poisoned cokes to the ambassador when we were on such bad terms. I would know that I would be suspected.”

“See, you admitted it. You had a strong motive and you had the opportunity. Anyone in Africa can get poison.”

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Everett's tone was ferocious. "If that is what you think, stay away from me. Any feeling I ever had for you is gone. Now, get out of my way and let me leave this place."

As he rushed to the door, she quickly got out of his way, out of the room, into the hall where she could get help if she needed it. But he didn't look back until he was almost to the corridor to the big entry room. Then, he stopped, and in a serious voice said, "Lynne, be careful. I don't want you to get hurt. I'm convinced that the murderer works at the Embassy. And it isn't me!"

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Chapter 25: A Diplomatic Affair

After Everett left, distressed and confused, Lynne did her best to concentrate on the mail and messages that had accumulated in the Community Liaison Office while she was in the north. She placed a number of calls to deal with them, making a conscious effort to keep her voice normal and calm.

After an hour or two of this, she was surprised when her door opened and Brett entered, looking hostile as usual. "What are you doing on your extension? Calling everyone in Cotonou? Your husband, the acting ambassador, is really annoyed. He's been trying to reach you for an hour.

"Ok. I'll call him right away."

He stood there waiting while she placed the call.

"Claudia, I hear Everett wants to talk to me".

"Yes, I must have tried twenty times. Hold on."

Brett seemed satisfied that contact was made and left the room, banging the door as he left.

"Lynne, I'm still angry because you judged me without even talking to me. After all we have been to each other!"

"Well, it looks bad. You were there just before the ambassador died. Your prints were on the glass."

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“I can explain all that if you will only give me a chance.”

“You keep lying and hiding things.”

“Look, I have an Embassy to run, international duties. I haven’t time for your unreasonableness.”

Lynne was silent.

Then, Everett spoke again. His voice sounded like he was making an effort to be friendly. “Lynne, I’m sorry things are going so badly between us. I really am innocent. Talk to the security officer, Tony Mariani. He believes me. And please, don’t make things worse with public accusations. I’m frantic to get tenure and struggling to keep Benin from revolution. Please at least publicly stand by me for a while. If you want to stay with Gloria, that’s all right. People will be impressed by your generosity helping that half demented woman.”

“Ok. I’ll try not to blow the whistle on you right now. I know that Tony Mariani hasn’t put handcuffs on you yet. After all, it’s up to him to decide how guilty you are.”

“Yes. Remember that. Be a good soldier, as you have been in all your jobs in Africa. Now, tonight, there’s an important diplomatic reception. The new President of Benin has invited the whole diplomatic corps. It’s a formal reception. And it’s important for me to be there with you as my wife to represent the United States. Please do it. If not for me, for Benin and your country.”

“Oh come on now. Who’s writing your lines?”

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“Well, it is important. You don’t have to be more than civil to me, just be there.”

“Ok. I’ll figure out a way to get my clothes from the house.”

“Yes, how about wearing one of those black Paris dresses, like the one you wore the night of the band concert. How about that long one. You looks like a queen in it”.

Lynne made a sound of disgust. “I’ll wear it. But don’t try to make it look like you’re a doting husband. I’ll try to get Gloria to go too.” But Gloria didn’t want to go. Lynne was secretly relieved. Since it was so important for Americans to make a good showing, it was better not to have a woman who was often uncontrollably hysterical.

When she returned to the ambassadorial mansion after work, she saw that Marcel had delivered the gown and shoes to go with it as she had asked in a telephone call. She chatted with Gloria for a while, then took a shower and carefully applied makeup, something she rarely did. She slipped into the long black chiffon Paris gown with a not quite daring neckline. She had expected to wear this at glamorous evenings when she would revel in her role as a state department official’s wife. She had thought she it would be part of the realization of childhood dreams. As it turned out, it was one of the worst evenings of her life, at least one of most unpleasant, annoying, embarrassing, humiliating, and infuriating nights of her life.

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The limo came to pick her up at 7:00. The driver gave her the official invitation in case she needed identification to enter. When he dropped her off at the presidential palace, she saw the walk crowded with highly placed diplomats. She recognized the ambassadors of Russia and Ghana, the Japanese and Chinese ambassadors, ambassador of Zaire and the British Consul. Each was with an elaborately dressed and coiffed woman, presumably a wife. Then she saw that awful woman, Daphne, looking gorgeous. What was she doing here? She wasn't anywhere near the level of the diplomats invited to this.

An aide hurried Lynne to stand next to her husband stood. Somehow, a public persona switch went on in her brain and she was able to greet and shake hands with a hundred people when her husband said, smoothly, and what sounded like proudly, this is my wife, Lynne."

The new Beninese president graciously shook hands with the long line of waiting diplomats. At last, the guest line dwindled.

President of Benin then retired to a private room with some of his top officials and the French ambassador. Lynne knew that bothered Everett. The American Embassy was constantly trying to outflank the power and prestige of the French.

Everett said to Lynne politely, "Thank you. Now, excuse me please, I have to talk to some people." He was out of sight almost immediately.

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Lynne looked for a friendly face. She found the Ghanaian ambassador. She had met him several times and knew he was pleasant and friendly when he wasn't too drunk. At his invitation, she joined him, his wife, and an official from Nigeria with an impressive lady wife wearing a gold brocade dress and a huge, artistically folded headdress, all sitting in a group of chairs. Waiters circulated with glasses of champagne. She arranged a smile on her face. She had to hide her belief that her husband might be a murderer. That made her stomach so upset she couldn't eat the dainty hot hors d'oeuvres a circulating white coated waiter pressed on her.

With half her mind, Lynne kept up a polite conversation with the pleasant group around her. At the same time she was busy with two quests. She wondered if she could spot a suspicious person that might be the murderer of the American ambassador. Despite the damning evidence, she really didn't think Everett was a murderous type. And she looked to see where he was. She would like to make a friendly gesture. She had been very hostile to him. Finally she saw him. When she looked at him across the room and gave him a weak smile he looked at her coldly and changed his position so that she was out of his sight. The rest of the evening continued the way. Whenever she changed her position to talk to someone else, if it was closer her husband, he would give her a cold nod, and then move. And,

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somehow, always near him was the detested woman, Daphne.

Then she saw Tony Mariani. He motioned to her to come closer to him. She excused herself and hurried over to him. "Hello Lynne. I'm not really at the diplomatic level to be here. But Washington thought I should come to offer a little protection in case Everett is in danger."

"Do you think he is?"

"Actually yes. The person that killed the ambassador might try to kill Everett too if he persists in the same behavior."

"What do you mean? Last I heard, you seemed to think Everett was the murderer."

"Well, I have investigated more and think he wasn't."

"But now you think you know who he is. I wish you'd tell me who it is. And if you're protecting Everett, why aren't you staying close to him?"

"If someone wants to kill him tonight, there's really nothing I can do. I already told him not to eat or drink anything that could have been tampered with. And I'm not going to tell you my guesses and suspicions. Keep your eyes open and continue to see what you can find out."

She wished she could go home. She looked for Everett, but didn't see him. Where was he? After Tony's words, she felt friendlier toward him. She was almost ready to make up with him when she saw him enter the room from the patio door.

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With him was the golden haired woman vixen.
He had his hand protectively on her arm.

Somehow, Lynne continued to go through the motions of being a gracious Embassy wife. People she knew kept introducing her to others and she made her way around the room.

She noticed that people were starting to go home. There were very few people still there.

She tried to catch Everett's eye. He didn't look in her direction, then somehow, he was gone again. Back in the darkness with Daphne? She walked all around the now, mostly empty room, trying not to look like she was looking for someone. How embarrassing this was!

Then Everett's driver appeared.

"Madame, Monsieur had important affairs. He told me to take you to your residence."

This was too much. Leaving her here to go off with Daphne! Maybe he wasn't a murderer. But he was a monster! Lynne felt a sharp pain. Could Everett really be having an affair with this odious blonde diplomat before the end of his first month of marriage?

Chapter 26: Sew What?

After her hideous evening at the diplomatic party, the next morning, Lynne was at the Annex office early, determined to throw herself into her work. She was furious and sad about the possible collapse of her new marriage. She realized she still loved Everett and didn't want him disgraced. One good thing, she had learned last night that the security Officer now believed that Everett was innocent. He said he had his eye on someone else as a main suspect.

But, just in case he didn't really have the person, she decided to work on her plan to set a lure for the murderer in the next issue of the newsletter, Talking Drums. Once more, she went over the copy of the short, teasing review that she had prepared, proofreading it carefully. After one more night of thinking it over, she would go ahead with it. Actually, she had better see Tony Mariani and get his approval before she sent out this issue with the dangerous murderer-attracting bait in it.

She read her headline again. **WHO KILLED THE AMBASSADOR? GO TO THE AMERICAN CLUB LIBRARY TO FIND OUT.**

That was rather strong. She shivered. Probably poor Matthew of CRS had been murdered for saying in public that he knew who the killer was. She'd better consider this some more.

About noon she started thinking what she would do that evening. She was still far too

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angry with Everett to think of returning home now. She would continue to stay at the house of the ambassador's wife. She searched her mind for something distracting to do. An evening with Gloria's rambling speech seemed unbearable. She realized that tonight was the monthly meeting of Sew What, the pleasant little sewing circle of mostly American women she had enjoyed the previous two years when she was director of the English Language Program. She thought it unlikely hated Daphne would attend since she was a newcomer and a semi outsider.

She called Gloria and asked her if she would like to go.

"But I don't sew."

"It really is just a chance to get together and chat. I don't have the patience for cross stitching or crocheting, but enjoy the company." She didn't add that before her marriage to Everett and the increased comfort that brought, she had liked the opportunity to spend a few hours in the pleasant, almost palatial government supplied air conditioned living rooms. She had liked the low key talk. However, things would be a little different now. She was an Embassy wife too, and thanks to the murder, was the wife of the acting ambassador, the highest ranking American in Benin. And of course, Gloria was the widow of the ambassador, an exalted position in this tiny American community.

She told Gloria that today, she planned to make some small dolls, using brown and black

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yarn to make heads and bodies and sew on some beads for eyes.

“Oh, I could do that. I even have some yarn I meant to do something with. I’ve been alone too much. Let’s go.”

As she listened to the gossip while they worked maybe she would learn something that would lead to another murder suspect besides Everett, her straying husband. A pang of pain struck her as she thought those words.

She and Gloria arrived at the spacious house of Nicole, the Cultural Center Director’s wife at the same time most of the others were clustering at the door to enter. She greeted them. Stella, the USAID official, wife of Gerry who ran the recreational center, the Peace Corps director’s wife, a missionary, Lita, her old Peace Corps friend, now director of a non governmental organization, the bronze lady, the ambassador’s secretary, and Sally, the Embassy nurse were all there early.

Each carried at least one bag or box. She thought of a short story she had read that was told almost entirely in descriptions of what people carried and how they felt about it. You could probably learn many secret truths if you really knew and understood what this group carried. Lynne carried shells, beads, gourds, a ball of black yarn, scraps of African cloth and a big bottle of Elmer’s Glue to the Sew What meeting. But she also carried anger at her husband for his public flattery of Daphne and humiliation of her. And she carried her strong fear that maybe her husband had killed the

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ambassador and at the same time her strong hope that he didn't and she would learn something tonight that would show he had not done it. She tried to hide from herself knowledge that her husband's unexplained finger prints were found on the ambassador's glass. But she also carried love which had grown for years and was not completely dead.

The things she carried were partly determined by necessity. She needed materials to keep occupied making her souvenir dolls at the monthly meeting fostering a sense of community in the American women in Cotonou half a world away from their native land. She needed their companionship and also it was part of her job as Community Liaison Officer to encourage the activity.

She carried a mental list of questions still hoping to learn that someone other than her suspicious husband killed the ambassador.

She chatted with women who knew men involved in the American Embassy, knew their characteristics, motives, and activities. One of them must be the murderer or know something that would lead to him. She knew the others carried consciousness of their status in the small community, some because of their special occupations, some because of their roles as wives of men with high rank. They all carried materials for their handwork. What they carried varied by mission. One, Glenda, was actually a missionary. She carried wool to crochet booties for African children. She did

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not seem to realize they did not need bootees in this torrid climate.

The things they carried were determined to some extent by superstition. Claudia always carried her almost superstitious reverence for the diplomatic system, her near worship of the dead ambassador and her confusion at acting as acting secretary of the acting ambassador, Everett, Lynne' husband. She possessed these and also and the strong mental spirit that kept her rising in the diplomatic support service ladder. Claudia came in carrying stiffness, showing mourning for the ambassador

For the most part they carried themselves with poise, a kind of dignity. Part of it was a necessity for their work or station. Brett's wife May Ling carried crochet yarn and her fingers flew as she made a platter sized intricate round doily during the two hour meeting. Sally asked her what she would do with a doily. May Ling carried a childhood in China and a struggle with the strange American language despite her masters' degree from a tolerant American college. Showing agonizing shyness, she looked at the floor.

But as they all waited, she did finally get some words out. "My husband, administrative officer," she stopped, blushed, continued, "She want a doilies on many tables, all piece of furnitures." Seeing the surprise on faces, she tried to make it clearer. She said, her husband insisted that every table, end table, and shelf had a fresh doily at all times. She showed fear and uncertainty as she talked. She seemed to be

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suppressing panic which she squelched by attempting an impassive expression on her face. Perhaps she felt inferior because she had no job, no official status except as a wife to the demanding unsatisfied man.

Gloria carried Parisian yarn and wound it into brown balls, trying to control the contortions of her sporadic grief at her husband's death and fear at his undiscovered murderer.

It was sad the things the women carried inside, but Lynne could only speculate about them. The things the women did or felt they had to do pushed them to keep on tatting, knitting, crocheting, hemming, cross stitching as they talked to each other, revealing some things, sharing some, hiding some. Lynne listened and vowed again. She would show strength, seek the truth. She would dispense with love if it was necessary, she would carry on the search for evil in the Embassy.

Lynne knew that Lita carried her love for Omar. She showed her hope that Lynne would influence Everett to encourage Voice of America to hire him as a journalist. Lita hemmed some table napkins, and said to Lynne in a low voice, "Omar should not be punished forever for that accusation that he stole a professor's typewriter."

Lynne tried to be both sympathetic and to avoid agreeing to intercede with her husband. Lynne thought that Lita probably carried hope that memory of Peace Corps days together would make Lynne press Omar's case. But then

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in a low voice, she said, "Lynne, did you know Everett had a row with the ambassador the day before he died?"

Was Lita trying to blackmail her into pushing Omar's candidacy? Lynne answered with low, partly masked fury, "No. And how would you know that, even if it were true?"

"I was at the Embassy waiting to see the ambassador about a request for funding for my agency."

The others used their experience in diplomatic circles to avoid acknowledging that they heard this conversation and made no comment.

Lynne carried with her the strength that had kept her in Africa for eight years, much of it in dangerous subsistence conditions.

"Lita, that is a personal matter," she answered.

"I have faith in my husband and am sure he will make a good decision about Omar." She would not yield to pressure, but also, would not increase public suspicion of her husband while she still hoped for his innocence.

They all huddled together for some comfort and companionship, united and divided by the things they carried. The hostess carried out cookies and a pitcher of lemonade that she had asked her housekeeper to prepare. It was hard to eat, talk, and sew at the same time, but some of them did it.

Stella's attendance at the meeting was unusual. She, like the rest of the Agency for Development officers, usually was aloof with

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other Americans working for the government. She showed a consciousness of being a high local official in an agency that had millions to spend. Lynne wondered what agenda she carried. Was she concerned about the behavior of her wild husband, Gerry, afraid he might be accused of the ambassador's murder? She talked about him as she knitted clumsily an ugly piece of red wool. "Gerry is with the children tonight. He is so good with them! They are always happy when he has a night off from the American Club and can stay with them. He tells them stories and keeps them giggling."

Lynne wondered what thoughts of Gerry's activities she was hiding.

When people started to leave, May Ling carried a load of used plates into the kitchen and came back for another. Nicole, the hostess stopped her impatiently. "May Ling, leave them. My housekeeper will do it in the morning."

May Ling almost winced and quickly said her goodbyes and left. Later, leaving, Lynne chatted on the sidewalk with Lita and a colleague of Lita's named DeDe who had just been transferred from Togo.

Lita said, "Poor May Ling. She's timid as a rabbit. Can you imagine having a husband who wants and insists on hand-crocheted doilies?"

Her friend Dede responded but Lita was hurrying ahead, rushing to her car.

Dede went on talking, turning toward Lynne. "That Brett, that is the least of his character flaws. He's really twisted."

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Lynne asked, "What do you mean?"

"People in Lome know it. They were surprised when he was sent to Benin instead of being fired and sent home."

Lynne knew that she looked surprised. She started to ask "What..." but DeDe continued.

"You work for Brett at the Annex, don't you?"

"Yes. I'm not surprised that he is a tyrant about doilies. But he seems protective of his wife and family. He's resentful because the Embassy hasn't given his wife a job."

"Ah yes. But ask someone else who knows the American community in Togo about his reputation there." Lynne was about to plead with her to tell more when Lita called from her car. "Hurry DeDe. Omar will be waiting for me."

"I have to go. I don't want to tell you more. But someone will. You'll be shocked." With that, she jumped into Lita's car. But she put her head out the open window. "More than that. Horrified!"

Chapter 27: Metamorphosis

After the Sew What meeting, Lynne returned with Gloria to the splendid ambassadorial mansion. Once more her thoughts drifted back to her husband's snubs at the diplomatic reception and his slavish attention to glamorous Daphne. And this, after he had convinced her that it was important for them to make a good show of solidarity.

That night she dreamed he was a devil, but wearing a green suit, taunting her. Waking from her dream she lay in the darkness thinking about all of his bad actions in the eight years she had known him. He was a monster as a boy friend and now, husband, always breaking dates, excusing everything by work duties, in Togo, falling for an annoying Fulbright professor in Togo who also had a mane of golden hair, now, this apparent fascination with this Contract diplomat, Daphne, and his possible murder of the ambassador.

When she got back to her office, she got a telephone call. Claudia said, "You have a telephone call from the acting ambassador."

"Yes, I'm here," she said, in a neutral voice.

"Lynne we must talk. This is ridiculous. Will you come to the Embassy? We can shut the door and hold all calls and really deal with all this."

She knew she would be at a disadvantage, meeting him in the princely ambassadorial

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office, but she would be safe with so many people around. And she really did want to talk to him.

“Ok. I’ll be there in about a half hour.”

She was at the Embassy in fifteen minutes. The guards expected her and escorted her into Everett’s suite immediately.

She felt that she hated him. He was an evil creature. She didn’t speak, just glared at him.

“Lynne, you’re acting like a child or a crazy woman!”

He was furious too. His eyes seemed to bulge. His skin looked green. Probably he had gotten hepatitis from a fly-covered banquet up north. He gestured wildly as he talked. His fingers looked long and spatulate.

“You’re jealous of Daphne. I think that bothers you worse than your disloyal suspicion that I killed the ambassador”

The fact that he was right made Lynne hate him more.

When she didn’t answer, he continued. “All right. Let’s start with Daphne. She’s a spectacular woman. I used to see her in Washington when we both attended the same seminars. I didn’t know she would be stationed here when I...”

Lynne finished the sentence for him, “When you finally broke down and married me after thinking it over for eight years!”

“When she came here this month, she acted like she finally was interested in me. Bad timing. I didn’t want to be unfaithful to you. But I did see her a few times. And,

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unfortunately, the ambassador noticed it. He was interested in her too. That's what we were arguing about at the Embassy the day he died."

He looked more and more like a green devil to her. This had been happening during her honeymoon!

"I'm ashamed of my behavior with Daphne. At the reception I was furious with your lack of trust in me and I acted foolishly by flirting with her. It was bad for my career, bad for my marriage."

"And you humiliated me when you sneaked off with her instead of taking me home."

"What are you talking about? I didn't go off with Daphne. I got a message from an aide that an important cable had come from Washington and I had to go to the Embassy to deal with it. I asked my driver to explain this to you."

"He did. But I didn't believe him. And the message, was it really important?"

"Yes it was. And it had something to do with this whole ambassador murder mess. We need some more investigation, but it might give us some answers."

"Can you tell me?"

"I really can't yet. But you'll hear later. When you do, I'm sure you'll forgive me. But right now, I'll convince you that I didn't kill the ambassador."

"I hope you can. But to start with, why were you at the Annex with the ambassador before the concert? You didn't tell me about it at the time."

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“I think we both felt bad about shouting publicly earlier in the day because of Daphne. The ambassador called me and suggested that we meet there briefly before the concert. It seemed like a good place and way to speak privately. I parked the car outside and walked in. The guard at the gate was busy and wasn't keeping records. Since we were both sorry, it only took a few minutes for mutual apologies.”

“And, why were your prints on that glass?”

“The ambassador said he was thirsty. I poured him some coke.”

“Tony's looking for that person that was in the back room. Tony had someone else interview the man up north, Raoul, that was working there that day. He is over his malaria attack and able to tell his story in detail. He said he saw me leave almost immediately. And, just as he left, he heard the ambassador saying in a loud voice, "Are you still there? How do I get some ice? The cleaner was half way out the door and hurried out since the ambassador wasn't talking to him.”

Lynne's relief was like dropping a heavy, prickly load. Everett took a step closer to her. “I'm so sorry, Lynne, about these past weeks. You know I've always loved you. But we haven't always been sure about marriage. Now, when you actually moved out of our house, I realize I can't bear to be without you. Let's start over. Lynne, you are half of me. I will never love another woman. Please forgive me. Let's make it a real marriage. Let's have a child.”

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Lynne was stunned. Had the evil frog turned into a prince? Had Everett really changed, reformed? It was likely that he would revert to his old ways. But her feelings had metamorphosized and once again he looked appealing. She felt a tremor of fear. She was vulnerable again since she loved him. Oh, was it possible that she could have a child who had his intelligence and good looks, but maybe would be more dependable? Already, she loved that child.

“What do you say, Lynne. Will you take me back? Will you forgive me?”

“I won’t forgive you, but I will accept you. Come here, my frog prince. Let me kiss you”

Chapter 28: Little Man, Big Rage

After their reconciliation, Everett left to return to his duties, continuing the struggle to keep the complex Benin-American relations in a stable balance. Lynne called Gloria to say that she really needed to be at home with her husband from now on. She offered to visit her every evening and see that she was settled for the night. She was surprised when Gloria told her it wasn't necessary, that she was almost ready to move and had asked the Embassy to pack up her belongings for shipment to her residence in America. She would take a long leave there before returning to her diplomatic duties in Paris. After some mutual polite exchanges, and arrangements for returning Lynne's things to her home,

Lynne said goodbye and was about to hang up when Gloria said, "Let me say something, Lynne, I'm feeling much calmer these days. I no longer think your husband killed my husband."

"I'm glad you realize that."

"Yes. But, I still say, someone was trying to kill my husband for almost a year. I don't know who. But it just about has to be someone at the Embassy."

"Yes Gloria. I agree. It's almost surely someone we know very well. I'm thinking over motives again."

"Be very careful. That murderer is clever and also patient. If you get close, you can be on the victim list."

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She thought of Dede's story that Brett and all Lome knew Brett was really evil. Lynne certainly knew he was an unpleasant character. His ordinary behavior and personality were abrasive and hostile. How could she find out more about his actions in Lome? She must think. Was there someone here who knew the American community in Lome well?

With half her mind on that question, Lynne attacked the pile of papers in her in basket. Dealing with them took over two hours. Then, she had to get some of the papers to Harriet. She hated to go to her desk in the big general room because it was just outside Brett's big office. She hoped he would be out or have his door closed. She knew that Brett scorned and disliked her, probably because he felt she had no right to the job as Community Liaison Officer, a position he had tried to get for his wife. She couldn't forget that he had greeted her that first day on the job with rudeness and a tirade about how unfair her hiring was. She habitually tried to stay out of his way. But now and then she saw him and sometimes he reprimanded her for something she had or had not done. Since neither he nor anyone else had told her what her duties were, she didn't feel guilty when he scolded her. She knew the job had been created to give employment to State Department spouses. Usually he reviled her for something she had done. He seemed to be furious at the interviews she had held at the instigation of Tony Mariani, the Security Officer and Everett, her husband, trying get

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acquainted in order to help solve the puzzle of who had murdered the ambassador. Luckily, she didn't really work for him. She had been hired by Washington. The ambassador, or, right now, the acting ambassador, her husband Everett, was her boss even though that was nepotism, a conflict of interest and perhaps illegal. After hearing DeDe's hints at the Sew What meeting, she wondered what secrets Brett was hiding. When she got to the desk of Harriet, that sulky lady silently handed her a message:

Staff Meeting:

All employees must attend the monthly staff meeting today at 11:30 in the Administrator's office.

It was 11:25 by her watch. Not much notice. She entered Brett's large office. She sat in a chair at the side of a large semicircle. Sally came in wearing her white nurse uniform and sat next to her. She said, "I don't know why he drags me into these meetings. There are sick people waiting for treatment in the health service." Soon, the room was full. Lynne was surprised to see Gerry, from the Recreation Center Manager. He must have gotten a phoned summons to attend. She, Brett, and Sally, were the only Americans in the room. Brett looked serious, as if he were trying to look dignified, wearing a navy blue business suit which must be uncomfortable despite the air conditioning that valiantly tried to deal with the hot climate. But, Brett still looked to Lynne like a scruffy little man, with an ill at ease manner

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and those nervous, beady eyes. He started out in French, but, perhaps noticing that the Beninese staff couldn't understand his accent, switched to English. His wild beady eyes swept the room as he hurled general reprimands and accusations first, of laziness, inefficiency, thievery, disloyalty.

He seemed inflamed with rage. His fury obviously overwhelmed him; his skin took on a red cast. His wild beady eyes swept the room. Then he started going around the room leveling accusations and criticisms specifically about people he named. Lynne could see varying degrees of anger mirrored in the faces of each person he accused or reprimanded. "Lynne, what lies have you been telling your husband and Washington? Louis, is your cousin messing with our affairs again? Victoria, why don't you just realize that you are not qualified for a better job? Harriet, I've warned you to stop coming in late and to speed up your work. And how about the petty cash? Your explanation isn't satisfactory. Sally, you know as a nurse, it is unethical to divulge private information. Gerry, watch out. Your job is to sell beer, not drink it!"

"And some of you are asking me to recommend you for upgrades and promotions! You're lucky I don't fire you.

Gossips, telling lies! The acting ambassador wants to talk to me tomorrow. Well, I will tell him some things about you people who are blackening my reputation."

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His shrill voice ran up to an almost soprano range. "Now go. Go. Get back to work. And stop causing trouble!" He made sweeping movements of his little arms, as if shooing chickens out of a garden. He followed them to the door and when the last person was out, still glaring, he slammed the door.

Lynne turned to her old friend, Sally. "Did you notice his face? It's bright red. He looks like he might have a heart attack!"

Sally answered seriously, "Yes. He might. And he should be upset. He's in big trouble!"

Chapter 29: What the Wang Man Knew

Lynne turned to Sally to ask her what big trouble Brett was in and how Sally knew about it. But Sally said, “Look, I have to run. The clinic is packed with people waiting for me,” and hurried away. Lynne took some deep breaths, trying to dispel the emotions aroused by the explosive meeting.

At Harriet’s desk right in front of Brett’s office she realized an outsider was waiting. There was something familiar about him. He was wearing some sort of light blue uniform. He had a fluffy, well cut Afro, the Togolese hair style, rather than very short, almost shaved hair like most Beninese men. The man said, in English, in a cheery voice, “ I’m here to repair the cashier’s computer. He says it is fatigued. Madam Lynne. Are you working at here at the Embassy now?”

It dawned on her that it was the Wang man, the repairman who came from time to time to repair the old Wang computers. She had dealt with him many times, when the ancient computer at the English Language program broke down, often after a lightning storm. She had sometimes had to wait for weeks for him to come since his company office was in Togo, rather than Benin.

“Yes. I work here now. It is good to see you again.”

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The Wang man came close to her and said, "That man," and he gestured toward Brett's office. "I knew him in Togo."

"Yes. He was stationed there. And I supposed you do work for the Embassy there too."

"Yes. I am there often. I know the people well. And my cousin works at the Embassy. That man. He is bad. Why is he still working for the government?"

"He is difficult to work with, but I don't know that he has done anything to make Washington fire him."

The Wang man said in a low voice, "That man, he has a terrible secret. A terrible secret that many people know. "

"What is it? Please tell me it is important." Lynne was almost pleading.

"I can not tell you. I am afraid of him."

"I must know. It might be a matter of life and death!" Lynne was aware that she sounded melodramatic. But maybe her words would convince him to tell her what he knew.

"No. I must be quiet and do my work here. And right now, it is almost time for the cashier to go to lunch."

"If you are afraid of him, maybe I should be too. I should know."

"Madam Lynne, do not get me into trouble. Ask someone who knows about Lome. All the Americans there know about it. And watch out for him. He is a bad man!"

And he ran off to the cashier's office to repair the fatigued computer.

Chapter 30: A Backward Look at Brett

When the Wang man left, Lynne realized it was twelve thirty. She and Everett had planned to eat lunch together. She hurried toward the front door. Dieudonne, a young clerk, had been covering the phones during the meeting. “Lynne, you had a message from Claudia, the acting ambassador’s secretary.”

As usual. “Yes,. What did she say?”

“She says the acting ambassador has an important meeting and can not join you for lunch.”

“Ok, Dieudonne. Thanks.” She was still in her loving, reconciliation mode and reminded herself that Everett had almost no control over the emergencies that required his attendance. Too bad though. Marcel no doubt had prepared an excellent meal. Still thinking of who could tell her something about what Brett had done in Lome, she thought of someone. Judith, the director of the Brilliant Sun school must know something about Brett since his daughter Nikki attended the school. Maybe the school in Lome had sent along background information.

“Dieudonne, can you call the director of the Brilliant Sun School for me?”

A moment later, she reached Judith, a member of the Explore group as well as Sew What on the phone. “Any chance you could meet me at my house and have lunch with me? I want to

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talk to you and it turns out that Marcel's has a fine meal all ready that shouldn't go to waste..”.

Judith hadn't eaten and could get away for an hour.

Lynne hurried home, so deep in thought she barely noticed the crowded hot streets. The Wang man's vague, condemning accusations of Brett told her little. She thought about what she knew and what she had heard. Brett was noted for his fierce defense of his Asian wife. He felt she should be given a fine job. But, he kept her somewhat isolated. When they were together, he did all the talking. She seemed to seldom leave the house without him. He even did the shopping with her trailing along. But, lately, she seemed to be breaking out of that narrow life. She had been at the last Explore dinner and also the last Sew What meeting.

They had a baby and the shy twelve year old daughter who went to the Brilliant Sun school. Soon Judith and Lynne were in the dining room of the big house she and Everett lived in, eating the salad Marcel had prepared for a first course.

“I really need to talk to you.. Brett just had a staff meeting where he flew into an inexplicable rage. Two different people have told me there is something despicable in his life.”

Judith listened attentively without commenting. She had a lovely, serene face. And a habitually serious but pleasant manner.

Lynne continued, ““I have to admit that I, personally disliked Brett from our first meeting.

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I had expected to like him since I had heard that he had been in the Peace Corps in Burkina Faso, before taking the foreign service exam and becoming a State Department official, reporting for duty at this post as administrative/security officer at the Embassy in Benin. That was almost a year ago. He was just transferred from Lome."

Judith ate her salad, listening and occasionally nodding.

Lynne went on. It felt good to be able to say out loud the horde of thoughts that had been tumbling in her mind. "But, I was shocked at his selfish and self important imperviousness to acceptable behavior. There was a meeting to introduce him to the American official community in Benin, attended by representatives of the four agencies under Embassy control, the Embassy itself, USAID, that is, The United States Agency in Development, the Peace Corps, and the United States Information Service which included the American Cultural Center and the English Language Program."

Lynne continued. She explained she had been Director of United States Information Agency's English Language Program at that time, a very minor, contract official but was included. There were about 20 people in the group. They all crowded into the room of the Economic officer, at that time, Everett, second in command, who was presiding, the ambassador having loftier duties to attend to. Brett bristled in, his small body stiff with

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importance and aggressiveness. Everyone gaped. He had with him, his wife, an attractive thin woman of Asiatic appearance and---- a baby, actually a baby, about 16 months old. Brett's dark eyes were bright and intense as he positioned himself just a few inches from Everett and announced some demands. He said, "This is my wife, you must give her a job at the Embassy, and this is my youngest child who must be provided a certified pediatrician."

Lynne went on to describe the scene that had shocked and annoyed her. It was hard to keep the anger out of her voice as she told Judith that everyone else in the room knew that people shouldn't accept a hardship post like Benin unless they were willing to put up with the conditions in an undeveloped country. Brett obviously had a much longer list of requirements that this small third world Embassy could not provide. He added, "I also have a brilliant twelve year old daughter who must have an excellent school to attend."

Lynne explained that Everett got him to quiet down by insisting that they must discuss these matters later and with just the two of them present. The plan for a polite short welcoming speeches was turned into an unpleasant situation. She continued describing the situation to her quiet, patient guest. "I struggled to suppress my dislike and as they all left the room, tried to chat with Brett, mentioning our common backgrounds as ex Peace Corps Volunteers. I told him that I had served in the Peace Corp in Togo."

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Brett scowled. "I've heard about that Togo group. Those little blondes uselessly rushing around on Yamahas. In Dapaong they had an all night party where they drank in every buvette and even had a rating chart to decide who had the most amusing village idiot hanging out there! Now, in Burkina Faso, we did serious work!"

Lynne was embarrassed to tell about her great resentment to the unfailingly kind and positive Judith. "He went on with his scornful, continuously hostile treatment when I got the job as Community Liaison Officer that he wanted his wife to have." Her stomach lurched with disgust and anger.

"Judith, my husband and the security officer, Tony Mariani asked me to help find out who killed the ambassador. Until we find the murderer, we may all be in danger. The way Brett is acting and the vague accusations against him make me feel it is important to learn more about him. I know you have had contact with the family since the older child attends your school."

"Yes. She does."

"What can you tell me about Brett?"

"Lynne, you are my friend and must know that I am a Bahai missionary. Unlike other kinds of missionaries, we earn our own living and do our religious activities as well as we can in the time we have left. So, I run the school. In whatever I do, I try to use principles of unity and love to solve problems. Both as a Bahai and

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as a school director, I can not spread private information.”

“Yes, I know. And I know you hate to say anything bad about anyone. But it is important to know more about Brett. He might cause harm to someone.”

“I can tell you some things that are public knowledge to all the parents and teachers at the school. Brett hasn't been satisfied with the school. He says it doesn't have high enough standards. Now, we do the best we can with the resources we have. We can't afford to import teachers from other countries. The school had moderate fees. Even so, they are too high for the Beninese but are low enough so some Lebanese, and Indian merchants can afford to send their children. Sometimes I have to beg my somewhat disapproving father in America for a loan to keep going. We are the only English speaking school in the officially French speaking country. This year, as a new triumph and challenge, they had three children of statesmen at the Russian Embassy in Benin. They knew no English, but must be taught it along with mathematics and science. Brett didn't appreciate that this makes tremendous demands on our teaching staff. Brett spoke out in parents' meetings in a way that hurt a lot of feelings. One of the best teachers recently quit because she couldn't bear his constant criticism and opposition. Following my Bahai faith I try not to be angry with him and try to find a loving way to deal with his concerns. He feels his daughter Nikki, who is highly intelligent should

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attain high levels of scholarship. We work with her as much as we can. But, somehow, she..."

Judith looked thoughtful, hesitated and seemed about to add something significant. But she remained silent.

"Judith, someone told me he has a terrible secret that many people know, including most Americans in Lome."

Judith looked tormented, but said nothing more.

Lynne pressed her, "Was there anything in the school records that told why Brett had a bad reputation in Togo? I'm not just curious. This might be connected to the murder of two Americans."

Judith sighed. "I know. I would like to help. But, I certainly won't tell you what confidential school records revealed."

She stood up. "Lynne. Please don't try to make me do something that I feel is morally bad." She hadn't finished her lunch, but even so, she hurried to the door. Lynne followed her, trying to find a way to persuade her to continue talking.

When Judith had the door open and was almost out she said, "Sally, the Embassy nurse, knows some things. Talk to her. Get her to tell you." She continued hurrying toward her car, but stopped once more. "Keep investigating, Lynne. He may be a dangerous man."

Chapter 31: Dinner For Two

After the day full of drama and revelations, Lynne was exhausted. Toward four o'clock she participated in a flurry of telephone calls. Claudia called to tell her that Everett planned to be home for dinner at about seven and hoped she would be there to share it with him. Lynne called Gloria, finding her still in a cheerful, independent mood, told her she would stop by briefly after work to pick up her things and take them to Everett's house. When she got there, she quickly gathered up the things she had brought for her stay and was home by six. She spent a little time unpacking, and getting reacquainted with her house. Then she took a shower and dressed in a comfortable, pretty, long casual dress.

Marcel prepared the dinner, setting the big table carefully, putting the salad and the fruit dessert in the refrigerator and the warm food in the oven on low. He left, wishing her a pleasant evening.

When Everett came, at first they were shy with each other. But soon were chatting and laughing together, over Marcel's delicious dinner.

When they were eating the papaya and pineapple dessert, Lynne said, "Everett, Brett acted like a madman in the staff meeting today." And she gave him more details of the frenzied meeting the Annex staff had been subjected to. Brett said he had been summoned

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for a meeting with you tomorrow. People say Brett is in big trouble.”

“Yes. I was so busy with other crucial things I have to wait until tomorrow to confront him. But it looks bad for him. He may be our man. You may remember I left the President’s reception because there was an important cable from Washington? Tomorrow’s meeting with Brett will be to follow Washington’s directives.”

Lynne didn’t understand, but waited to see if Everett would explain.

“Most of this will become public knowledge soon, so I can tell you what this is all about. This is what happened. I have had so many emergencies, some that required us to act in order to prevent a possible coup, since I took over at the Embassy that it was a short time ago that I finally got to the bottom of the pile of papers waiting for my attention when I took over after the ambassador’s murder. I saw a shocking cable that the ambassador had ready to send Washington. Then I consulted his daily calendar and talked to Claudia to figure out some things. The ambassador reported in the cable that he had told Brett soon after he arrived in Cotonou that he was under suspicion.”

“Suspicion of what?”

“I hate to have to tell you this. But, soon everyone will know.”

“The Wang man said all the Americans in Lome know something terrible Brett has been trying to hide.”

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“Yes. You’re familiar with how the grapevine works. In Lome, Brett’s daughter, Nikki, complained to her school teacher about pains in her stomach and nearby body parts. The nurse examined her and found bruising and bleeding in the vaginal area.”

Lynne gasped. She had not expected this!

“The nurse talked to the child and wrote out a report saying she suspected that Brett had been molesting his daughter for years. When he denied everything, the ambassador in Togo decided to delay making a final decision. They transferred him here, maybe to try to stop the flood of gossip. But they sent all their records here, to our ambassador here in Benin, and also to our medical office so that Sally would know what the past accusations had been if the same thing happened again. And, as the cable states, our ambassador called Brett in when he first came here to tell them their concerns about it.”

Lynne broke in. “Isn’t it surprising that, after almost being fired in Lome, and getting that warning, when he first came here he made all those demands at that first meeting with Everett and members of the other agencies?”

“He’s obviously the type of person that feels aggression is the best defense. He absolutely refused to admit his abuse of his daughter despite the near proof of physical evidence. Things seemed to be going all right for him for a while. But, one day, the teacher at the Brilliant Sun school here was concerned about some psychological problems she detected in the child and suggested that the medical officer

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check her out. Brett happened to be in the north of the country that day, so couldn't make objections."

"What did Sally think when she examined her? "

"She sent in a report similar to that of the Lome Medical Officer. According to the files, Claudia, and the cable, the ambassador was very concerned about all this. He was going to put Brett and his family on health leave and send them to America to sort it all out. He hoped to do it without causing a public scandal.

"When I found the ambassador's cable, I sent it to Washington with a note on it explaining that I found it after the ambassador's murder. I sent it the day we returned from the North.

"Their cable that I received the night of the Beninese President's reception was in answer to it."

"What did it say?"

"I'll tell you because you are my wife and I trust you. But don't mention it until after Brett has his meeting with me tomorrow. Washington said that he should be relieved of his post, sent to America and investigated for the murder of the ambassador."

"Wow!"

"Yes. Brett knew the ambassador was planning on blowing the whistle on him. Brett seems to have that kind of arrogance that makes him feel impervious to everything. He probably thought that no one here knew about the scandal except the ambassador and if he

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brazened it out and made the ambassador feel it would cause trouble to fire him, he would be ok.

Or, maybe he thought killing the ambassador would end the problem. Maybe the ambassador met with Brett before the concert, right after I left, the night he died.”

“And he was the one who somehow got the poison into the coke?”

“It’s believable. When I think about it, I realize the ambassador started having those sick spells that sent him to Paris for a checkup just about the time Brett came to town. Maybe right after that first warning conversation. He might have had a regular method of getting poison into the ambassador, but never figured out the correct dosage to kill him until that last time.”

“Good heavens. You think this about him and yet you leave him on the loose?”

“We don’t want this handled by Beninese authorities and you realize I don’t have a police force here. Brett himself is actually the Security Officer. Of course, we have Tony Mariani from Washington with us now. Tony requested two marines from Lome to come help us. They are sending them tomorrow. When they get here at noon I’ll have them ready and when Brett comes for his meeting, we will keep him under guard until he gets to the airport. They’ll go along with him to escort him to Washington.”

Lynne felt a rush of relief. By tomorrow afternoon, this fearsome period would be over!

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And she felt content that her husband was trusting her and was telling her this secret plan.

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Chapter 32: A Dreadful Pattern

Still feeling strong and happy the next morning, after the evening of close sharing with her husband, Lynne fell to musing as she drove through the crowded, hot streets to the office. Death had dogged her from her first year in Africa. Not only the common, ordinary, expected, pervasive death caused by revolution, terrorists, disease, and poverty, but also, malicious extraneous death, murder in her small circle of American friends and colleagues.

Since her return from her marriage trip to Paris several weeks ago, the ambassador and sweet Matthew, the fey Catholic Relieve Services director had been murdered. At last Lynne felt she knew who the latest murderer was. She was convinced that it was Brett, the aggressive, self important bead eyed administrative officer. She knew now he had a terrible secret, an accusation of molestation of his daughter. People in Lome had known about it, but had been glad to get him transferred to Benin and out of their hair. But, she knew now, the American Ambassador to Benin, Waldo, had learned about it. He had said he was going to get him fired. They had been haggling and dickering over it for a year, the same year that Waldo had been suffering mysterious ailments that disappeared when he left Africa and was examined in Paris. He had made up his mind and had been planning to send a cable to

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Washington about it after one more discussion with Brett.

She was sure of Brett's guilt now, and it seemed that Everett and Tony were also. She was confident they could all find a way to prove his guilt. This all made her feel more hopeful than she had since the murders started.

She entered the Annex building and found Brett's office door closed and Harriet at her desk in front of it with a deep scowl on her otherwise smooth, dark face.

"Good morning, Harriet," she said, trying to put some warmth into the greeting.

At first Harriet didn't even answer her and the look of displeasure on her face deepened. But then she asked sullenly, "Do you want something?"

"No. I'm just coming to work, just passing through, just saying hello."

As she made her way to her office, Lynne noticed other looks of anger and discontent on the faces of the other workers in the big room. Yes, that awful meeting of Brett's had sowed discontent. If they hadn't before, now, everyone must hate him. If Everett's plan worked out there would be only this one more morning to go through in the building with this man who was probably a murderer besides being a child molester.

She dealt with some papers on her desk and looked at the book article she had prepared in a desperate attempt to flush out suspects. There would be no need to send it now. How good it was to have the crimes solved! But how

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bad it was to be in the same building as a known killer. She decided that she didn't want to spend one more day in the office, so close to that foul and dangerous man. She straightened up her desk, got her purse and locked her office door.

Instead of leaving by the front way through the big front room and taking a chance at being stopped by Brett, she hurried out of the Embassy Annex building through the seldom used back way, through the narrow corridor between the back of the building and a cement wall. The equatorial heat assailed her. She made her way through prickly weeds, crumpled trash and skittering lizards, wrinkling her nose at the smell of urine on the broken cement that led to the medical office and its path to the parking lot where she could get to her car out of sight of the front office.

She rushed, stumbled, then stopped, stared and shuddered. On the path was Brett himself, his small body in a posture that meant only one thing, death! He was perfectly motionless, in a sprawled position on his back. His face was smeared with quantities of bright red blood. His eyes were open and had a look of astonishment. His throat had a long, deep slit. Near him lay one of the broad bladed short handled knives so common in Togo and Benin, a coupe coupe in French, and in Ghanaian English, a cutlass.

Lynne didn't scream. She started shaking with horror and looked around fearfully. Was the killer still near? She saw no one but,

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shuddering, she rushed away toward people and help. Another murderous death of an American in this small Embassy!

And they were all still in danger. Once more they needed to look for the vicious person that had killed three Americans in Benin.

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Chapter 33: Suspects, Usual and Unusual

After discovering Brett's bloody body, Lynne ran frantically, into the Health Service office, the nearest place where she would find people and a telephone. Once again, Sally, the nurse, went through the steps she had taken when the ambassador's body was found just outside the Annex in the grassy area filled with flowers and gala decorations. This body in the grubby corridor was treated basically the same way. The Ghanaian part time doctor who was at his private office in Cotonou that morning was called to hurry in. In the meantime, Sally did her usual preliminary tests of death and stayed close to the body.

This time, they could call on an experienced security man, Tony Mariani, to handle the details. He rushed over from the main Embassy building with his assistant and his intern.

Mariani made a vigorous effort with few resources to do professional work at the crime scene, the dirty, broken, and littered corridor behind the Embassy Annex. He said to Lynne, "I told the guards at the gate not to let anyone out. I learned that Louis had gone out and given them that order as soon as he saw the body. Good man, that Louis."

The assistant and intern took pictures from many different angles and distances. Anything that looked significant was put in plastic bags.

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Once again, a body would be shipped to America for an autopsy and tests. Mariani carefully wrapped the bloody coupe coupe to send it to Washington along with the body. As he did so, he muttered that the rough wooden handle would make it difficult to lift fingerprints from it.

Lynne followed along with Mariani as he went back to the gate to ask the guards for a list of everyone that had entered that day, but he got only smiles and shrugs. They didn't keep a record. If a real stranger tried to enter, they asked for identification or called an official. There hadn't been anyone like that morning. After all, it was only 11 AM.

"We probably should notify Everett," Lynne said.

Mariani told her, "Everett knows. He was here when I arrived. He had just popped in a short time before, looking for Brett. When he didn't find him in his office, he was about to leave when I came. I told him quickly what Louis had said on the phone, that Brett was obviously murdered. We decided that Everett should go back to his office at the main building and get started on the official work, sending a cable to Washington and getting touch with Brett's wife."

Then they went back inside where there were many people in the big office area. Besides the thirty or so people that worked there, since this was the day that State department employees got their pay, there was a long line of people who waiting to get their pay in cash,

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some from the Cultural Center, like Dora, and some from the Embassy. Also, there were Washington appointed people from the main Embassy building like Claudia who got paid with checks which must be turned into local currency by the cashier since local banks disliked checks and took several weeks to come up with spendable money.

Gerry was also there needing a cash disbursement for his American club expenses.

People were talking, reacting, and speculating in English, French and at least five African languages. Mariani quieted them down enough to ask some questions. He spoke in English and Louis translated into French. If they answered in French, Louis translated into English to be sure Tony understood.

He asked if anyone had seen anything suspicious or unusual or had seen any strangers. Had any one had gone toward the back of the building near the exit to the deadly corridor? Several people pointed out that a steady stream of people had been in the large room to get pay checks and some of them had wandered around the offices to chat with friends that worked at the Annex, some toward the back or used the WC at the back of the building or gotten a drink at the water cooler. Who? No one admitted to a clear memory of specific people or names. Several volunteered that the coupe coupe was ordinarily kept in a little shed in the corridor which was never locked. No one said they had seen anything suspicious or unusual that morning. But, when

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Mariani asked if they knew of anyone who was angry at Brett, a chorus of voices rose to speak at once. "He insulted us all at the staff meeting. He accused us of crimes. He said he knew our secrets. He treated us like pigs or scorpions."

Tony turned to Lynne and said, with a sort of desperate resignation, "Obviously, we have to talk to everyone privately and sort this out."

Lynne observed all this, hoping to see something that would be significant. Everyone looked upset, but no one looked especially guilty.

Mariani had his assistant make appointments for everyone in the building at fifteen minute intervals. They set up a station in the big office that had only a short time before been occupied by Brett Bickford, now cold and dead.

Lynne asked if she could be part of this interviewing team. But Mariani said, "No Lynne. You can't do that. But, you can do this. Go back to your office, consult your notes, and do some serious thinking. Who had the motive and personality that would result in this murder as well as that of the ambassador and Matthew, the Catholic Relief Services man? I and my assistants have a long hard job to do. So far, there is one thing everyone seems to agree on. They didn't see anyone that wasn't known to the American Embassy community. We will find out who could have been in that corridor. Help us to think about who really had a reason to kill Brett."

"O.K. Tony. I'll work at it."

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“We have a limited number of suspects, all locked in this compound. If we do our job right, we will be close to zeroing in on our killer. We’ll question everyone. Someone must have noticed something that will help us to find who left the company of others and went to the corridor. And one of those people we will talk to is more than a witness. One of them is the killer.”

Chapter 34: Who's Waldo?

Lynne agreed to keep out of Tony Mariani's way and do some real thinking. One mission the security man had assigned her right after the first murder was to learn more about the dead man. Who was Waldo Edwards? What was he into? Who liked and disliked him? Waldo was still a mystery. Like the community as a whole, Lynne knew little of him except surface things even after she had questioned Claudia, his bereaved and doting secretary. She had tried to find who hated him or feared him enough to kill him. Claudia had given some hints of people who had grudges against him because of struggles over promotions, jobs, and ratings, things that constantly caused animosities against the most powerful American in Benin. The most obvious person in the Embassy community with that kind of a grudge against him, had a solid alibi for the time of his death. Lynne felt that the next American death was caused by fears that someone would expose the murderer. Matthew had announced in public that he knew who killed the ambassador not long before he was killed by a homeless madman, the fou who was obviously paid to do the actual murder with the fu fu paddle. Now Brett was dead too.

Had he known something that made him dangerous to the murderer? Or was he killed because he had infuriated someone to the point where they attacked him with the coupe coupe?

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Certainly at the office meeting the day before he had enraged people and implied that he knew damaging things about staff members that he would reveal when it suited him.

But, she still thought understanding the ambassador was the next step in solving these crimes. Somehow a thought teased her. When she had first started asking about him, someone had hinted something? What was it. She had somehow not investigated it, not taken it up. Who was it that hinted at something? Someone at the Annex? Anyway, h How could she learn more about Waldo Edwards as a person? Claudia had refused to let her see the files on him. Probably Mariani had clearance and authority to do that. But, Lynne knew she had unofficial sources. After all, she had been in Cotonou for more than two years and had close contacts with many of the people contained in this room and being interviewed as possible suspects. Who could tell her more about Waldo? She had noticed in her six years in Africa that gossip, the grapevine, was the main source of information about what was really going on. A certain portion was false. But much of it was true and was known and passed on by word of mouth long before official sources seemed to notice it or knowing it, released it.

Now, Lynne thought how to investigate other reasons for people to dislike him. She thought over the people she knew were right now in the large room waiting for their turn to talk to the investigators. Ah! She thought of

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Dora. She was described as a clever and devious woman by some of her fellow Beninese workers in the American community. Lynne knew she couldn't uncritically believe what Dora told her. That day Dora asked her to come to talk to her at the Cultural center, she said that Victoria, the personnel director at the Embassy was a witch and had probably killed the ambassador using her powers because he hadn't given her the promotion she wanted. Lynne had learned many other people agree that Victoria was a witch, and Victoria herself had told Lynne she was angry with the ambassador because he had blocked her promotion. But, Lynne later learned that she couldn't have killed the ambassador. She had been performing a voo doo ceremony in Abomey at the time of his death. So, Lynne would have to consider what she told her with caution. Even so, she was one person who would probably be willing to pass on what people said about the ambassador and might have her own malicious, but perhaps insightful assessment.

Lynne went to the big room and found Dora, sitting, looking bored. "Dora, will you come into my office? I would like to ask your opinion on something."

Dora seemed delighted to be able to give an opinion and to do something to pass the time until her appointment.

As usual, she had dressed for her day at work in a neutral colored outfit. Except for having her hair done in an elaborate pattern of braids close to her head, her style was more

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British or American than African. Once comfortably seated in Lynne's office, Dora started talking in her correct, French accented English. She said in a carefully modulated voice, "I am tired of this. The security officer says he will let us go back to our jobs after we have our private interview. I still a half hour to wait. What do you want me to give an opinion on, Lynne?"

"Dora, I talked to you once about the murderer of the ambassador. You told me Victoria was suspicious, but we learned she couldn't have done it because she was in Abomey..."

Dora calmly corrected her. "I told you to watch her. She's a witch. A witch who hated the ambassador. Witches can do things you can not imagine."

Lynne continued to be fascinated that a woman like Dora, with a degree from a British university would say this in a matter of fact tone. "Okay. I'll remember that. But, right now, I'm trying to find out more about the ambassador. I know a lot of people were angry with him for job related reasons. But no one tells me what he was like really life as a person. For a few days I stayed with his wife Gloria, but she would only tell me how wonderful he was and would get hysterical when she thought of her loss. What was he really like?. What were his faults? I know you and your family have lived in Cotonou forever and that you always know what is really going on."

Dora seemed delighted by the question.

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“You asked the right person. I know his big fault. I was quiet about it before because I need my job. But now he is dead and cannot punish me.”

“Yes. He can not retaliate. What do you know?” Lynne held her breath. Would she learn something important?

Dora was quiet a moment, then seemed to change the subject. “I think you know I had a good British education. I got a Master’s Degree in England. We read all the old English classics.” She stopped and looked questioningly at Lynne. “Do you know that line from Browning, ‘A man’s reach must exceed his grasp?’”

Lynne was puzzled. Was Dora mocking her? Refusing to answer? Forgetting what they were talking about?

“I think I ran into it in books of quotations. Why are you talking about it?”

Dora laughed. “I never quite knew what the poet meant, but I sometimes think of that line when I think of the ambassador.”

“I don’t get it!”

“It’s like this. Waldo Edwards was a groper. He was always reaching out to grab women, trying to grasp them, groping them.”

“The ambassador. A promiscuous groper.” Lynne tried to readjust her ideas.

“Yes. He liked to squeeze and poke and touch women.”

“I remember now that Louis asked me what that word meant. But if the ambassador was a

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habitual groper, why haven't I ever noticed it or heard other people talking about it?"

"He was careful to do it only with women that he controlled, ones that worked for him, and not in public.

But, when I was alone with him, one time when I first met him, he really groped me. After that I tried to stay a distance from him. But sometimes I had to allow it. I needed my job. I did not tell my husband or my cousin the cabinet minister. It would have caused a lot of trouble. His groping was one of the reasons Victoria hated him. When she refused to let him touch her, he failed to give her the job rating she wanted. Anyway, she didn't deserved promotion. She is an evil woman, as I told you."

"Someone must have complained about his behavior. If he did this often with different women, it couldn't be completely hidden."

"Oh, it is pretty much hushed up. But I have a cousin at the Embassy who saw secret files. Waldo almost lost his job when he was ambassador in Senegal for a groping incident. They said he was cleared, but they removed him from the post and then gave him jobs in little countries, like Benin country because of it."

"Tony Mariani must know this."

"Of course he does. He just hasn't told you."

"Do you think the husbands of any of the women he handled felt strong enough about to want to kill him?"

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“African men think of wives as property. They would be furious and dangerous if they knew about it. I didn’t tell my family. And probably most other Beninese women would suffer quietly before bringing about the end of their marriage and job. But, it wasn’t only Beninese women he toyed with. A certain high American Official got her position and her powerful job because she allowed the ambassador to touch her in the most intimate parts of her body when they thought they were alone.”

“If they were alone, how would anyone else know about it?”

“White people think the Beninese are just background,” Dora said, bitterly. “They forget that Beninese staff members, even though we can be quiet and discreet, are always noticing.” She stood up. “I must go now. They will be calling for me soon. But don’t doubt that we know what happens in these American agencies. And we spread the information among each other. Did you know I have fifty first cousins that I call my brothers and sisters? At least fifteen of them work for you Americans. And we share what we learn.

“When the time comes, many people will be willing to tell the authorities about a brash and violent man whose wife was too close to Waldo Edwards.”

Chapter 35: An Ordinary Bloke

When Dora made her damning smear of the ambassador's character and habits and dashed off to the interview, Lynne was left, aghast, in her office. At first she had been unbelieving, but as she listened to Dora and thought it over, Waldo as a groper somehow rang true. If Waldo had molested women in this Embassy as Dora said it was documented that he had in another Embassy, that opened up personal motives for his murder--jealousy, protection of marital rights and jealousy.

She had to think over the people involved in all this, and especially ones that had been here at the Annex when the ambassador died and, presuming that the two murders were related, today when Brett was killed as well.

Lynne stood at the entrance to the big room that contained many desks and doors to several offices. In contrast to the somber horror of the day she appreciated as usual the bright, colorful African fabrics in the dress of the women, Victoria in bright blue, Harriet in dark red damask, called here bazin, the assistant cashier, in orange, the purchasing agent in chartreuse green, and others here for their pay wearing purple, pink, yellow, and combinations of all of the colors.

The men either wore the khaki Embassy employee's uniform or neat outfits of American or European clothes.

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She thought of those she could see, and others that had been here earlier, and considered whether they could be strong suspects. She realized that once again, her husband had been here, had made a brief appearance. Why did she continue to have him flash into her mind when she thought of suspects? She had never been molested by the ambassador. Rather, he had always treated her politely. And Everett had no reason to suspect otherwise. But of course she wasn't the one he had been protective of. It was jealousy over Daphne that had caused the angry scene between Everett and the ambassador that people at the main Embassy had reported seeing. And, several people had pointed out that Everett wanted the ambassador out of the way for career reasons. He wanted the role of ambassador. And with Waldo's death, he had it now, at least on a temporary basis. But, she and Tony Mariani had already discounted Everett as a suspect because there was a witness that said the ambassador was still alive and well when Everett left him the night of the band concert. But it was odd that he was somehow at the gate today when he had said he would wait at his office for Brett. She shook her head. No. Stop it. Stop the disloyal thoughts! Her husband was not a murderer!

She was sorry that Brett was dead. He had been such a wonderful suspect. Now who else was there? Dora's stories pointed the way to a possible motive for killing the ambassador. Who else could have been exceedingly jealous

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and enraged and had the personality of a murderer? What was it that Dora had said? “A brash and violent man?”

She looked over the big room where many people were still waiting for their private interviews with Mariani and his helpers. In the crowd of black faces one face stood out like a white thumb. Gerry! Dora’s words certainly described him. He was a brash and violent man; his gleefully told stories about his life attested to that. He loved to tell about being stopped at customs in Paris because he carried a gun. She had suspected him earlier, but, somehow, had got involved in suspecting other people. He had admitted that he didn’t like the ambassador and the ambassador had threatened to send him back to the States because he drank too much. Why had she decided he was innocent? Maybe just because she liked him. Or because she was at that earlier time enmeshed in suspicions of her husband. She didn’t know if Gerry had an alibi. Where was he just before the concert that day the ambassador died? He had told her he was just an ordinary bloke. But, he was certainly extraordinary in comparison with other Embassy husbands and wives.

He might have had two reasons to hate the ambassador. Although his wife, Stella, was a rather plain woman, maybe the ambassador liked all kinds. Waldo certainly had pushed Stella’s career forward. Could she be the person Dora was hinting at who allowed familiarities in return for job preferment?

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Maybe Lynne could catch Gerry before he left the Annex. Talking with him, she might learn something that would make her feel he was a strong suspect.

But she couldn't see Gerry. Louis was there. As the highest ranking employee at the Annex with Brett dead, he was authoritatively keeping an orderly flow of people in to be questioned. Even so, he was willing to talk to her. They had always gotten along well together. He told her Gerry had had his interview and returned to work.

"Louis, now that Brett is dead, I am thinking again who was violent enough to kill not only him, but the ambassador. Someone told me Gerry had at least two good reasons to want the ambassador dead. What do you think—is he rash and violent enough to kill?"

Louis as usual was serious and polite. He calmly considered her question. "Gerry is a wild, undisciplined man who uses force without considering the possible consequences. You heard about what happened outside the Sheraton a few nights ago?"

"No. What happened?"

"You know, local riffraff know that customers of the Sheraton are people with money, worth robbing. On that dark street leading to it, this past year, there have been thieves on a motor who ride up to well dressed people, usually white people, they are the ones with money, and the man riding on the back leaps off, waves a coupe coupe and demands

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any bag or even wallet they can get. Most people drop their bag and run.”

“Yes, I’ve heard of it. I never walk there at night.”

“ Well, Gerry was out strolling. Suddenly two voyous, no-goods, zoomed up and grabbed his bag. Gerry would not go. Instead he out a knife and stabbed the thief. He nearly killed him. He was so fierce, the guy on the moto, instead of joining ran for his life.

Gerry could easily have been hurt badly. But instead, he was dangerous for those thieves. He might be just as dangerous to anyone else that got him angry enough.”

“Maybe so. We both know, Brett accused Gerry in front of the entire Embassy support staff of drinking too much.”

“Yes. That would make him angry. And he was afraid for his job if everyone decided he was a drunkard.

That coupe coupe was familiar to Gerry. He has borrowed it from us on occasion to do some work at the recreation center. Maybe this time he borrowed it to kill Brett.”

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Chapter 36: The Opinion of the Security Man

Lynne waited in her office until the security team finally finished the interviews late that evening. She continued thinking about ways to find the murderer. Gerry seemed very suspicious. But, she hoped someone else was guilty. She thought about how Tony had asked her a week ago to think of a plan to flush out the murderer. She had written the piece to put in Book Notes that hinted that she knew the murderer. The article even invited readers to talk to her about it. The thought of actually putting the plan in motion frightened her. But, she wanted to show Tony that she had at been thinking about his request for creativity. She got the sheets with the article and took them out to the photocopy machine in the big main office. She punched the start button. Looking around the room, she saw that about ten people were still waiting to be interviewed.

Harriet sat at her desk and said in a challenging way, “Do you want something?”

“No. I just made a copy. I’ll be in my office if anyone wants me.”

Back in her office, she placed the copy in a folder on her desk in case she decided to show it to Tony.

She felt it was a bad idea. She tried to think of a better one. Much later, Tony Mariani tapped on her door. “Well, that’s done. We’ve talked to everyone. I have to interview you, too.

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Come to my office in the morning and you can tell me about your activities and also your impressions of the others here today. Maybe we can come up with a chief suspect.”

Lynne finally got home after nine. Two hours later Everett entered the house, with a slow step. He kissed Lynne on the cheek and threw himself into the nearest chair.

“It was the most awful series of *deja vu* scenes. Do you realize this is the third time I have gone through this since we returned to the country? They delivered the body to the medical office. The nurse looked the body over. They called for the Ghanaian consulting doctor. He officially proclaimed what was very obvious, this cold, bloody, and still body of another American was really dead. We went through all the paperwork, notifications, cables. I had to send cables to Washington and to Brett’s family in America, a miserably unpleasant thing to do again. I had to go to Brett’s house and tell his wife what happened. Strange, but May Linn listened impassively to the shocking announcement. She seemed to be thinking what to say. Finally she said only two words, ‘Thank you’ and seemed to withdraw into an impenetrable pensiveness. She may be happy he is dead. We know she wasn’t at the Annex today. But do you think she convinced someone else to get rid of him?”

Lynne had no answer and realized he was far too exhausted to seriously consider possibilities. They went to the bedroom, and

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pulled off their clothes. Everett was asleep almost immediately.

Lynne made a resolution. If her talk with Tony tomorrow morning didn't convince her they had found the murderer, she would spend the day organizing her thoughts, writing up some notes and try to come up with a list of the most likely suspects. She fell into a sleep troubled with ugly dreams of ten suspicious people menacing her

At nine o'clock the next morning she went to his office in the main Embassy building. He asked her movements the morning before as he had the others, then asked if she had anything to report. She told him about Dora's accusations of the ambassador's groping.

Mariani said Washington had send him the ambassador's records and he saw the reprimand he received for molesting a woman in a previous post.

Lynne told him that Gerry's wife was especially mentioned by Dora. She also told him about the violent stories, the gun at the customs office he had bragged about several times and the Sheridan incident. He knew about that too. He said, when he interviewed Gerry, he had asked him again where he was just before the ambassador died. Gerry admitted he had come with a delivery had actually been inside the Annex and talked briefly and unpleasantly with the ambassador not long before his body was scheduled. But he swore the ambassador was alive and in apparent good health when he left him.

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"With that suspicious circumstance and the information about the ambassador's behavior toward Stella, his wife, I feel now that Gerry is a good suspect for the ambassador's murder. If he killed him, then maybe he also killed Brett who had publicly called him a drunkard." He paused, and played with a pile of papers on his desk. He looked intently at Lynne. "Yes. A likely suspect. But, one thing makes it hard to believe he swung that coupe coupe and killed Brett. There was no blood on him. The body was bloody. A messy business that left a blood smeared corpse should leave some blood on the killer."

Lynne nodded. That was an important point.

The security man continued, "But, we have the same lack of bloody evidence for all the people we interviewed in the Annex yesterday. We especially looked for blood on everyone. Of course they all had opportunities to wash their hands. But, the killer's clothes, there should have been blood on them."

"And you didn't see any blood?"

"No. Not a drop on anyone."

Tony and Lynne were silent for some moments, their faces wrinkled with concentration.

Neither came up with an explanation.

Frustrated with that line of thinking, Lynne changed the subject.

"A while ago you asked me to think of a way to trap the murder into doing something incriminating. I thought of a plan, and have it

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all ready to put into execution. But events have been occurring that kept me from telling you about it.”

Tony looked interested.

“Tell me about it.”

I wrote a teasing notice to put in Book Notes that make it sound like I know who the murderer of the ambassador is. I thought that would flush out the guilty person.”

“You mean you were considering using yourself as bait to invite an attack by the murderer?” Tony seemed horrified.

Lynne was embarrassed. It really sounded like a foolish idea.

“Yes. That was the idea. I thought somehow you could get me extra protection. But, I really lost my nerve.”

“You must be crazy. It probably wouldn’t work. But, if it did, it could get you killed. Do you have a death wish?”

“No. I really don’t. Probably that is why I didn’t go ahead with it. I planned to ask your permission anyway. I made a copy of what I wrote, just in case you wanted to look at it.”

“Give it to me. I’ll destroy it. This multiple murderer is extremely dangerous and volatile. If the existence of your plan was known, you could be number four on the death list!”

His voice took on tones of command.

“Don’t set that Talking Drum Bait trap again. Set that devious brain of yours to thinking how Gerry managed to do that bloody slaughter yesterday without getting any blood on his clothes. Figure that out and I will be satisfied

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that we can charge him for Brett's murder and probably the ambassador's too."

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Chapter 37: Suspicious Characters

Lynne left the security man, discouraged by his demand that she figure out the impossible. How could a bloody murder occur without leaving bloody stains on the killer's clothes?

When she got back to the big office in the Annex, she saw Gerry, cheerfully photocopying a new supply of menus for the American Club. In his ordinary joking way that seemed callous and unfeeling after Brett's death, he said, "Lynne, quite a do yesterday. That bugger Brett finally got someone so fed up they went over the edge. Things will be better without that bloke at the Embassy for a while. I hear they've sent a lady to act as temp to take his place for a while from America. That's good for me. I can usually charm the ladies." He gave a rakish smile. "I'm sure you've noticed that!"

Lynne was found it hard to believe that Gerry, such a disreputable man, and really, right now the main suspect for the murders, knew the latest information, before her. Her husband or Tony Mariani would tell her when an appointment was made. It was far too soon for Washington to make a decision on who to send.

Even though she believed this, she found herself asking him, "What kind of person is she? What do you know about her?"

Gerry laughed. "I will just let you find out what for yourself."

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Lynne entered her office and shut the door. She would review all the possibilities she knew of for finding the murderer. Despite the security man's opinion and her annoyance with Gerry, she really didn't feel he was the killer.

Lynne sat before her computer. She would do this in an orderly fashion. When she ran into her first murder in Africa, she didn't have a computer and laboriously made hand written lists. At that period, she kept a daily journal. She shivered when she remembered some of the frightening things that happened to her because of that journal.

This would be much easier, technically, that is. She would recall and list all of the possible suspects, especially ones she had thought important at times in the investigations. Lynne fell into almost a trance. She would try to relive her impressions of the three murders from the beginning and consider all the suspects.

First, right after the ambassador's death, she had been concerned about the hostility of the drab middle aged lady who said she had been snubbed by the ambassador. She said she was glad he was dead. But, that drab woman took the next plane to America since she had been fired from her appointment by the ambassador and was out of the country when the next two murders were done. Lynne believed the three American deaths were tied together. Perhaps the later ones were intended to cover up the first one, or perhaps a killer had grudges against all three of them. With the drab

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lady gone, she had listened to office gossip and suspected Victoria, the personnel director. Several people, was it Harriet, Louis, Claudia, and Dora? Several people hinted that since she was a voodoo witch, she was the killer, using magic if necessary. Victoria was revealed to be furious with the ambassador because he hadn't given her an upgrade in status and a raise in pay. Lynne thought she had found the killer, but then she learned that Victoria was in another village doing benign voodoo for a relative when the ambassador was killed. Her next suspect was Gerry, who was revealed to be an impulsive man with a grudge against the ambassador who had reprimanded him for drinking. But Gerry wasn't secretive and openly told her about he was glad the ambassador was dead. Somehow, she had never followed through with investigation because he and others including the ambassador's widow, Gloria had given her strong reason to suspect her own husband Everett had killed the ambassador in order to further his diplomatic career. Lynne also learned that there was another possible motive; both Everett and the ambassador were interested in Daphne, the beautiful blonde woman who was given the job that the drab woman had held for only a week. It had looked bad for Everett when she learned he was lying to her, sneaking, had an affair with Daphne, and had also had a meeting with the ambassador the night of the murder. Even more damning, Everett's fingerprints were on the glass that had held the deadly poison that

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killed the ambassador. But, Tony, the security man had convinced Lynne that one of the Embassy employees had seen the ambassador alive after Everett handed the glass to the ambassador and left him. She now was again in love with Everett and found it hard to believe that she had been afraid of him for a time.

Next, the evidence started mounting against Brett. The more she learned about him, the more she believed he was the killer of the ambassador who was about to send him home in disgrace. Everett as his Ambassador's successor had seen the evidence against Brett as molester of his own beautiful young daughter and was going to tell him to take the next plane to America and face charges against him. But, then, yesterday, he was found dead, slashed with a coupe coupe.

Now, it really looked bad for Gerry again. She had heard rumors that the ambassador had some sort of physical relationship with Gerry's wife and Gerry had continued to reveal himself as a violent and impulsive man. He didn't really have an alibi for the time period before the ambassador's body was found. Perhaps he went to the Annex early for his duties of setting up the reception the night the ambassador died. He had been at the Explore dinner when Matthew had declared that he knew who had killed the ambassador. A fou, a madman, had probably been hired to do the actual killing with the fu fu paddle. And Gerry had been at the Annex when Brett was killed. Dora had said the ambassador habitually fondled Gerry's wife.

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Gerry himself admitted that he was a wild rash man with an ungoverned temper. Despite all this, Lynne somehow doubted his guilt. This time, she wanted to think of every one who could have done the two murders. Perhaps they had motives she hadn't heard of. But who else was a possible murderer?

Lynne still thought the three murders were tied together. The ambassador was probably killed by someone who worked at the Embassy or was somehow close to it. The killer that marked Matthew for death was probably at the Explore dinner or close to someone that had attended and heard Matthew say he knew who killed the ambassador. The murderer of Brett was surely someone that had been at the Annex the morning he was killed.

That included all the employees of the Annex, people like Victoria, Harriet, Louis, the cashier, Vitoria, Harriet, Louis, the cashier, the janitors. But, it also included many other people that worked for the Embassy in the other building and were at the Annex to get their pay or have their paychecks cashed, in cases like Claudia. And, there were some people that worked at non governmental organizations, like Lita and her questionable boy friend Omar who were there to get some grants or funds from the cashier. And, of course, there was Gerry and Dora and some Peace Corps administrators. Surprisingly, Everett was there briefly and surprisingly.

Which of them had resented the ambassador? They all needed his agreement in

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order to earn a living. Did one of them resent his treatment of them?

Gerry still seemed the most likely now, but she hoped there was a better one, someone she did not have positive feelings about. Probably she should do as Tony said, and concentrate on thinking how he could have killed Brett without splashing blood on his clothes.

Exhausted, at five o'clock, she prepared to go home for the day. She was about to lock her office door when she saw a She saw that something that someone had tried to push under the door. It was a paper napkin, the kind that had on top the words, American Recreation Center, Cotonou, Benin. There was also a smear of grease and perhaps mustard.

How odd! What was it doing here? She picked it up and looked more carefully. In big childish letters, in all capitals, as if deliberately meant to disguise the writer, it said:

**BLOKE, DO NOT EXAMINE THE
DEATH OF THE AMBASSADOR. REST QUIET
OR DIE!**

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Chapter 38: An Old Suspect Returns

The next morning, as soon as she entered her office, Lynne reexamined the strange warning left outside her door. She had picked it up only by two corners and put it in clear plastic folder to protect it. Then she left it in a locked drawer overnight. It obviously came from the American Club which was run by Gerry. But of course, the whole American community had access to it. And the word bloke was ordinarily used by only one person, Gerry. If Gerry had sent the warning, would he make it so obvious that it was he who had sent it? But, if he was the murderer and thought she knew he was, he may not be worried about signaling that he was the sender. But the words were written in a childish script, as if the writer was trying to hide the sender. And the wording was odd. Rest quiet?"

But maybe this strange message would really solve the murder of the ambassador. She would get it to Tony. If he could find fingerprints on it that might give a definitive answer. But since it looked used, with the grease spot and the mustard, it might have other finger prints on it. She put it and a typed message explaining where and when she found it in a manila envelope and marked it URGENT.

She personally made a trip to the Embassy to hand it to Tony, but he wasn't in. She gave it

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to Claudia with her promise to hand it to Tony Mariani and not let anyone else touch it.

Claudia agreed to it. She seemed strangely passive and looked haggard. "Lynne, someone is murdering Embassy officials. I'm having trouble sleeping. Who knows. I may be next!"

Lynne didn't know how to reassure her. Truly, none of them could really feel safe until the killer was found.

The next few days, work at the Annex was strained and dispirited. Although no one liked Brett, without him, many of their jobs were difficult. Louis was acting as a temporary administrator. But many of the documents they used in their daily activities had to be signed by a state department official.

Lynne spent her days on routine chores in her community liaison office. For once, she caught up on her mail, answering messages that came to her, filing most of it. She got out a new issue of Talking Drums. Following the vehement instructions of Tony Mariani, she tore up and threw away all her copies of the misguided article she had prepared when toying with the idea of setting a trap for the murderer. She wrote an article about Brett's death, making it as neutral as possible. Since the damning information and suspicions about his child molestations had not been officially released, she was careful to keep all hint of them out.

Everett was working long hours. Brett's post was a dual one, as security officer and administrative officer and many duties resulted

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in work for Everett. At night, Everett flopped wearily into bed, late, and rose early. He had little to say except to complain about his burdensome hours and days.

One day Lynne was rearranging the magazines in her office when, in the late afternoon, Louis tapped on the door. "Washington has hired a temporary administrator. It is a lady. She applied to be a state department officer a year ago and passed the test. She worked for several non governmental organizations as an administrator and has worked as a consultant. She is flying in to night."

The next morning, when Lynne entered the Annex building, she was in the aisle right in front of the administrator's desk when she noticed the door was open and at the big desk there was a woman, obviously working hard with a pile of papers.

"Why, I know that women!" Lynne thought.

The woman called out from the desk at back of the room, "I don't know your name, but, please come in. I want to talk to you."

Lynne hurried in. It was the woman of a certain age, the drab lady that had talked about her fury at the ambassador soon after his death.

"My name is Myra Delaney. I'm the temporary administrator, here until Washington appoints a permanent person. I met you before."

"Yes. I remember. It's good to see you again."

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“Yes, it is good to be back. And wanted this time. And the lovely Miss Daphne will treat me with great respect because she knows I’m in charge of the people that cash her checks, get her supplies, and make arrangements for her.” She spoke in a half joking, cheerful manner. Obviously, the change in circumstances had certainly improved her mood. “And now the ambassador is dead. I told you just one of the reasons that I disliked him. But there were more. He was a petty womanizer. When he thought he was unobserved, he was always pinching and squeezing women who worked for him. He didn’t think I was worth molesting. But I saw him do it to his secretary and other women at the office. Some of them didn’t mind. Tony Mariani sent me the documents about the investigation of his death. I read them on the plane. Some women lost their jobs because they refused to let him touch them. Others were demoted or refused promotion. This kind of thing is dangerous. Even if it was ok with some of these women, someone else might hate it. African men don’t like other men handling their wives and girl friends any more than Americans do. Maybe one of them killed him or had him killed. Tony told me he asked you to help in the investigation. I am pleased because I have too much to do.”

“Good. I’m glad you’re interested and involved. Brett didn’t seem to care. And then he became a victim.”

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“Yes. And, any of us can become victims if we don’t find out the killer.”

“That’s what Claudia, the ambassador’s secretary said the other day. She’s terrified.”

There was intensity in Myra’s eyes. What was she thinking? “We have to try something new. I have piles of things waiting for signatures. But, let me see if I can get Tony Mariani to meet with you and me tonight and we can get him to tell us what he has specifically found out about the night the ambassador died. And, maybe we can think of a plan to step up the investigation.

“Right now Tony says it’s a matter of blood,” Lynne told her. “How did the killer of Brett spend the day before the eyes of all the people here in the Annex without anyone noticing blood on clothes? Blood!” Lynne’s emotion overtook her and she said the last word in almost a shout. Sorry. But it’s bugging me.”

“OK. Keep working on that problem. I’ll ask my secretary to coordinate it with Tony, ask him to suggest a place where we can meet.”

She raised her voice. “I don’t know how to work the buttons on my phone yet. I need my secretary.” She shouted, “Harriet!”

Harriet was there almost instantly.

“Ask Mr. Mariani if he, Lynne and I can meet tonight for dinner. Tell him he can choose the place.” Then she said, with great conviction, “We’re going to find out just exactly who is killing Americans!”

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Chapter 39. Danger and All That Jazz

Lynne was glad that Myra was taking an active interest in finding the killer. But, all of a sudden, she felt a flash of fear. She had once suspected the drab woman was the killer because of her fierce dislike of the ambassador. Myra had still been in Cotonou when he died. Had anyone checked to see where she was those crucial few minutes before the band concert was scheduled to begin when someone handed a poisoned drink to the ambassador? Lynne had been working on the supposition that the same person killed the ambassador and then Matthew and after that, Brett. And Myra had +been out of the country when those two deaths occurred. But what if Myra killed the ambassador and someone else with different motivations killed the other two? Was Myra taking so much interest in the ambassador's death in order to mask her guilt? Several hours later, Harriet told Lynne that Tony Mariani had agreed to meet her and Myra Delaney for dinner that very night. Oddly enough, he had chosen Le Jazz Club.

“Why are we going there? I've heard it is rundown, and has very few customers. I've heard the food is terrible and the service worse,” Lynne protested.

Harriet's eyes were pools of fury. “My cousin owns Le Jazz Club. That is where Mr. Mariani wants to go. He said he has always

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wanted to see what it is like. He said he doesn't have much free time, that he likes jazz and wants to get some pleasure from this meeting. Then she said hostilely, "Should I tell him you refuse to go there?"

So once again, Harriet was offended. The woman was too touchy. And, she had too many cousins for Lynne's liking. She hurried to say, "Of course not. He's the boss. And it may add some fun to our unpleasant discussion of murder."

The dinner meeting was for 7:00. Lynne called her husband to tell him she couldn't have dinner at home. As usual, he was too busy to talk to her. She only reached Claudia. "Oh, Lynne, I was just about to call you. The acting ambassador can not have dinner at home tonight."

"I should have predicted that. Will you call Marcel and tell him not to bother to cook. He can go home early."

At five, Lynne drove on the hot, crowded streets to her house. As always, she was careful to avoid the motorcycles that sometimes held two adults and a child and darted in and out of any unoccupied spot on the road. She arrived home in time for a leisurely bath. She picked a long dress made of three shades of green in an African print. It had been a while since she had gone out for dinner. She found herself feeling somewhat festive, despite the unpleasant purpose of the evening, and the reputation of their chosen meeting place.

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When she started out just before seven it was already dark, as always at this time so close to the equator.

She knew where the club was-- near the market area, on a back street, between a half completed sand block building and a half destroyed sand block building surrounded by scraggly weeds. Someone had printed on the door in uneven large letters in what looked like house paint LE JAZZ CLUB.

There was no driveway or parking lot and no cars were parked on the street. She placed her car on a patch of dirt at the edge of the road, close to the dingy entrance and waited inside it, ready to leave if she sensed danger. Unusual for the crowded African city, she was the only one on the street. At this time of the evening, probably most people that worked were home and perhaps eating a meal. But also, looking at this abandoned looking street, with a discontinued railroad track and a sort of swamp filled with trash and garbage, there would not be many reasons to here. She waited anxiously for the others to arrive, hoping Tony would come first. She was nervous about possibly being alone with Myra in this deserted area.

There were no lights and she could barely make out the littered path. After a while, two bou bou clad men appeared. One fumbled with a key and opened the front door. Perhaps they were cooks, ready to start fires in back of the building to prepare food. Lynne was still displeased at Tony's choice of meeting place. But, she realized he didn't know the city well,

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actually, despite several investigations in Togo and Benin, didn't know the West Africa region well. Hearing there was a jazz club, he probably assumed that it would be somewhat like jazz clubs he had attended in the Western world.

A half an hour later, a car drove up. Both Tony and Myra got out of it. Lynne could see by their faces that they realized this rendezvous spot was a mistake. Tony groaned

"Lynne. This is a dump. Why did the Annex secretary let us meet here? What shall we do now?"

Lynne greeted them warmly, then was silent. It was not her decision to make.

Myra said, "I don't know the city. You tell us, Tony."

"Ok. Let's go ahead with it. It will be a place to talk, which is why we're here, and whatever, it will be a great story to tell the folks back home about the so called glamour of foreign service life."

They entered to find the place on the inside lived up to the expectation signaled by the outside.

It was hot and airless in the shabby room. There was a faint order of decaying food. They found their way to a table covered with a soiled white cloth. On one wall there was a bar, showing a little wine and some dusty bottles of Fanta orange drink. On the other side, there was a simple wooden platform, no doubt intended for a stage.

A man in a bou bou came over to them, beaming a welcome. "Bien arrivee. Bienvenu."

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He went on to say in careful schoolboy French, "The menu today is chicken and french fries."

Looking at each other, stifling laughs and complaints, Tony, Myra, and Lynne ordered chicken and french fries.

A few minutes later, three more men entered the restaurant. They were younger, and wore complets, the pajama like suits made of African print that were common in the south of Benin. They busied themselves arranging the stage. One had a large one stringed instrument. Another had obviously hand made African drums. A third had an unpolished wooden, flute-like instrument.

The three Americans watched in wonder. This was turning out to be a fascinating experience. But, the performance didn't start, and the food didn't come.

At this point, Lynne was getting really hungry. There was no sign of food,

After much hand waving, gesturing and calling, they got the bou bou clad waiter to return. In French, Tony ordered wine.

The waiter looked doubtful, but said, "Oui monsieur."

Fifteen minutes went by. There was no waiter, no food, and no wine. Fifteen more minutes passed. Then, the waiter returned, and said, "I am sorry, sir. But we cannot give you wine. We cannot find the bottle opener." And he quickly left towards the regions that Lynne hoped led to the outdoor fire that was broiling their chicken.

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“Well, we might as well talk. Tony said, “The number of people at the Annex and its groups before the band was scheduled to play the night the ambassador died is large and their movements are complicated. Probably many of them could have entered the Annex when the ambassador was inside. I won’t try to discuss all the possibilities. I’ll just tell you some of the highlights. There were three sets of fingerprints on the glass that held the poisoned drink.”

Astonished, Lynne said, “Three? I never heard that before!”

“Well, we got a report from Washington’s best expert. The ambassador and Everett had prints on it. But, at least one other person had made smudges which were too smeared to identify. Lynne you remember Everett reluctantly admitted to talking to the ambassador and giving him some coke in a glass about an hour before you and he discovered the body outside near the buffet table. An Embassy employee said he saw Everett leave and heard the ambassador complaining about not having ice to someone he couldn’t see in the back of the room. My informant said he didn’t see anyone else leave, but left himself in a few minutes and went home. We still don’t know exactly what kind of poison was in the coke; tests show it wasn’t any of the ordinary things like arsenic or cyanide. We feel that whoever responded to the ambassador’s complaint about the warm drink and put in ice also put in the poison that killed him.”

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While Tony talked, the jazz band, which turned out to be the bou bou clad men that had set out the instruments, came on the stage, bowed and played some music, which was produced by one tone on the string base, one tone on the country flute, and rhythm provided by energetically pounded drums. She had heard bits and pieces of what Tony was telling and ordinarily would have been pleased to hear it all put together so clearly. But, by now, hunger was gnawing at her stomach. Where was the food?

At last the waiter appeared with three plates. On each was the scrawniest, most muscular, most undercooked piece of chicken she had ever seen. Each plate also had exactly five pale, limp french fries. Tony gave a groan of disgust. They had now been in the restaurant for almost two hours.

Lynne was too disheartened to attempt to eat. "Excuse me. I have to go to the lady's room. Tony, maybe you can figure out what we should do next."

She stood up and started toward the back regions of the room, hoping there was some sort of toilet there.

Myra quickly stood up. "I'll go with you. Nature calls me too."

As she went out the back door, Lynne met several bou bou clad workers. She said, "VC and toilette." They gestured toward the back of the lot. She hurried, stumbling on the littered, uneven ground. The area was dark there, lit only by the charcoal fire and a little moonlight.

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She stood reluctantly at the entrance of a bamboo enclosure. She peered through the gloom at the dirt bottomed shower stall. She knew these were often used as a place to urinate. Desperate now, and after eight years in West Africa, Lynne was willing to use the only possible facility. She took a gingerly step in.

Suddenly she felt a sharp pain at the back of her head. The next thing she was aware of was a dazed return to consciousness, lying with her head in the filthy stall and her body in the dirt. Her mind was fuzzy, her thoughts deeply fearful, yet somehow accepting, "Was she murdered, like the other Americans?"

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Chapter 40 Politics, Beninese Style

Tony and Myra pulled Lynne to her feet and half led, half dragged her to Tony's car, all shocked by the horrendous assault. They took Lynne to the Embassy medical office and called the Ghanaian doctor to check her over. While they waited for him to come, the guard and the janitor at the center exchanged comments in their maternal African language. Lynne was shaken from the assault and couldn't still the terror she felt even though she was with Tony and some others she trusted. She had gone through so much these last weeks. People that she knew seemed to be dying all around her. And now, the unnamed menace seemed to be aimed at her. What was she doing here, facing all these attacks in a country where she usually couldn't even understand what people were saying? If it was Myra who had hit her, was she waiting for a moment when the others were out of the room or looking the other way to renew the assault? They wanted to reach her husband, but no one appeared to know exactly which diplomatic reception he was attending. Lynne wanted someone to comfort her and take care of her. But, she thought despondently, even if Everett was here he would probably just play the unflappable diplomat and also probably would scold her for being careless enough to put herself in danger.

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When the doctor arrived, he wasn't impressed by her condition. He found only a small bump on the back of her head. He checked her eyes and did a rough test of her reflexes. "I do not think you have a concussion. You just need a warm soapy bath and a good night's sleep."

Myra offered to take her home and stay with her until Everett returned. A splinter of fear struck Lynne. Her shivering increased. "Myra. Where were you when I was attacked? You started out to look for a rest room with me."

"I'm sorry I didn't stay with you. When I saw that you had to go to the back of the lot in the dark, I decided to wait until I got home. I stayed just outside the back door."

"And did you see who hit me?"

"No, it was dark. I couldn't see you. You know there were several people cooking. And there were other people hanging around. I didn't see anything threatening. You called out. That's when I asked one of the cooks go with me to the stall and found you lying in the mud."

Lynne didn't know whether or not to believe her. Someone hit her, maybe wanted to kill her. Was it Myra?

They called Sally, who was, not only the nurse, but Lynne's friend since Peace Corp days. She offered to take Lynne home and stay with her until Everett returned. She helped Lynne take the prescribed bath, using a lot of soap. Then, she gave her two valiums and tucked her into bed.

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When Everett returned and he expressed alarm and concern. He reached out to caress Lynne as she lay in the bed. Lynne groggily opened her eyes, but only briefly, then included him in her restless, frightened dreams of dark, menacing figures, danger, mud, and jazz.

The next morning, the sun was bright as usual. Marcel's fine breakfast of coffee, papaya, and croissants comforted Lynne and Everett.

Everett's voice was tender. "Until we catch this murderer, please take better care of yourself. Don't go off in the dark alone. Try not to be alone at all." He seemed to be struggling to formulate more advice to give her, knowing none of it was going to keep her safe until they found out who was behind the attacks. Uncharacteristically, he blurted out, "I love you very much. You are so precious. If I lost you, my life would be..." He controlled his emotions and stopped talking..

Lynne looked at him with love. He had improved in looks now that he was functioning successfully as ambassador. Something about the way he carried his head and shoulders spoke of attractive power. His tender words helped a little, but she still felt shaken and vulnerable, thinking again of her fear of death and her face in the muddy floor. "I'm glad you feel that way. I'll try to be careful. But, I have to work with Tony to catch the person that attacked me and probably the others."

Everett sighed. "Yes, I know. We have to go on with our work. Which reminds me. Now that we have Myra doing the petty things like

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signing papers and such, I have more time to do my work as ambassador properly. And, one thing that is important is to get Myra up to date on the political situation here in Benin. Myra as security officer should know what I can tell her about how things stand. I'm having a meeting today with her and asking Tony Mariani to attend and also you. As you have noticed, I haven't had the time or energy to keep you informed. But you should know how things are going politically in the Benin. And, after all, I asked you to help Tony Mariani to solve the question of who killed three Americans. There's always a chance that the general Beninese political situation is involved."

"I'll like that. I've been so involved with the horrendous things around the Annex I'm ignorant of the general picture in the country. I try to read the weekly papers. You know I can read French pretty well, but don't learn much. They have only eight pages and are full of partisan rhetoric.

"Well, I know more than you'll find there, and will try to recap recent events and explain the present situation."

Late that afternoon, Lynne, Tony, and Myra were in Everett's imposing ambassadorial office. By then, Lynne had regained a lot of the courage that had kept her in West Africa these past eight years. Everett sat behind the huge mahogany desk. Three chairs faced him. It was an odd situation for Lynne. Her husband looked highly ambassadorial and serious. She

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tried to properly act the role of subservient employee.

“I want to run through some of the background of the internal political situation in Benin in recent years and at present. I will even give you my considered but tentative prediction for the future.”

Tony and Myra expressed appreciation for his plan. Lynne just smiled, encouragingly.

“The recent elections were won by the old dictator who say that he is no longer a Marxist, but a born again Christian. There were real threats of insecurity when our favored candidate, who was seeking a second term, looked like he was not going to accept the results and would refuse to step down. It looked like there might be civil violence. But, we applied pressure and also offered him a good job with the World Bank and he gave up his claims. Ever since, I have been walking on eggs with the newly elected government, trying to influence them to help our national policy but at the same time avoiding making them feel controlled. Here again, money from Washington was helpful. Now things are calmer and it appears that the new Beninese president feels the United States is a cooperating friend of Benin.”

Lynne was proud of Everett. His good leadership had helped prevent a war or anarchy. She thought of that night just a few weeks ago when her guard had told her people were fighting each other with bows and arrows in her neighborhood.

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Myra looked as if her mind was spinning, trying to grasp all this about a country had just arrived in. But Tony had been in the area long enough to have a look of comprehension. "Mr. Acting Ambassador, that helps a lot. But can you tell us a little about how the Beninese staff at our Embassy feels about all this?"

"Besides the other issues, remember there is are regional and tribal or ethnic conflicts involved. The candidate we backed came from the Fon people who have been somewhat Westernized for at least a century. They live in the south and have a number of educated people. Kereko, who won, came from a Northern group, the Barabo. Their people are less well educated and have traditionally had few ties with European. Animosity goes back to the days when members of southern tribes married white slavers and sold members of northern tribes into bondage when they could defeat them in battle.

"The Beninese that work in the American Embassy all have a superficial loyalty to the candidate that lost. Most of them are members of educated families from the south. A few, especially the guards and janitors, come from the northern groups. But all of them are pragmatic and outwardly accept whatever government is in power. Still, some hidden resentments remain."

Myra said, "In practical terms, how about the people that work for me? What do you think their feelings are about this?"

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Everett turned to Lynne. "You've worked closely with the Beninese at the Embassy and the Cultural Center. What do you think?"

"Dora and Harriet had relatives in high places in the government that was just defeated. Louis and Victoria also are close to that group. Probably, secretly, the cashier is happy now and also many of the guards."

Tony seemed impatient. "Thanks for telling me all this. But, I don't think this will help us in the murder investigation. We don't suspect Beninese as being behind them, except for the crazy man, the fou, that probably killed Matthew. He probably did it for no other motive than money paid by the real instigator of the murder. By the way, we are pretty sure we know who he is. And we have an idea where he is. Soon we will retrieve him from where some of his relatives have him hidden. Then we'll see if we can question him and get anything out of him about who hired him.

"But, back to politics, let me ask, do you think the relationship of some other country with the US could be the motivation for the murder? We all know there is rivalry, jealousy, even hostility between our gang and the French Embassy here. Is it possible that the French are systematically killing Americans here?"

Everett laughed, then looked serious. "Tony, that's a fine question, and I wish I had an answer. Certainly the French were gleeful when our favored candidate lost the election. Our Ambassador was paranoid on the subject of the French. Any time the French ambassador

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was introduced before he was at a public event, he would come back to the office raving about a French plot to demean and destroy our country.

“The French diplomats were invited to the band concert the night the ambassador died. But, you know, your investigation showed that the guards say no Frenchmen were admitted before the body was discovered.”

Tony Mariani listened attentively and nodded, but then he said. “Yes, the guard’s record book doesn’t contain any French citizens there that evening. Even so, I’ve been looking into their activities. One of the Embassy secretaries has a cousin that works in the French Embassy. He has been doing some cautious investigation of the French diplomats that tangled with our ambassador. I’ll get after him to find out where they were early that evening.”

Lynne felt a quick burst of enthusiasm. Maybe Tony was onto something. She knew how careless the guards were about records and so subservient to any white person they sometimes let people in they had been told to keep out. What if the murderer and the cause of all this violence was not a friend or colleague of hers?

“Oh,” she thought. “Wouldn’t it be wonderful if it was all a plot of the French?”

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Chapter 41. Invitation to an Inquest

After the meeting with Everett, Myra and Tony, Lynne briefly felt pleasure and relief. The idea that the French, rather than people she knew well, might be responsible for the deaths and violence helped still the continuing tremors of fear she had felt since someone came out of the dark, hit her and left her face down in the filthy mud behind the Jazz Club. She thought back to that strange warning note that had been left under her door, several days ago, calling her bloke and telling her to stop investigating the murder. She had been half amused by it because of its quaint wording. But now she took it seriously. She had been warned and had continued snooping and then was knocked on the head. That made two warnings. The next time the killer might succeed.

She loved the fact that Everett included her in the meeting and she was especially pleased that he had asked her to share her knowledge about ethnic loyalties in the Embassy staff.

The next few days, Lynne stayed in her office and worked catching up on her regular duties as Community Resource Officer. The first few hours, she kept the door locked, just to make herself feel she was doing something to keep herself safe. But she had to unlock it several times to let in people that needed to do business with her. The familiar tasks made her begin to feel her normal strong self. She tried to

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give Myra a level of trust. Even so, she was careful not to be in any isolated place with her.

She was hopeful that soon Tony would announce that he had learned that some sinister Frenchman had been seen that night before the band concert was cancelled by the ambassador's death.

Her relationship with her husband was warm and loving. But, despite his avowal that he would spend more time with her and help keep her safe, his pressing ambassadorial duties kept him working long hours. Two out of three nights that week he came home extremely late, worn out after, unending complications involved in trying to put into effect the directives he continued to from Washington by cable. Conditions were so special in this little, undeveloped country and this small Embassy, it often seemed impossible besides being absurd to follow their commands and procedures.

He too seemed to be willing to wait for news from Tony about his investigations.

At the end of the week, Lynne got a telephoned message from Tony's assistant as soon as she arrived at work. "Mr. Mariani wants to see you in his office immediately."

She rushed to her car and made her way through the congested, hot, streets. The identification procedures with the little marines at the gate had become an accepted routine. The receptionist told her to go right into the office Tony was using.

Tony looked harried and different. Instead of having the usual strange appearance he

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usually had of an over groomed song and dance man trying to be stylish but somehow getting the wrong decade, he had on a nicely coordinated shirt and lightweight suit like Everett and other Embassy officials wore. But the shirt was wrinkled and he looked exhausted, worried, and distressed.

“Lynne, I’m talking to you, but I want to talk to Everett. His secretary says he’s too busy to see me, has been for two days. But she passed on a message last night from him, saying... “ He fumbled among the pile of papers on his desk and pulled out one on memo stationary. He read it in a subdued voice. “Tony, find that murderer. Washington is pressing. If you can’t clear this up soon, be prepared to have someone else sent from Washington with the predictable damage to your career and possible future promotions.”

“But I thought you were making headway, that you are looking for a French connection.”

Tony gave a despairing groan. “That was just wild thinking. Since then, we’ve done extensive investigation both openly and covertly through several of our Beninese friends who speak local languages and French well and have friends and relatives that work at the French Embassy. One of them is someone you know, Harriet’s husband, Roland Dobato who taught in your English Language Program last year.”

“Sure. He’s a friend of mine. He sometimes attends out Explore dinners.”

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“Oh. Really. Well, you know he has a doctorate and was a professor at the university. The Beninese government pays their professors about as much as we or the French pay a mail clerk. He recently got a job as a translator the French Embassy. It’s a nice opportunity for him and good for us. He likes America and was glad to help us. He reported that the French had a special retreat at the ocean at Grand Popo which you know is a two hours’ drive from Cotonou. The entire French mission attended. Roland was there. They were in the sight of each other constantly. None of them could have been near the American ambassador any time the day of the planned band concert.”

Lynne sighed. “That’s disappointing. “It would have given us suspects that weren’t my friends.”

Tony scowled. “It’s good news for international cooperation. Roland and the others found that the French regret the death of our ambassador. They say it caused them difficulties and they’re afraid that it will increase instability in the region. It’s good we don’t have to suspect a covert war with France.”

“Yes, Tony. I was thinking of my own narrow feelings. This constant fear in the background is getting to me.”

“Well, your husband’s threat to destroy my career is getting to me.”

“I’m sorry Tony. But you know, I have very little influence with him. He keeps Embassy business and our relationship strictly separate.”

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“Yes. I know that. Anyway, our investigation leads us back to Americans and employees of the Embassy. That’s a lot of people. I’ve found out a few things, an assortment of motives, where some people were at that crucial period just before the ambassador died, and have some new findings from Washington. But, I can’t think of the way to put this together and give me the correct conclusion and the solution to our mysteries.”

“Tony, remember when we were both in Togo working on a murder we reached a point like this. We decided to hold a big meeting of people that included all our suspects and many who might be witnesses of some unusual activity. That meeting in Togo somehow did as we hoped. It triggered a witness to speak and surprised the murderer into make a damning admission. Could we try something like that again?”

“Don’t they call a meeting here where they get everybody together and work to sort things out a palaver?”

“Yes. That’s what they call it in Ghana. Here, they call it a palabre. They settle a lot of family and neighborhood disputes with it. We could have a version of it. This time we could invite about fifty people, ones we feel might know something. Let’s give them a meal, invite them to a banquet. Maybe that will relax people enough to they let slip some helpful knowledge.”

“Well, it’s something to try, and something to show Everett that I’m determined to get this

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all solved soon. We can call it a solidarity banquet to thank the Embassy community for their patience in the difficult situation we have been in these last weeks and tell them that I, as security officer, will explain what we have found out so far about the deaths. We will ask Everett to issue invitations that are actually commands, requiring them to come. Then, when we're all together, we'll tell them what Washington found in its tests and reveal what we suspect. We'll watch to see if anyone looks especially upset or tries to leave. And maybe this will stir someone to tell us something new and significant.

If Everett agrees, I'll ask him to have Myra, our administrative officer, arrange for a dinner to be held in the courtyard of the American Cultural Center as soon as possible. And I hope he can ask Lome if they will lend us three of their marines so the Embassy guards can attend and also to prevent an early exit of a witness or the murderer."

Lynne left the meeting wondering if Everett would agree to this plan. Maybe he would. He might want to show Washington that they were taking dramatic steps to bring out the information that was surely locked in the secret self of some one or some people well known to her and the Embassy. She was asleep when he returned home that night so she didn't get a chance to talk to him.

The next afternoon, the mail clerk brought her a message bearing the ambassador's seal. She noticed he had a stack of similar envelopes,

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probably destined to be delivered to other people that worked in the Annex. She read the letter typed on heavy cream paper. The message sounded threatening and cold. She knew hers was similar to the one sent to the others and was intended to make those that received it anxious. Probably Tony drafted it for Everett.

It said:

To Employees of the U. S. State
Department in Cotonou

I know you have been in a state of suspense since the ambassador was killed. The murder of Matthew Carey of CRS and then a second murder of an American statesman on Annex property have made all of you suspicious and fearful.

All those receiving this letter are required to attend a meeting to be held in the garden of the American Cultural Center this coming Saturday at seven P.M. A simple meal will be served.

At last I can tell you that our head security officer Tony Mariani will explain the test results of the evidence sent them which he has received from Washington. He will also tell all of you other helpful information he has gathered in his investigation. At this time he is almost ready to make an arrest.

Be prepared to tell anything you experienced or witnessed that can be helpful in the final stages of identifying those responsible for the deaths. Failing to reveal information will have serious consequences.

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Come with the intension of bringing about the desired end of the meeting—an arrest for murder.”

It was signed, Everett Knowlton, Acting Ambassador.

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Chapter 42: The Palaver Cast

After the mail that brought the half threatening letter from her husband, the acting ambassador, Lynne hoped to get more information in the next delivery from the messenger. Late that afternoon, she got a note in the handwriting of Tony Mariani, the Security Officer:

Lynne, Here's a list of who we invited to the murder banquet. Look it over and see if you think we have included all the crucial people. Maybe seeing those names will jog your mind into some good hunches about what happened the day the ambassador died and why.

Attached to the note was a typed list containing thirty-five. What a cast of characters for the drama Tony was planning! Some of them didn't seem like they would be helpful in the investigation. But maybe they were padding to hide the important ones. At the bottom, Tony had scrawled by hand: "We are requiring the guards that worked the night of the planned band concert to work at our banquet. And, and we have scheduled the people that worked on the catering and cleaning that night to act as waiters at our affair. Needless to say, it may be extremely important to ask them some questions."

It was good that they would be at the inquiry. Lynne had told Tony about Matthew's remark at the Explore dinner that a waiter, a friend of his, told him that someone was

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hanging around the evening the ambassador died and acting suspicious.

The waiters and guards could be fine witnesses for the activities of others that night. There was only a sketchy record of who was on the grounds at the fatal period. Maybe this meeting would somehow spur them to reveal some things they had not talked about in official interpolations. A guard that Lynne had known for a couple of years, Rachman was on duty at the gate that night and had greeted her husband obsequiously. He was from the north and was over eager to please people with power. He didn't ask ID from people he knew, usually didn't enter people on the log. The other guards acted about the same. But she knew they noticed and remembered.

She went through the list carefully. It looked like they invited the right people. But one suspect, really the most plausible one, wasn't on the list. That was Brett, the hostile, beady eyed Administrative officer. Brett had suspected that the ambassador was about to end his career because of allegations of molesting his daughter. But he was dead. Did he kill the ambassador and then did someone else kill him?

With all the living suspects together, she began to hope that information would come to light that would reveal the murderer. She started to have faith in this palaver. Soon they would know the secret star of the cast!

Chapter 43: The Taste of Murder Banquet

Lynne tried to judge how her fellow workers in the Annex were reacting to the letter of invitation and command from the acting ambassador. She noticed half suppressed anger and resentment, increased irritability, and alienation. Some of them avoided eye contact with her. Small knots of people gathered briefly to grumble and complain. One, clustered at the water cooler as Lynne left her office had Harriet, the cashier, and Victoria saying they wouldn't go. But Louis pointed out, "If you do not go, expect to spend some time in the custody of the security officer's helpers and be under serious examination for murder and other crimes."

The grumblers grudgingly agree to attend the Banquet.

Lynne thought about how another Inspector, Mc Duff, had held a big required meeting to wind up his investigation of the shocking death at the American Cultural Center. He had packed about two hundred people into the courtyard to disguise the fact that he was pretty sure he knew who the killer was. That meeting had almost failed.

She didn't know if Tony Mariani had zeroed in on a chief suspect, the one she herself thought was most suspicious.

Gerry, coming to the Annex to pick up a check for the recreation center mocked the

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whole project. “Well, blokes, are you ready to attend the Taste of Murder Banquet? Prepare to bare your souls.”

The next few days, Everett told Lynne he had several meetings with Tony Mariani to plan tactics for the important evening. Tony would be in charge of the meeting not only because he was an expert in ferreting out the truth in criminal matters but because Everett realized that some people were suspicious of him.

He spoke somberly to Lynne, “This public meeting will be highly unpleasant for me. And for you to because...” He seemed to be afraid to pronounce the name Daphne to her.

Since he seemed stuck, Lynne responded. “Yes, it will be humiliating for me. But, it’s necessary.”

“We have to do something to move the investigation forward. Other embarrassing things will be revealed about other people too. I hope this strategy works and we can find the guilty person and stop suspicions of me and other innocent people. And, Tony wants you to sit next to me. That will show that you support me and forgive the interlude with...” Again he couldn’t say the name. He waited for Lynne to finish his sentence.

This irritated Lynne. “Everett, I can’t really forgive you. But, you know I decided that since I love you, I will go on with our marriage. Maybe in time that situation will be a faint, dry memory.”

Saturday night finally arrived. Lynne drove to the American Cultural Center in her own car.

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Everett was tied up with official Embassy business until the last minute and would meet her there. All of Lynne's senses were heightened as she reached the garden area in back of the building. Just after seven, it was dark, since sunset in Benin as always so close to the equator came at 6:30. In the grassy area edged with tropical plants and flowers behind the building, six long tables with places for ten were set up in a horseshoe facing a head table.

Straggly flowers, pink, white, and orange hibiscus, bougainvillea, and frangipani trees with wine, orange, and yellow blossoms on leafless grey gnarled limbs, and showy tropical leaves provided a background. There were five tall coconut trees with perilously ripe nuts visible thirty feet up and a large tree of life like a huge umbrella.

An Embassy clerk showed her to her place at the table to the left of the head table where Tony Mariani faced the others. A place for Everett was saved on the end next to her. Her location gave her a good view of all the other tables. Lynne was surprised when Harriet entered, dressed majestically in an elaborate bou bou, and sat down next to her. Her husband, Roland Dobato sat in the place at the other side of Harriet. He called a warm greeting to Lynne. Despite sitting next to her, Harriet only muttered her usual quiet, rather sulky hello.

The tropical heat was still strong and fierce. Lynne should be used to its all pervasiveness, but it still bothered her tonight. It was

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something like breathing steam. Her whole body felt like it had a top layer of wetness. Faces of the others showed glistening moisture. Luckily, almost continuous breezes varied the temperature momentarily from time to time and her skin felt occasional thrusts of moving, cooler air.

The tables were almost filled.

Lynne was starting to worry that Everett might not come. That would look bad. There was an undercurrent of gossip and suspicion about him that she hoped this meeting would disperse. Absence implied guilt to some.

She heard in the city the Moslem call to prayer, and a bell tolling for Catholic mass and drums beating for an animist funeral. Added to that, Louis had wanted to make everything right for an important outdoor meal, he had found four fetishers to station on the corners outside the center, pounding African drums in a voo doo rhythm designed to keep away rain.

She was relieved when Everett made his way to her table, dressed in one of his most formal suits. He looked powerful. She hoped the others would interpret his confident stride as innocence.

Tony Mariani entered with an aide on each side of him. They sat at the head table, facing the others. There was a microphone at his place. He was wore conventional dark suited diplomatic garb. Gone was his old outdated Hollywood style. He had finally learned the rules for power dressing in the African diplomacy set. "Welcome to this banquet. We

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have several reasons for this feast. We want to thank you for your strength and patience through these past difficult weeks. Eat and enjoy your delicious meal. Then we will start our other purpose, a frank discussion. By the end of evening you should all know who the murderer in our midst is.” His beaming smile reminded Lynne of a crocodile about to eat a victim. She knew she wasn’t the only person fighting nausea, trying to eat heartily as commanded. There were strong odors, fetid, sweet, sickening, evoking decaying vegetation, dead fish, lizards and small animals, and blasts of air from a nearby beach used as a large area for human wastes. Also in the sea breeze, she wondered, “Can you smell salt?” And decided “Yes.” That helped a little. But also, there was a strong acrid scent of smoke and burning charcoal and lamb fat and scorched animal flesh.

Added were the scents of over heated people, sweat, and other body fluids, and the plentiful cologne used instead of deodorant sold at the Cotonou market, some musky from Arab lands, some more delicate from France.

Soon the smells mingled with tastes, cheap french wine, almost rancid grilled lamb with African side dishes, the gooey green glop made of okra, a sauce flavored with hot red peppers that burned the mouth and throat and the pounded yam called fu fu tasting like wall paper paste looked.

Probably everyone felt anxiety. What secrets would be revealed? What accusations

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would be made? There was little talk. Probably all of them were eating without real appetite, suspenseful about what would be revealed. Some, or at least one person was afraid that the inquest might succeed. And, probably many were thinking of how to defend themselves if they were accused.

At last, Tony finished eating and the waiters started collecting the empty plates of those who had managed to eat their food. They continued collecting plates until it was obvious that the eating segment of the affair was over. Then the waiters replenished all the wine glasses. Probably Tony thought extra drink would loosen tongues.

Tony stood up.

Knowing that it was important to see the expressions on the faces of the suspects, Tony had arranged with Napoleon, the clever but erratic electrician who had studied in Paris, to bring in the extra flood lights sometimes used for plays and music performances. Luckily, Napoleon was sober tonight and was moving from light to light, checking each one. He muttered in a mixture of English and French and Fon his concerns. He even talked to Lynne who had once been a friendly colleague. "Lynne, they ask too much light. It can not support this. They ask for trouble. Tell them." But Lynne was reluctant to seem like a meddler.

She could see everyone clearly. Looking over the gathered guests for a moment as a purely visual phenomena lighted well by Napoleon's

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heroic efforts, she saw about half of them were what is called white, and half were what is called black. The white faces varied in color, some were tan, pink, and shades of grayish or yellowish cream, with splotches of red or brown. Many of those called black had rich dark skin that was as dark as brown can be without being black. A number of them had skin called by the Africans, *clair*, a glowing tan gold, like oak.

Tony stood before the microphone. Lynne had a confusion of feelings and emotions. Was this the going to be the end of the long felt evil at this small, ingrown, tormented Embassy?

Tony went on, "All right. On to business. Claudia, you as the ambassador's secretary knew about his plans and appointments. Please stand."

Claudia as always, was dressed in a beautifully coordinated outfit in shades of bronze, copper, and dark orange, all going well with her bronzed skin and red bronze hair. She said in her well modulated voice, "The ambassador told me he wanted to talk to someone before the concert and would come early."

"But who did he expect to find there early?" Tony demanded.

"He didn't say."

"Okay. We have some evidence. We'll start with the results from Washington. First of all, finger prints. There are three sets of prints on the glasses tested in America. You know that all

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of you that work for the Embassy had finger prints recorded as part of the hiring process. If your prints were on the murder glass, we could match them up. They found out that there were the ambassador's prints and also, another smudged, unreadable set." He paused, perhaps to add drama. "And there was a third set. They match the prints of our present acting ambassador, Everett Knowlton."

Lynne knew about this earlier. But most of the people there didn't. Their faces showed a variety of emotions. Everyone was quiet. What would Tony Mariani say next?

"I'll relieve your minds by telling you right away that Mr. Everett Knowlton didn't do anything to damage the ambassador."

Now, faces looked puzzled. The security chief asked Raoul, who was working as a waiter, to come to the head table. "Tell these people what you know about the situation in the Annex not long before the ambassador died."

Raoul spoke clearly in his French accented English.

"Yes. I worked in the Annex that night. I was in the building early."

"Ah. Who did you see? The office was supposed to be closed. No one should have been there except for the serving staff."

"Yes. I was there to clean. The ambassador was there. Then Mr. Everett Knowlton came in."

Tony respectfully said to Everett, "Sir, please tell us what happened at that point."

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Everett stood up and spoke in a loud, confident voice. "Certainly. The ambassador had asked me to meet him there to exchange mutual apologies over a confrontation we had in public concerning..." For a moment his voice faltered. Then he went on firmly, "Concerning an attractive consultant."

A murmur went through the onlookers. Those in the know, including Lynne looked over to where lovely, blonde Daphne sat. That lady looked unperturbed.

"We did apologize to each other and the ambassador asked me to get him a coke. I got one out of the frigo and poured it into one of the tall glasses that was on a little stand near it. After the ambassador took a sip or two of the coke, he, grumbled that it wasn't cold enough. I ignored that hint that I get him ice. I left right away. Probably someone else was in the Annex, in one of the back rooms, heard the ambassador complain about the warm coke, and got him ice. That person doubtless used that opportunity to also add the poison that killed the ambassador." Everett sat down.

"Yes, I believe that's what happened. We'll ask Raoul to tell us more."

Raoul spoke from his place this time, in a strong voice. "Mr. Everett left very soon. The ambassador said in a loud voice, "Are you still there? How do I get some ice? I was half way out the door and hurried out since the ambassador wasn't talking to me."

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Lynne had heard this before, but still felt great relief to hear her husband publicly vindicated.

Next Tony Mariani called another waiter up to the mike. This one didn't speak English and Tony's French was weak. Louis stepped up and laboriously translated everything back and forward.

"Did you see anyone else enter the Annex before the concert was supposed to begin?"

"Yes, I saw Mr. Gerry go in there. He went in looking angry, was in a short time and came out looking more angry."

Lynne looked over to where Gerry sat with his wife Stella. She looked calm, neat, strong and stern as usual. He seemed at least half drunk and looked startled. He let out an angry roar. Below the short sleeves of his shirt the tattoos on his bare forearms writhed.

Tony continued, "Someone put a note under Lynne's door threatening her if she didn't stop investigating the deaths. That note was on a Recreation Center napkin with the mustard stain on it."

Gerry looked like he would explode with anger. His cool wife put a restraining hand on his arm.

"And that note contained a word only one person in this post uses--bloke. Gerry, that is pointing to you."

There was some sort of commotion at the entrance to the area. Then there was collective shock and a gasp from the people watching this drama. In walked three small American

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marines. She knew the four marines stationed in Benin were not as tall as most of the male Peace Corps volunteers. These seemed even younger and shorter. They were unfamiliar, probably, the ones borrowed from the American Embassy in Togo. Stiffly, in dress uniforms, almost in march step, they entered. Striding purposefully, they reached the table where Gerry sat and stationed themselves directly in back and to each side of the wild Britisher.

Tony Mariani looked pleased. "Well Gerry, what can you tell us about the poisoning of the ambassador?"

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Chapter 44: Some Light on the Subject

Lynne looked carefully to see how people reacted to the security officer's near accusation of Gerry. The smartly dressed U.S. Marines from Togo who flanked Gerry were ridiculously young and small. But, even so, Lynne thought, "Poor Gerry. Now he can't make an escape if Tony really accuses him."

Somehow, Gerry controlled himself to explain coherently, "I was there early that night. Of course. Our American Club provided some of the food and I was making a delivery. Someone told me the ambassador was inside the Annex building. I decided to go in and confront him, tell him he had no right to ruin my life by sending me back to America. I didn't stay inside long. He was patronizing and dictatorial. I wanted to kill him. But, I didn't. I could have polished him off with my fists or the knife I carry like I did that bloke that attacked me outside the Sheraton. I held back. And poison isn't my weapon. There was no talk of cokes or ice when I was there. Someone else was involved in that scene. Some of the people setting up must have seen me leave. And Everett must have come after I left."

Tony nodded. He went on with his revelations. "Yes. You have a motive and the temperament for murder. But you were seen leaving the Annex building soon after you entered it. And, that napkin with the mustard

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stain had a bunch of fingerprints on it, but none of yours.” He seemed to be enjoying his role in this gathering despite the intense heat. He mopped the sweat off his face. “Let’s go on. At this point, I’m able to report more to you from the forensic laboratory in Washington. You probably know we sent the glass with remnants of the ambassador’s coke to them. Ok. The poison. After extensive testing for hundreds of common and rare poisons, and careful analysis, the lab has an answer.” The room was completely quiet. It was as if no one wanted to breathe.

“We felt all along that if we know what the poison was, it would help us to know who put it in the ambassador’s coke. At last we know.” He paused, probably to give maximum effect to his announcement. Then he said as if in triumph, “Mimeograph fluid! Besides our modern computers and printers, we still use, some older methods of reproducing large quantities of announcements and other documents. Our old mimeograph machine gets a workout almost every week. The poison was the fluid used in that machine.”

Murmurs and private comments in at least three languages were somewhat audible throughout the room.

“The fluid is kept on a shelf under the mimeograph machine which is at the Embassy, at the end of the hall in the main Embassy building, in the area accessible only to Embassy office staff.” Lynne was astonished. She looked around at the assembled people hoping to see

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someone looking guilty. Almost everyone looked shocked. But the startled looks could be caused by many different inner feelings. Of course one person wasn't really surprised at the answer, but probably was horrified that the Washington scientists had identified the murder weapon.

Tony went on. "A big question is, who had access? Probably the murderer had been poisoning the ambassador for a year before his death. We know his health was so bad he had to go to a hospital in Europe last year. The report says, oddly enough, the fluid is almost tasteless. A small dose makes a person sick. A large one kills. The amount in the ambassador's body was great. Experts say he would have died between five minutes and ten minutes after ingesting that coke that had a big dose in it."

Lynne watched as Gerry began talking in a low voice to his wife in an agitated manner. At this point Stella asked for permission to speak. "This limits your suspects. Gerry wasn't an office worker. He didn't even know there was a mimeograph system, much less know where that fluid was kept. If he needed copies, he always used the photocopy machine in the Annex."

Tony answered, "Yes. That may be true. And our list of suspects is getting shorter."

Claudia, still a modish picture in bronze despite the heat, spoke up. "There are still a lot of possibilities. Most of the office workers in the main Embassy building knew where that fluid was kept. Some of them used it to make

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mass printings. But remember that also some of the workers in the Annex came to use that machine and fluid now and then. Some of them hated the ambassador."

Lynne was mesmerized by the revelations and drama. She didn't bother to wipe the sweat that poured down her face or scratch the pinching bites from errant mosquitoes that had evaded the toxic spray liberally applied by the gardener in preparation for this evening.

Tony mopped his shining face again. "Let's work on something that can lead us to the murderer another way. Whoever killed the ambassador probably also killed Brett."

This was getting really dramatic. It was important to see people's faces. And the sky was dark now except for faint moonlight. Tony asked Napoleon to provide additional lights. Napoleon again grumbled under his breath. When he was near Lynne, she heard him say again, "No good. De trop. Too much."

Tony brought up a new question. "Now, we might ask if it take a strong person to kill Brett with a coupe coupe. I asked some Beninese policeman what they thought. They said no, even though it is big with its broad, flat blade, it is made of cheap materials and is light and easy to wield. And Brett was a small man. AS for fingerprints. The wooden handle was too rough for that.. And Washington found none at all."

Lynne looked around at the serious, highly attentive faces as Tony continued. "Now, cast your minds back to the day Brett was killed. Many of you were at the Annex that day. One of

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you went to the back alley, got the coupe coupe out of the shed, killed Brett, and then went back to work or business in the general office. How did that person commit a bloody murder without looking bloody to others? We searched the whole building thoroughly that day and there were no discarded clothes. “

He paused, then acting almost like a searchlight, his eyes methodically swept the room. “One of you did this. Everyone think of that big general office, that day. Who was acting suspicious? Who had a way to hide the blood?”

At this moment, the toggled together lighting system that Napoleon had constructed reached overload. All of a sudden, there was no light, except for a faint glow from the moon.

In the dark, the order that had been imposed by Tony’s command started to break down. The voices were a melange of loud and soft, some strong and accusatory, some explaining, protesting, placating, and denying in French, English, and several African languages.

When the lights went back on, Lynne saw that in the dark, the marines had left the area surrounding Gerry and were at the entrance, probably moving there to be sure no one left. The room was immediately quiet and orderly. Tony stood again before his microphone. “Now, the matter of Brett’s death. Can that help us? We know it had to be done by one of the people we had locked into the area for questioning. Some of them were people who had access to

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the mimeograph machine in the main Embassy office. All those questioned said they didn't see blood spots on anyone's clothes or even wet spots where someone might have tried to remove stains. We knew it would have been easy to wash any blood that might have been on the skin either using the faucet outside in the alley or in the W.C. But, why didn't anyone see blood spots on the murderer's clothes? My assistants conducted a thorough search of the entire building before anyone was allowed to leave. There were no discarded clothes and no place to burn things. Now, all of you who were at the office the day Brett died, think deeply. Did you see anything helpful? Or have you any ideas about this?

Lynne tried to visualize that day. Was there blood showing on anyone? No. Not at all. She tried to remember what people were wearing. Since she loved the clothes of her African colleagues, she usually paid close attention. Right now, she looked over the people in the crowd. The floodlights rigged up by Napoleon were functioning well now and she could see everyone clearly, even to the details of their clothes. Most of the men wore dress shirts, crumpled in the relentless heat, most of the Beninese women wore attractive outfits made of African fabric, in the elaborate fashions made by the local dressmakers, some with leg of mutton sleeves, ruffles, and shirring. Several wore primly plain colors and American fabrics in conservative American styles. It seemed that

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every color in the rainbow was represented in prints or in the damask called bazin.

Some of the few American women there dressed in one mode, some in the other. Even after eight years in West Africa, Lynne delighted in the pageantry of African gatherings. Now, everyone showed signs of rumpling from the unrelenting moist heat.

Tony went exhorting, pleading, commanding everyone to come up with an answer. He reminded Lynne of a preacher at the revival meetings she sometimes attended as a young girl. "Come forward. Make your testimony."

With half her mind, Lynne listened. But, with the other half, she was still working on his command to call back that day that Brett died. She visualized the scene, and tried to remember what everyone was wearing. She sometimes did an exercise like this before she went to sleep at night.

Suddenly she remembered. She leapt out of her chair and started toward Tony. "I've got it. I understand now. I remember. I know who killed Brett!"

Chapter 45. Hate is Poison

After her sudden epiphany, Lynne started toward Tony and the head table, waving her hand wildly. She burst out, “Oh my god, I know who killed Brett!” And she followed up with “I know how it was done. Tony, I know why we couldn’t see the blood spots. I know who could have, probably did, kill Brett!”

“Calm down Lynne. Keep your shirt on. Let everyone have a chance to talk. We have to get more facts, more evidence out. When I want to hear from you, I’ll let you know.”

Tony put even more intensity into his tone and went on. “Now. Help us get the facts out. Who knows something that will shed some light on our investigation?” When no one else volunteered to talk, Tony continued talking. “We have to consider who knew about the machine and had access to the mimeograph fluid. Probably outsiders didn’t realize that the Embassy still uses that old outmoded reproduction method for big jobs, to save a little money. Even though Gerry had strong motives to harm the ambassador, he couldn’t get near that mimeograph machine. The few times he was at the Embassy, the ambassador treated him with suspicion and he wasn’t given freedom to roam about the building. The restroom was far the copying area; a visitor couldn’t use a trip there as a way to get to the fluid. But someone, someone no one has suspected, went at least once a month all year

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to do a big mimeograph copying. That person could have had contact with the ambassador who was often wandering the halls to get a little exercise, often carrying a glass of coke. He usually had it in his hand, and put it down from time to time on various tables, shelves, surfaces, when he wanted to inspect a paper.

"I believe that same person killed Brett with the coupe coupe. That was a bloody deed and must have left blood on clothes. We were all locked in together for hours afterwards. And yet no one saw any blood on any one."

He paused and Lynne had a chance to talk. The room was completely quiet except for her words. "Now I remember why. Can you all remember what you wore that day? I love the African clothes and always notice them. That day, one person wore a beautiful embroidered bazin bou bou type dress. The dress was dark red!"

Lynne turned to look at her neighbor on the right, Harriet, to see how she was taking this. Now it was Harriet who seemed thirsty. She looked tormented and grabbed for the wine glass near her left hand and drank deeply.

Lynne continued. "It was Harriet. She wore a dark red dress. I believe she killed Brett, then washed her hands and face and returned to the main room with us all."

There were gasps, murmurs, countless stunned reactions from the people in the room.

Tony Mariani said, "Yes, that's right. That is the piece of information I have been looking for. I had just about fixed on her. She was filled

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with resentments. She had even gotten the president of the country to intercede for her to keep employed. She probably fed the ambassador a little fluid in his coke when she went to the main Embassy building to make copies on the mimeograph machine once a month. When she did that for a year and it made him sick, but didn't kill him, she used the opportunity the night when the ambassador asked for ice to pour in the drink a large dose from a bottle she probably kept in her purse."

Louis broke in. "But, how about the fingerprints. If she did that, why weren't they on the glass?"

Tony said, "That is a good question. But, they did find a third print on the glass, too smudged identify. We don't know why." He seemed puzzled.

Lynne thought back the night the band was supposed to play. Everyone was dressed in elaborate outfits. Harriet had been in a gorgeous dress with an elaborate headdress that day. There was something unusual about her costume.

"Tony. My interest in dress gives me an answer to that question, too. I don't know where she got them, maybe at the stalls of second hand clothes they call the Dead Yovo market. Maybe she considered them something special to complete her outfit. Or, maybe she planned ahead and was looking for gloves to avoid detection. But, I remember clearly, Harriet was wearing lace gloves!"

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Harriet screamed. "You always hated me, all you Americans!"

And then, it looked almost as if she was frothing at the mouth. She fell over, her head hitting the table, causing a loud crash of glasses, china, cutlery.

Sally, the Embassy nurse, leapt up and rushed over to examine her. Had rage and guilt caused her have to have some kind of stroke and collapse? "Good heavens. I think she's dead!"

Everett turned to Lynne. "So suddenly! Just like the ambassador. I wonder if she gave herself some of her own poison!"

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Chapter 46: A Meeting on Stilts

Two weeks after the revealing palaver banquet, Lynne's mind was still not at rest about the murders. There were too many unanswered questions. She had thought that once she knew who killed the ambassador, she would feel some peace. But this morning when she woke up, she felt worried and nauseous. Everett and Tony had told her that they would have a meeting with her and tell her everything they knew and thought they knew about the three American deaths. But, as usual, Everett was caught up in a round of diplomatic duties and the meeting kept being postponed.

The Annex and Embassy were awash with gossip and rumors. In the past in Africa Lynne had found that paying attention to rumors was the best way to know what was going on. She calculated that about 75 per cent of the rumors were true, that they were often more reliable and less biased than more official sources of information.

Harriet's body was taken to her home village about 30 miles from Cotonou for funeral ceremonies. Some people from the Embassy had attended. Special services were usually held for suicides, but this death was considered to be accidental. Now people talked about Harriet, her constant gloom and sulkiness, her frustrated career ambitions, her jealousy about her husband's roving eye and his domination by his mother. And, they said she had never

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recovered from the death of her newborn child which she blamed on witchcraft by Victoria.

Everett had not talked to Lynne much about the outcome of the banquet after one angry conversation. He was furious with her and shaken when he realized how close to death she had come. "Why did you drink that wine after you realized Harriet was the killer? If your drinks hadn't gotten mixed up, you would be dead and we would be trying to prove Harriet's guilt."

She had no defense. She knew she had taken an unthinking risk. She shuddered when she thought about what a foolish, careless chance she had taken. When she quenched her thirst even though she felt sure Harriet had poisoned the ambassador she had not really adjusted to accepting her as a general threat as she sat next to her.

Day after day, as she went to work, she felt uneasy. Maybe she would start feeling better when the promised meeting finally occurred.

One evening when Everett came home late, he said, "You have been patient. I've decided that tomorrow evening, you, Tony, and I will go to Ganvie, that village on stilts a few miles out of Cotonou for dinner. It's a tourist attraction that seldom attracts many tourists. It's quiet and peaceful there. There are no telephones. Washington and the Embassy can't reach me. We'll go there, eat some fish, and uninterrupted, discuss everything Washington and Tony have figured out about the deaths."

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And, that evening, before sunset, they were on their way outside the city on the way to Ganvie in their personal car, with Everett driving. She was pleased for once to be spending the evening with her husband as well as eager to learn the related facts behind the deaths that had been preoccupying her for the last weeks. As usual, looking out the window at people she saw walking at the side of the narrow road, she enjoyed observing the African fabrics and styles. Who would have thought that this little private enjoyment of Africa would help the authorities to pinpoint just who had killed the ambassador and Brett? They drove the 10 miles and pulled into the shore of the water filled swampland that was Ganvie, just as the sun was going down. There were said to be hundreds of simple wooden homes on stilts in this area. Legend said they were there to avoid taxes; others said they had been pushed out by warring tribes. Now, hundreds of people lived there, moving from house to house by pirogues, the hollow log canoes. People said the children learned to swim in infancy and helped the family survive by fishing. Tourists could take a slow motor boat or be poled for a tour. There was a hut on stilts where they could buy baskets and wood carvings. A few hummocks of earth pushed out of the water and provided a little soil for tiny vegetable gardens and a few scrawny chickens.

A breeze brought a swampy smell, combined with the odor of human waste, but gave a little coolness.

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Tony met them and they entered the hotel, built on stilts and they were seated in the dining area, a precariously built veranda overlooking the picturesque water area with its fringe of other stilt-built structures. So far, they were the only diners. An attractive waitress with hair tressed into many braids, wearing traditional printed African clothes, took their order.

Tony seemed pleased to have a chance to talk about his successful solution of the three murders. "Everett, you got my written reports, but I don't know how much time you had to study them. And whether you have any further questions."

Everett replied, "I read your reports carefully."

Tony nodded and turned to Lynne. "After all your help, I haven't enlightened you any further after the public meeting. Everett, is it all right with you if we start with her questions?"

"That's a good idea. After she's satisfied, if I want more, I'll do some asking." He turned to Lynne with a rare, relaxed, loving smile. "Dear, just ask Tony what you don't know and want to know."

At last! Lynne finally could hear what Tony knew and believed. "Ok. Obviously my hunch was right and Harriet killed Brett and we couldn't see the blood spots because she was wearing dark red."

"Yes, Lynne. She killed Brett. We found that dress at her house. She had washed it, but

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analysis showed there were still some remains of blood.”

“But why did she kill Brett? Was that tied to the ambassador’s death?”

“Maybe only because by now she had gotten used to killing people. Her motive was resentment and revenge for a thwarted struggle for career advancement. You were at Brett’s last staff meeting when he mocked Harriet’s ambitions and accused her of inefficiency.”

Everett broke in. “You two are doing fine. But, I’m getting hungry. Where is that waitress and where is the food?”

“Sir, do you want me to go to the kitchen and tell them to speed up?” Tony asked.

Lynne was pleased to see Tony was treating Everett with respect, as he should when dealing with the acting ambassador.

But just then, the lovely young waitress came in with a basket of fresh, crisp baguettes of French bread.

They tore into the bread and Lynne continued her questions. “So, let’s go to the main question. I gather that Harriet really did kill the ambassador. But why?”

Two groups of people entered and sat at the other tables. Half of them were fashionably dressed Africans and half, sloppily dressed Europeans.

Tony said, “I did a lot of interviewing people at the Embassy and also the local community. You knew Harriet quite well. You know that she was bitter because she hadn’t gotten the job she wanted. You know about the

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earlier situation where she was refused an upgrade and a better job. She went to the president of the country who was related to some of her cousins. When he interceded, the ambassador gave her the job as Brett's secretary, but gave it a fairly low rating and therefore not very good pay. You noticed she was always sulky. She did her job well but was, it seems, always seething with anger."

"Yes. That's probably true."

"Well I will tell you the situation I have pieced together from the interviews, the evidence, and my best judgment. She went to the Embassy at least once a month to mimeograph things and do errands. She had been putting mimeograph fluid in the ambassador's drinks for a year. That's why he was weak and unhealthy. She came early to the Annex that fatal night hoping to find a way to poison something the ambassador would drink before the concert. She was especially angry that day because the ambassador finally noticed her when she was making copies at the Embassy and pressed her claims to a promotion again. Claudia was in the hall and saw the encounter. She reported he said she wasn't really a secretary, just a clerk. That did it. She filled a bottle with the fluid, and popped it into her purse, determined to kill him that night. By now she knew the dosage she used previously wasn't strong enough. She poured a sizable amount into his coke when he asked for ice after Everett left the building. You were right about why her fingerprints weren't on the

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glass. We found the lace gloves in her house when we searched it. And probably Harriet tucked that voo doo object into the ambassador's pocket. She probably wanted to implicate her enemy, Victoria. She firmly believed that Victoria's witchcraft had killed her baby."

"Poor Harriet. She was really in bad shape. I know another reason why she was always so bitter and unhappy.

Last year when her husband Roland Degbado worked for my English Language program he told me his mother blamed Harriet for the baby's death in the hospital. She took the body and buried it and refused to let Roland tell Harriet where the grave was. When the years went by and Harriet didn't get pregnant again, Roland's mother continually urged him to take a second wife who could produce more grandchildren for her."

Tony shook his head. "I don't understand Africa."

"I don't know if any of us outsiders understand more than the surface. But, to go on with what you have figured out. The threats to me. She must have poisoned my wine. She guessed that I remembered about the dress and was about to accuse her. I was saved because I made the fortunate mistake of taking her wine instead of mine. She shouted a curse at me when she collapsed. But in the weeks before, was it Harriet warning me, trying to get me to stop investigating, leaving that note on the napkin trying to incriminate Gerry?"

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“Yes. We’re sure Harriet did that. Another cousin, admitted to getting the napkin out of the garbage for her. You notice, she seemed to have an endless supply of cousins.”

“Yes. Dora and other friends have told me that they have fifty or more cousins that they feel extremely close to, usually call them brothers and sisters. But why was she so threatened by me at that time? I didn’t suspect her at all then.”

“She probably read that foolish article you wanted to print in Talking Drums that hinted that you knew who murderer was. You didn’t publish it, but must have left a copy where she would find it.”

“Oh dear! I made a photocopy in the machine near her desk. Later I couldn’t find the original. I must have left it in the machine where she could find it.”

“Yes. Probably.”

“Well how about that night at the jazz club, was she the one that hit me?”

“Yes. She knew you were planning a meeting there. Since her cousin ran it, the kitchen help wasn’t surprised when she visited it and waited in the yard. She melted into the darkness and followed you to the shower stall used as a WC and hit you, then ran off into darkness again.”

“How about Matthew? Did she have him killed and why?”

“Witnesses said they saw a fou, a local mad man, skulking near the Ambience the night Matthew was killed. It turned out to be a simple

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minded cousin who worked as a virtual slave in her household. She had raised him as a little boy, keeping him in a subservient position. People said he honored her like a mother and always tried to please her. He doesn't remember much, but admitted that Harriet paid him to kill Matthew with the fu fu paddle. After that, she gave him taxi fare to go up north to Abohmey to live with relatives. Harriet's husband was at the Explore dinner when Matthew said he knew who had killed the ambassador. He must have told Harriet about it."

"Did Matthew really know who killed the ambassador?"

"Sort of. Or, he had a strong suspicion. We found the waiter that was his friend who had told him that Harriet had been at the annex before the ambassador died."

Everett broke in. "I'm sorry to be demanding. But I didn't have time for lunch. Where's our food?" It was now an hour since they had placed their order.

Tony looked at Everett. "Should I go to the kitchen and demand our food?"

"Madame! Ou sont les repas? Where is the food?" Everett said in a loud voice that may have reached to the kitchen. Whatever, it seemed to work and the graceful woman brought out a big tray balancing it aloft and deftly put a plate of fish and french fries before each of them. Since by now they were ravenously hungry, eating occupied the three of them for a while. When she was satisfied,

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Lynne searched her mind for what else she wanted to know.

Even though she continued to feel uneasy, she couldn't think of any more puzzles. She had thought she would be jubilant when she finally learned who the killer was and no longer had to feel constantly threatened. But she had an uncomfortable feeling. It seemed like the unstable wood veranda was swaying with the ocean tides.

And then there were the foul smells that came from the murky water of the lagoon. And also, the fish she had just eaten had a really strong taste and smell.

She tried to express some of the ideas that still haunted her. "Louis said there was evil at the Embassy. Did he mean the atmosphere was tainted because of the desperate competing ambitions in the small Embassy? Was that the underlying cause that brought about the violent deaths of three Americans? Was ruthless ambition an evil root that developed into murderous fruit? But was that evil the result of unrelenting struggles for success and too few opportunities in an unjust world?"

Everett showed annoyance. "Oh come on Lynne. You're getting melodramatic."

Lynne was thinking what to reply when she suddenly felt much worse. "Everett, take me home. I'm sick!"

"Don't be so sensitive. I'm sorry I criticized you."

"That's not it. I'm ill!"

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She leaped out of her chair and rushed to the edge of the veranda. In urgent misery she bent her head over the rickety railing that overlooked the smelly muddy lagoon surrounded by huts on stilts.

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Chapter 47: Double Luck

It was only much later that Lynne realized the significance of her wretched moments at the railing of the dining room on stilts.

Two months later on a hot, bright Monday afternoon she put tape on the last carton of packed household goods belonging to her and her husband. She thought about the changes in her life and in those of people she knew in Benin. Before they ever got used to their new married status in Benin, Lynne and Everett would be in a dramatically different situation again. Almost immediately after the murders in Benin were cleared up, Everett learned he had gotten a promotion and achieved tenure as a State Department official. And then, only two weeks later, the key Washington Africa Desk officer had a sudden heart attack and resigned. Everett was appointed to fill that prestigious job as soon as possible. He would be stationed in Washington for at least two years. He and Lynne would find a house there to buy or rent.

Lynne gave up all pretense of performing a necessary service in the Community Liaison office and spent these last weeks closing down their lives in Africa. Personal and household goods had to be sent by ship two months before they would report to their new home in Washington. They would camp out in their Cotonou mansion until then, borrowing equipment that was usually kept in a warehouse in Cotonou for the purpose of

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providing necessities for new officers before their shiploads of goods came in.

Everett was working hard to try to finish some ambassadorial projects started by Waldo Edwards. For several weeks now he had been briefing the temporary replacement, who had been the Economic Officer in the Embassy of Togo and would be acting ambassador until Washington's red tape produced the next official Ambassador. The new Ambassador, who would be on duty in Cotonou in six months, was an African-American woman related to one of the most respected white families of Virginia. She had been convinced by her friend and colleague in Paris, Gloria, the emotional wife of Waldo, the former ambassador, to take the appointment instead of going to another, larger African country. Everett's secretary, the bronze lady, was going back to Washington to search for a new posting. She didn't want to work for a woman.

It looked like the Beninese people were accepting the election results that showed that Kereko, the old Communist leader, had won. The rumors that he was a born again Christian seemed to be true and so far he was using democratic methods in governing the country. The renewed generosity of Washington and the World Bank helped Benin limp along. There still was no self sustaining Beninese economy, but things seemed peaceful.

As the weeks went by, Lynne learned of more changes in the lives of some others that had been important to her. The security officer,

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Tony Mariani, who, like the others in the diplomatic community, been worried about the future of his career, had gotten a promotion. When the three murders were solved, he was given commendations and an appointment to be head security officer at the Embassy in Rome.

Harriet's disgrace and death left holes in Cotonou, but they were soon filled. Dora's niece whose stalled job aspirations had made her aunt bitter got Harriet's job. She made a policy of smiling at everyone and got along well with the drab lady administrative officer.

Just a week ago, Harriet's husband, Roland Dobato, pleased his mother, so intent on having more grandchildren, and married the woman she had long ago picked out for a second wife for him. The woman had proved her fertility by having two children when she was a schoolgirl.

Omar, the boyfriend of Lita, Lynne's old Peace Corps friend, got a Fulbright Fellowship to study journalism in the US. At last, somehow, he had lived down the accusation of stealing a professor's typewriter when he had a previous scholarship in Texas.

Victoria didn't get a promotion. Perhaps her reputation as a voo doo witch stood in the way. But her husband completed twenty years of service at the Embassy, which entitled him and his family to immigration visas. He got a job with World Bank in New York. She packed trunks full of her beautiful African clothes to go with him and live, at first, with relatives in New Jersey.

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Gerry left for America for rehab the day after the palaver banquet. Reports were he was doing well and expected to join his wife in her next post, probably in Central America.

In the time Lynne would still be in Cotonou Lynne would attend many farewell parties and ceremonies. She still wasn't feeling well. The admiral's ship with its modern medical clinic for American State Department officers and their families was making one of its rare stops at the port. She decided to go to see if he could somehow restore her pep. Maybe she needed vitamins. She remembered that eight years ago when she started working in Africa, the Peace Corps doctor had provided her with a big bottle of special, remedial multivitamins, pointing out that the diet she would eat here would be lacking in many of the nutriments that Americans were used to in their diets. She guiltily remembered she had put the bottle in the bottom of a drawer, always meaning to start taking then, but never actually did so.

"There. That's it." She went to the kitchen to give instructions to the housekeeper. "Marcel, a messenger from the Embassy will be here sometime today. Please ask him to take all of the boxes and furniture that have tags on them."

"D'accord. Ok, Madame."

She got into her baking hot car to hurry through the crowded streets to the port for her appointment with the navy medical clinic.

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Two hours later, after her visit to the doctor, she felt dazed. She longed to talk to someone. But, as usual, Everett was busy. He was many hours' journey away in Parakou with his replacement, showing him the north country.

Who could she confide in? She thought of Louis, the highest Beninese administrator at the Embassy. He had given her wise insights when she started her job at the Annex.

Besides her need to talk to someone discreet and friendly about what she had learned from the doctor, she also wanted a private meeting to say goodbye to him. The guards let her in without question. She went directly to his office and tapped on the door.

"Lynne, Madame Ambassador, how good it is to see you!"

"Yes. It is good for me to see you too. I've missed you since I stopped coming to work. I want to tell you something. Something important. I just came from the doctor on the Admiral's ship."

Louis's kind, handsome, dark face showed concern. "I hope you did not get bad news. I hope there is not something seriously wrong with your health!"

"No. The opposite. The real opposite. I'm pregnant! I've been envying people with children for a number of years. Now I will be one of them!"

"Congratulations. I am happy for you!"

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“But, there’s more. They have all this fancy equipment on the ship, like a modern clinic in America. They use sonograms, take a sort of picture of the tiny little developing egg in a woman’s body. They could tell me important things.”

Louis was enthusiastic. “Americans have medical abilities that are like witchcraft, good witchcraft!”

“Yes. And he was able to tell me I will have not just one baby, but two. Twins!”

Louis’s face had a big smile. “Twins. Here in Benin, having twins is considered very fortunate. It brings blessings and success, special powers to the entire family!”

“Yes. I’ve heard something about that. I do feel blessed!”

“Lynne, you will leave Africa with double luck!”

Lynne liked the sound of it. After eight years here, her Africa days were almost over. Now, a new life would start with her husband. She would have two children, a boy and a girl. Double luck!”

The End