

Chapter 10: Something Fishy

Lynne was glad to leave the harried scene. Fortunately, the destruction crew didn't touch the area on the other side of the door leading to the ELP. Officials agreed they needed less security since there were no state secrets there.

She devoted a few minutes to consider Randy's news about the Ambassador. Lynne remembered the Ambassador's plate had been empty except for the piece of fish. Lynne had eaten a lot of that delicacy. Lynne searched herself for symptoms. She felt fine, physically, at least.

She went to her office, working to understand the English Language Program system and see what she must do before classes started. Lydia visited her, dressed in a spectacular two-piece dress made of orange and yellow African fabric with elaborate tucked sleeves. She said that there had been a surprisingly large number of registrations and they now needed to add another class. They could hold it in the little student lounge, but they needed a teacher.

Lynne sent Lydia back to her registering of students and looked at her list of teachers and the notes she had taken. Just then, the phone rang. It was Lydia. "Lynne, there is a man here who wants to teach, a white man."

"American?"

"No, maybe French."

"Send him in."

Jean Luc Southbridge came into her office. He said, "Good morning. I saw you at the USAID party."

How could she have missed seeing him last night! His smile was warm and enticing. He had grey blue eyes and wavy light brown hair. He was tall, over six feet, slim with broad shoulders.

"I am on contract with USAID. I want to teach part time in your program." He had a delicious accent with hints of Oxford and Paris.

"But, if you have a contract with them, why do you want to work for me?"

"I've talked with Courtney Browning about it and he is in favor of it, if you are willing to hire me. My mission is to develop a health education program for Benin. I want some direct contact with Beninese students to observe their learning styles."

He showed her a resume, degrees from the Sorbonne and studies at Oxford and also an impressive work record in English speaking countries, including America.

"Your first name is French and your last is English."

"Yes. That fits the situation. My mother is French, my father English. I was raised fully bilingual."

"Your English is wonderful. The students will love your accent. How about taking a level six class, Monday and Thursday evenings? It will start next week."

"Yes, that will be fine. Thank you. Now," he said with mock seriousness, "This isn't America. So the rules of business correctness don't hold here. What do you think of personal friendships between Madame Directrice, you, and your staff?"

She looked at him, thinking, "Oh, dear. Here I go again." She tried to remember Everett's admirable traits. But this Jean Luc looked delectable.

"There are no rules that I know of here about personal relationships."

"Good. Once I get on top of my new routine, I shall ask you to take dinner with me one day."

"Okay."

He reached out his hand and squeezed hers lightly. "Then, let us shake on it. I will plan something soon. And then I will ask you to teach me more about the American mind."

Was this flirtation? She realized she hoped so.

Then, Jean Luc changed and looked really serious. "One of your fellow Americans is in trouble with the French government."

Alarmed, Lynne said, "Who? What do you mean?"

But the phone rang and Lynne automatically answered. "Yes. This is Lynne. I'll be right with you." She looked up at Jean Luc. "Please wait a moment."

"I must go. They need me." And he standing at the door.

"Wait, I want to ask you something. Last night at the party, did you eat any of the fish?"

"Yes. Excellent, made the French way. I will teach you some other French ways." And he was out the door.

Chapter 11: The Wicked Witch Of The West

On Wednesday morning, Lynne awoke thinking of Minerva. After the unpleasant telephone conversation and then witnessing her tirade at Courtney Browning's party, Lynne had been dreading official contact with her. Minerva was, after all, sent from Washington to give financial and office management advice to her and to all of the programs presented by the USIA for the French speaking African region. She was a truly dreadful woman, Louis had told Lynne. She was married to an American Cultural Center director in Senegal. She seldom saw him but mentioned him often in order to add to her power and could be heard giving him orders on the telephone.

When Lynne reached the top of the stairs and went through the glass doors she could hear her talking to Randy in her squeaking chalk voice.

"If this isn't corrected, I will tell Washington." Poor Randy was working in the temporary office rigged out for him displacing the Beninese press aid, Francois who had moved his operations downstairs to crowd in with Pierre in his tiny, crowded office near the video room. Louis had told her the Washington threat was not always empty. He told of a USAID officer who had been recalled to Washington and prosecuted because of her evidence about a paper or two improperly filled out. He said the fear she instilled had made the last director of the center cut down the beautiful large umbrella shaped tree that used to shade the courtyard.

Randy was distracted, with half of his records still in his cement dust filled office which had the gaping hole where the window had been torn out scraps of plaster all over. When he saw Lynne waiting to see him in the hall, he walked over to her and said in a low voice, "We have a visitor today, Minerva Jefferson. She is the RPMAO, the traveling administration advising officer. He hesitated. "Do what you can to satisfy her. She has friends high up in the State Department."

They both joined Minerva. Obviously, she and Randy had decided to ignore their shouting match at the USAID party. Lynne saw that she was well dressed, in a fashion found in Vogue magazine in past times. Her tan face was artfully made up. She had a facial defect, a permanent sneer. She looked at Lynne, then said to Randy, "What are her qualifications?"

"The main one, Minerva is, she is here. Classes start tomorrow." His tone was almost pleading.

"It is important to show a strong presence in countries like this. Do not use the disruptions of this security upgrade as an excuse for lax business practices. Mishandling federal funds is a federal offense."

Randy looked completely cowed. His tone was placating. They went on talking to each other. Lynne excused herself and left the office, discouraged. On her ways back to her office she stopped in to talk to Lydia and saw a copy of a newspaper, obviously just published. It came out every two weeks. It was eight pages long, tabloid size. "May I read this, Lydia?"

"It is in French."

“That’s okay. I read French easily.” She skimmed the whole thing. No mention, of the border incident. Probably there were incidents like it every day and probably they were not publicized.

It was good to have a little information about Cotonou and Benin. Here she was, starting her sixth year in West Africa, and she remained mostly isolated from the news. Several times since she had arrived in Benin she had turned on her short wave radio to listen to the Air France news cast. But, even though she could usually understand the slow, clearly pronounced French of the Africans, the fast, slurred, Parisian accent of the announcer left her behind.

Despite Minerva’s promise or threat to talk to her Lynne worked all day and didn’t see her again. Perhaps she and Randy were busy with their management concerns. Then, just before five o’clock when she was getting her mail near Monique’s desk, she ran into Minerva. In five minutes Minerva scattered criticisms, insults, and threats. “Your program is failing. The only thing that keeps it from complete financial failure is the USAID Atlas program which prepares fifteen Beninese for a scholarship to get Masters’ degrees in America. If you don’t manage that successfully, you will not be able to keep this job. She spat out all of this, then stalked away. Just before she went out through the glass doors, she said. “I will come to your office and finish this conversation.”

Monique, the secretary, saw the look on Lynne’s face. “A terrible woman. And now we all have to deal with Minerva without help. We can not count on Randy defending us from her. He is no longer the warrior. He’s back on Prozac.”

Chapter 12: An Undiplomatic Demand

The next morning, when Lynne went to the office area, she saw it was even more torn up by the security construction men. A young Beninese welder worked near the mail boxes in the central hall, the brilliant arc flashing. His eyes were unprotected except when he occasionally pulled down a bulky antiquated mask that made him look like a barefooted robot from star wars. Lynne averted her eyes and decided not to try to get her mail today. Turning her back on the unfortunate young man she greeted Monique whose desk was just a few feet away.

Monique was harried and angry and amid the construction and rubble was trying to deal with a telephone call. The voice of Minerva shrieking in disapproval in one of the offices somehow could be heard down the hall over the other sounds. And then suddenly a hyper Minerva was hurrying down the hall toward them. She ignored Lynne, but said to Monique, "Get me tickets to fly to Senegal on Friday morning. There is something very important I must find out there.."

"That is not my work. The travel coordinator at the Embassy does that."

"Do what you are told or I will see that you are replaced. I want that done now," and she turned and stomped out of vision, to continue shrieking at the unfortunate person, probably Louis, in the office farther down the corridor.

"That woman. How can she live! She insults everyone and tells us all she will sack us. Who will feed my children if she does? Someone should stop her. And why does she want to go to Senegal? Her schedule says she will go to Burkina Faso next. She probably wants to cause trouble for someone." She tried to get back to her work, but seemed too driven by anger. She said to Lynne, "My mother in law knows how to put a voodoo curse on people. That is what I should do to her."

Chapter 13: Safe At Home?

Lynne was pleased to learn that horrid Minerva was leaving soon. Monique's idea for revenge against Minerva seemed to comfort her and she said cheerfully to Lynne, "Louis said to tell you that you can move into your house this afternoon if you really want to. He will tell the driver to take your things there."

"Oh, great. Please tell him to go ahead and arrange it. Thanks. And Monique, do you know a good carpenter? I don't have any furniture. I want to have some things made." She knew this was the most economical and best way to get what she needed.

"Oh yes. My cousin is a good carpenter."

"Please ask him to come and see me Friday evening at the house."

Monique seemed glad to help her and also to get some business for her cousin.

Again, the day flew as she rushed to learn more about the program she was supposed to be directing and prepare for the first classes. She had only an old manual typewriter and a bottle of white out to prepare things for the photocopy machine to communicate with the teachers. Louis gave Lynne the keys to her house and told her that her things had been delivered there. Lynne wrote a note for Randy telling him that she was going into her own home and thanking him for his hospitality. At five o'clock she quit work and walked to the main road to find a taxi. She gave instructions to the driver, using the, the Bon Coin, as the main directional guide. When she got to corner that held the little grocery store, she saw a bamboo couch, table and chair for sale, set on sale at the side of the road. What luck!

They were painted a fine wine color and were well made. The driver stopped long enough for her to negotiate with the seller and tell him to deliver it. She got in the car, directing the driver, " *A droit, tout droit, a gauche, ici*, turn right, straight ahead, turn left, here." Behind them, at a slower pace, she could see the furniture seller and five young boys carrying the furniture on their heads.

When they got to her house and carried the things onto the veranda, Lynne counted out the money in worn CFA notes. She gave each of the boys a 100 CFA coin extra and was rewarded with bright smiles.

Mamadou welcomed them at the house. He was less shy now and helped arrange the furniture in the big, bare living room. Now she would be able to sit down in her new house! She would even have a couch to sleep on.

She knew there was no municipal garbage collection in the area near her house. Trash was thrown on a vacant lot nearby. She knew that when it rained the road would flood and the effluvia from the trash heap would float in front of her house. But five years in West Africa had made her accustomed to such inconveniences. Today, the road looked dry and fairly clean.

She had not had a *gardien*, a combination gardener and guard in most of the places she had lived in West Africa even though she knew it was the custom. Ordinary Beninese had to find a child, or an old person, usually a relative stay at the house at all the times, and sleep at the doorway to guard against theft. But Lynne had noticed in her five years here in this desperately poor country, that the people seemed basically gentle

and non violent. They hated thieves. But still, anything not nailed down or guarded was in danger of being stolen. minutes. She had heard that in Benin, all crime was blamed on the Nigerians. In Togo, it was usually said that the thieves were Ghanaian.

Since the owner of the house had hired Mamadou, she decided to keep him on. He was pleasant and helpful. Each evening he would rake the whole yard and disposed of the dead flowers that had dropped.

The house was rundown and the paint, a faded and streaked cream color but, there was a profusion of blooming bougainvillea growing close to the cracked and stained stone wall. Almost all of the neighbors on the street were African. Next door on her right she saw a huge imposing house. Louis had told her that it had once belonged to the Ambassador of Zaire. One day he got a message to come home. Knowing jail or execution probably waited for him there, he escaped to Paris. Now it was rented by a group of Air France pilots and stewardesses who used it to rest and party in.

Mamadou bought a loaf of long French bread from a passing woman for her. After a century of French influence, the Beninese women could make wonderful bread in their clay ovens.

Lynne looked around her house with a feeling of belonging. Rummaging in her goods stored in back bedroom, she found the jar of peanut butter and bottle of water she had packed for emergencies.

She sat at the new bamboo chair, eating her first dinner in her new house, feeling content with the world.

Mamadou finished his sweeping and as darkness fell, took out unrolled a thin bamboo mat which served as his bed on the veranda floor. He was soon quiet.

Wondered if being in the same country as Everett would make them grow closer. She had hoped so. Now, delightful but disturbing thoughts of that French Englishman floated through her mind.

She arranged a pile of pillows on the bamboo couch to use as a mattress. She was content. Tomorrow she would write a long description of her little home. Right now she couldn't even find her journal. She gloried in the thought that she was safe. She had a home.

In the middle of the night she woke with a start. Why? What was that? She heard it again, screams from the huge new house next door. She also heard loud music. More than half asleep she wondered, was she listening to laughter or fright? Was it a playful drunken brawl or did she hear pain and terror?

Chapter 14: Napoleon Can Fix It

All day Thursday Lynne felt like she was running and listening and planning as she ran. She was still working in her office at six. Then, since classes would start that night, she took a tour of the classrooms which were in a little building in back of the center. She went out the back door of Lydia's ELP office and down one flight of outdoor stairs. Dusk was falling.

She had her own set of keys to the rooms. The classrooms were in two little buildings, like most buildings in Cotonou made of mud blocks, and then painted in chalky pastel. The windows were glass rectangles, completely sealed in. It was stifling, inside, really unbearable. With no way to open a window there wasn't a whiff of moving air. When the air conditioning wasn't on, no one would be willing to stay in them. Many of the ELP students were employees of developmental organizations and worked all day in air conditioning. Ordinary Beninese homes didn't have air conditioning. But they had many open, glassless windows and even air holes between bricks.

She turned on the air conditioners, and was rewarded by a whirring sound and a wave of cooler air. Room A and B looked fine, ready for the teachers and classes to arrive. She was surprised to see class room E was unlocked with the key in the keyhole, outside. She looked it over, a big room, with thirty chairs, each with a little arm attached for writing. She saw the blackboard was clean. And the air conditioning was working. Satisfied, she went out and locked the door. She would remind the janitor that the classrooms should always be locked when there were no students or teachers in them.

Continuing her tour, she heard a dull pounding. What was going on? Was that wretched security team tearing apart her classrooms? She finished checking all the rooms and didn't see anyone pounding anywhere. As she passed Room E again she realized the noise was coming from inside. How could someone be in there? Rushing to unlock the door she saw inside the room a plumpish, balding man with wrinkled brown skin who looked scruffy for a Beninese. He was sputtering, indignant, speaking mostly in French with an occasional English word. He said, "I was in the W.C!" You locked me in. I, Napoleon will not stand for this!"

"How awful!" She hadn't realized there was a little room with a toilet and sink to the right of the little hall leading to the room, inside the door that she had locked.

She tried English; it was so much easier

"Oh, Napoleon, please forgive me. I didn't know! I'm new here, the new ELP director."

Napoleon went on ranting, "I thought it was that lizard from Washington. She would do it to punish me, I think," said Napoleon.

"Punish? But I have heard such fine things about you!"

"About me? You have heard good things?" He sounded surprised. But soon puffed up with pride and pleasure. "Ah, madame, yes, If you need anything repaired in your house, I can fix anything. Radio, VCR, television, refrigerator, anything. I was trained in Paris. Small small price." He smiled broadly, but somehow, there seemed to be a hint of mockery.

She made a final check of the bulletin boards and stepped into Lydia's office. Lydia worked until seven o'clock in order to give the teachers their keys and handle last minute registrations. Lynne was pleased to see a line of prospective students signing up.

Near them, in a dark corner, she saw Napoleon deep in conversation with someone. Who was it? She looked intently through the gloom. It was the Rastaferi man! What was he doing here? She stopped a moment, trying to think what to do. Then she decided to confront him, make him identify himself, then ask him about his actions at the border. As she approached them, the Rastaferi man ran off quickly and Napoleon disappeared!

"Africa is getting to me." Lynne thought. "People don't disappear." But the fleet footed Rastaferi man was gone and Napoleon was nowhere in sight!

Chapter 15: Defenestration

After sighting the sinister Rastafari man, Lynne tried to tell the man on duty at the guard shack about it. She tried to explain in her flawed French about seeing the man at the checkpoint when the man with golden skin was killed and then seeing him talking to the rascally repairman Napoleon a few minutes ago. The guard seemed to understand her French. He assured her that she was wrong, no such man had come in. Only students and teachers, fine people, and he knew them all, over one hundred of them.

Defeated, Lynne went home, still feeling that the Rastafari man was probably a killer and was loose in her workplace.

She scribbled a few words in her journal, and worn out, jumped into bed and a dreamless sleep. The next morning, she planned to insist as soon as she got to work that Napoleon tell her who and where the Rastafari man was. She started out early but when she finally found a taxi, it had in it five people who it turned out, were all going different places. They went around in what seemed like circles for almost an hour before she finally was deposited at the Cultural Center. When she went through the gate she found a surprising group of people standing in the driveway close to the front left side of the building. Randy and Louis were there and other employees of the Center. Law enforcement was there in the shape of the Embassy guard stationed at the Center and a Beninese policeman. They were all clustered around something on the driveway. Curious, she found a gap between two people, looked, and quickly looked away. It was gruesome. Minerva, the ill tempered supervisor from Washington, lay face down. Her head was somehow flattened and a wide stream of blood had flowed onto the cement near her. The white dress she wore yesterday was streaked with blood. The body was completely still and in an unnatural position as if a person trying to fly had been crushed.

The group milled around, asking each other what they should do. At last, Randy pulled himself together and started giving instructions. "Louis, get Pierre from the video room and have him take pictures of the body and everything around it. Call Peace Corps and get the nurse and also call a local doctor. Right away." Next, he looked around, perplexed, and said to the guard. "Stay here and protect the area. Don't let anyone touch anything here." Then in careful French he spoke to the policeman, "We need someone to take fingerprints."

The policeman looked puzzled and protested in an Africa language. The Center guard looked puzzled too. Randy began an explanation of the role of finger printing in crime detection in careful, slow French. The guard nodded in half comprehending agreement and started explaining to the policeman in Fon. Then he told Randy his reply, "The head of criminal investigations is in Abidjan at a conference for a week."

"Well they must ask him to come back. This is important. "Biting his lips to control his aroused temper, Randy left the group and started upstairs. Everyone except the Beninese policeman and the embassy guard followed him. Lynne trailed behind. It looked like Minerva had fallen or been thrown from above, from Randy's office. They walked up the big stairway and down the corridor to the right, past the glass door.

When they reached the doorway of Randy's once imposing office, they saw the appalling condition it was left in by the security construction crew in subsequent events. Cement chunks and bits of wood were strewn all over. Broken glass from the window was in a loose pile in a corner. There was a layer of cement dust over everything. Two narrow strips of wood in a giant X which had symbolically blocked the open window after the workmen had smashed the old glass were broken. Shards of the wood were still nailed to each side. The window was a large, gaping hole.

The group of people following Randy had grown. Monique was there. Lydia, Lynne's secretary appeared. She said to Lynne in a low voice, "Someone has stopped those evil eyes that I told you were watching you!" With Lydia were the two new teachers, Jean Luc Southbridge and Gerald Tangevi. They all rushed over to the hole that had been the window. When they were about three feet from it, Randy shouted, "Stop, you're ruining the evidence. You're smudging the footprints and adding to them."

It was true. Lynne looked at the floor behind them. The cement dust on the floor showed many different clear and distinct footprints as well as some smudged and fuzzy. She saw her own and those that obviously came from others in the onlooker group. But maybe some others. Trying not to disturb anything more, they went closer. Close to the window hole they saw a large area on the floor where the dust had been disturbed in irregular patterns.

"I wonder if she jumped. Maybe under all that hostility there was depression." Randy suggested.

"That looks like there was a struggle. You see Minerva's high heels, then there it's like two people were sliding and scuffling over the floor, displacing large areas of dust as they did it." Lynne contributed.

"Yes, that's more like it. I would have thrown her out the window myself if I thought I could get away with it. And, it looks as if the scuffle and then our walking in here has removed what might be the footprint of the pusher." Randy said.

But, looking off to the side where none of the gawkers had been they saw something that was clear and distinct. Amid the cement dust there were two clear footprints! They showed distinct indentations and high ridges, the imprint of an American jogging shoe!

Chapter 16: Who's In Charge?

Randy instructed Pierre to take pictures of the entire scene, especially the marks in the dust. The Beninese policeman was one step behind them. Randy said "Now, here is where we need fingerprints. There, around the window." He looked doubtfully at the dusty room, with the glassless window leaving the room open to the elements, with wind blowing the cement dust and sand in ever changing patterns. We need some expert help here."

He locked his office carefully and asked Monique and Louis to give him their keys and sealed them in an envelope and signed it over the seal and put them in the safe in Louis' office. . "We will keep what evidence that's left here from being further compromised until an expert comes from America."

Randy was perplexed about how to treat the death of the horrible Minerva. The Beninese took respect for the dead seriously and had three day funeral ceremonies, strict mourning customs that might take a month to fulfill, and another ceremony a year from the day of death. But the Africans were used to Americans doing things that seemed strange and heartless.

Randy had a hurried telephone consultation with the Ambassador, who was sick at home, and then pronounced in the firm, official voice he was capable of, "We will turn over investigation of this matter to the proper authorities. Now, let's all get back to work. Scheduled classes in the English Language Program will be held tonight. At some later date we will have a simple service for our tragically dead colleague. For now, set the flag at half mast."

Despite the flattened body of Minerva lying in the driveway, everyone tried to pick up the threads of daily duties. Lynne knew she shouldn't be surprised at this business as usual policy. In these unstable posts, scattered violence was common. Even coup attempts didn't cancel work at the Embassy and Cultural Center. She tried to collect her thoughts as she hurried down the corridor to her office. Randy had made a dangerous admission, that he had wished Minerva dead. He really might have killed her with his erratic personality and uncontrollable rages. But, if he had killed her would he frankly admit his pleasure at her death? Maybe. He often spoke with unguarded tongue. She was glad that Randy was turning the investigation over to "the proper authorities." But she wondered who that might be. She had noticed from her years in Togo that the justice system for Americans in West Africa was a little like the old Wild West. The African governments respected the US and tended to let its officials solve their own mysteries and prosecute American criminals in American courts.

Lynne was glad Americans usually dealt with American suspects and criminals. She had heard of a symposium at the university on how the law should treat a suspect who had assumed the form of a leopard when he killed someone.

Lynne wondered who was the officials in charge of security in the American community in Benin. After murders occurred to people close to her in Togo when she was in the Peace Corps and then as a Fulbright professor at the university there, she had been needed to help find the solution to the crimes.

As the day unfolded, she overheard bits of conversations when she passed Louis' office on her way to put things in the outgoing mail and now and then, Monique and Louis gave her updates on what was happening. Randy sent an urgent cable to Washington asking for a temporary security officer to deal with the death. He got in touch with Minerva's husband in Senegal who said that as soon as the police got through with the body, they should fly her back to America for a funeral. He would fly back immediately to make arrangements. Minerva could have a proper American autopsy there.

An official of the Beninese police arrived to talk to Randy. They both spoke excellent French and they understood each other well. The Beninese official made out a report, signed it, stamped it, and told Randy the US Government had better handle the investigation of the death, since the victim was an American citizen and the incident took place on American property.

She almost bumped into Randy in the hall. They were both rushing.

"Sorry."

"Sorry. How are things going, Randy?"

Randy moaned. "All this stuff about Minerva's death and the Ambassador is sick. She has agonizing stomach cramps. Our Peace Corps nurse says she is bleeding from the stomach. The Ambassador should be medivaced home but she is protesting, resisting medical advice and wants to stay.

Before the day was over Lynne learned who was officially in charge of the investigation for the time being. Susan Nelson came to Lynne's small office. She was about forty, a plump, severe looking woman with short brown hair. She had the look of someone that was organized and efficient. But, when she closed the door she started chattering nervously. She explained that since it was a small post, she, as the administrative officer was in charge of security as an extra duty. She was also the liaison with the Beninese army. All this besides being in charge of the Embassy Beninese employees, all physical maintenance, special arrangements and repairs, and the general payroll. "I saw you at Courtney's party, but we didn't speak. It's good to have another young American woman here. How do they think I can do anything about this murder? I have no training as a security officer and so many other duties I scarcely have time to eat or sleep."

She went on, as if glad to be speaking her thoughts. "About the only thing I have been able to do so far is talk to the guards at the Cultural Center. You know, I administer their activities. They say that after classes ended last night and the students and teachers left, no one entered the center until morning. Susan stopped, signed with exhaustion. Then said, "Friends at the Embassy in Togo told me you helped with murder investigations there. I hope you'll keep your eyes and ears open and tell me anything that can help us find out who did this."

Delighted that she finally could tell someone in authority about the Rastafari man, she said, "Oh, I will be glad to. Right now, I have something to tell you that no one else will take the time to listen to..."

But once more she was thwarted. There was an urgent sounding knock on the door. It was Monique.

“Madame Susan, Randy needs you right now.”

“Whatever Randy wants I hope won’t take a lot of time. I have a meeting in a half hour and then several more appointments and I have to meet with the Beninese general military staff in two hours. Sorry, Lynne, we’ll talk later. But I don’t know when.”

Chapter 17: Questions And Resolutions

After men from the Embassy medical office came with a worn stretcher to pick up Minerva's body, the atmosphere of the Cultural Center improved. Now at least it didn't look so grisly when Lynne looked out the window. The janitors started hosing down the bloody spot.

There was a sort of permanent shiver down Lynne's back all day. She felt that she was in danger, but she didn't know how much and which source was most serious. The country was on the brink of a revolution, and she had encountered two recently killed bodies close to her. She felt right now that she knew a murderer. Hadn't she seen the Rastafari man kill the golden skinned man at the check point? And she had seen him lurking on the center's grounds last night. Had he noticed that she had witnessed the shooting at the check point? He could have killed Minerva, too. But, why? Did they even know each other? She had no idea. She didn't even know who the Rastafari man was. She had to ask Napoleon about him. After all, they had been talking together and had disappeared together last night. But Napoleon was hard to find and was known as a liar. Even so, she left word with Louis, Lucien, and Lydia that she wanted to talk to the fix it man.

If the killer knew how much she knew and suspected, would he find a way to silence her? The best defense would be to go public with all her suspicions. But, she must get a clear idea of whether Minerva's death was tied to the checkpoint shooting.

Before she left the center that night, the word spread that Minerva's body would be flown to America by the next plane, which would be tomorrow evening. Washington would arrange for an autopsy there and plan a funeral with Minerva's husband.

That evening, when she reached her home, Mamadou met her at the gate. Once inside the house, she locked her doors carefully. Then she sat on her bamboos couch and made a list of questions leading to a solution of the mysteries. To start with, who was near and in the building that evening when Minerva died? Louis, and Randy often worked after hours. Monique usually left as close to 5 o'clock as she could. About a hundred students entered the gates around seven o'clock. Ordinarily, the crowd of students only went in the class rooms in the little annex building, which was behind the cultural Center and on the ground floor.. But in the time before the start of classes, some of them went up the back steps to visit the secretary's office to register, pay fees, and buy pamphlets. The doors to that office were locked a little after 7:00.

Once inside the gate, people could enter and go up the marble stairs. But, at that point, unless they knew the code, they couldn't open the glass door that led to the center's administrators and to the pillaged office that had once been Randy's proud fortress. The glass door to that section opened only by using its code which was known only to employees and people they told. And, once past the glass door, how could they get into Randy's office? For that you need a key. She didn't know exactly who had keys.

In the early part of the evening there was no check on who left the building. After the students left, the wide gate that vehicles entered in the few cultural center vehicles entered in was locked. A guard was on duty at the small entry all night.

Lynne thought about last night. When she left her office, Louis was still working in his office and Minerva was still there. Did she stay on working after the students left? How did the murderer get in? How did he or she know Minerva would be there? Did they have an appointment? How did the murderer get in?

And who had motives? The list was long. Monique, Louis, and Randy had openly spoken of their hatred of Minerva. Probably others at the cultural center and the English Language program who were more discreet also disliked and feared her. They all could be suspects. And, how about the students. Did any of them know and hate Minerva? Unlikely, but possible. This added up to a long list of possible people that hated her and were glad she was dead. But were they murdering types?

She thought of the Rastafari man whose curls seemed more sinister the more she thought of him. He was on the grounds earlier. Did he wait around somewhere until all the students left and go up the front steps into the building later? Did he have a reason to kill Minerva? Had Lynne seen him kill the golden skinned man? Was Minerva connected to the Rastafari and the man golden skinned man? And it teased her mind, where had she met the golden skinned man before? Suddenly she remembered something. That row Minerva had with Monique. It was because she wanted to go to Senegal next to find out something! What did she want to find out? More things to threaten people with? Did someone know that plan and kill her before she took that fact finding trip?

Before she made any headway in getting the facts of that first death, here again there was a death—a murder. She talk to Susan Nelson again and make her listen to what she knew.

She had gotten that far when she heard the sound of clapping. She knew that was the country way of asking to enter. “Qui est t’i! Who is it?”

“C’est moi!” She heard Mamadou’s voice. He told her the carpenter had arrived. She opened the door to see a man in worn khaki pants and a t shirt that said, Soccer Mom on it. The combination of the linguistic tower of Babel and the many second hand American clothes donated in the U.S. and shipped by the bale for the dead yovo, second hand market made these amusing costumes. Lynne was careful not to laugh. “Good evening. You are the carpenter?” She asked in French.

He agreed that he was the carpenter, Monsieur Baloubi. He spoke careful, correct French that was easy for Lynne to understand. After Lynne told him she wanted a dining room table and some chairs, “Mahogany?” he asked.

“Mahogany,” she answered, knowing that here, mahogany was one of the cheapest, good quality woods used. She paid him half in advance, the equivalent of twenty-five dollars so he could buy the wood. He said he would rush the job and deliver it to her Sunday.

As she walked to the door with him, he was relaxed and felt like chatting. “You are new to Benin,” he said. “Do you like it?”

“Yes, I think so, but many things have happened. ..”

“Yes, you have encountered death. You should go to a fetisher and get a charm. You know long ago, Cotonou was a burying ground. The word, in the Fon language means place of death.”

Chapter 18: Students And Spies

Lynne had just settled down to work in her office again when Lydia reported to her that a young man was trying to register who had obvious Libyan ties. The president of Libya had declared American to be his greatest enemy. There was evidence of camps in Libya that trained terrorists against the U.S. when she was in Togo there had been an intercepted shipment of explosives from Libya intended to bomb the U.S. Embassy. Lynne asked her to send him in to see her.

Rachman Allabi, slim and bandy legged with a bald spot on the top of his head had a proud expression of optimism on his mustached brown face. He told Lynne that his friend from Libya would pay his fees at the English Language Program. Lynne stalled him, telling him to come back the next day. When he left, she told Randy about the encounter. He said he would check with the Ambassador by phone. He called back a half hour later.

"Lynne, the Ambassador agrees that when that person with Libyan connections tries to come in again, the guards will stop him at the gate and refuse entry. Of course this will require a new vigilance on the part of the guards who must check every one of the hundreds of students coming to class for identification before they can enter. The Ambassador will notify Susan, the security chief, immediately, and she will explain the change to the head of the guards."

Lynne marveled at their cheerful faith in the easygoing Beninese guards. "But what if they aren't so diligent and somehow the friend of the Libyans slips past?"

Randy put on his most confident administrator voice. "If that happens, bring him to my office immediately. I will take care of the situation." He sounded as if he was looking forward to a shootout at the O.K. corral.

The Libyan's friend came back that night. Somehow, despite the new directive on checking ID, there he was, in Lydia's office, trying again to register. He still had his optimistic look. "I want to become really good in correct English. I want to be an interpreter," he said. Though embarrassed by his confidence in her good will, Lynne followed orders. She took him to the front of the building, through the glass security door, to the little office amid the rubble that Randy was using. And it was completely deserted. Oh course. She and Randy should have remembered that Randy's office closed and he went home long before the time that many students can to registered just before class at seven o'clock. She felt a shiver down her back. She realized she was all alone, and had brought this perhaps spy to the isolated and empty wing of the building.

In the semidarkness of the half demolished hallway, she and her guest looked at each other intently. Rachman Allabi's eyes seemed to glow. He said, "It is hard to see. Do you think it was like this when Madame Minerva was launched into eternity?" the man said.

Terror filled Lynne. Was this the end of her life? But she controlled her reaction. "I don't know what happened that night. Do you?"

He looked at her again. "No. But I have heard stories. You were not her friend?"

"I barely knew her. But she wanted me fired. She was my enemy."

The guest's teeth glinted in the darkness, as if he was smiling or snarling.

"Ah, another victim."

"Another? What do you mean?"

"I have a friend who was being persecuted by her. Do you know Abdul Hassan?"

She wondered if he had something to do with killing her. "No. Is he another Libyan?"

No. He is Senegalese. A highly educated man. But don't ask me questions about him. You are trying to get him in trouble."

She had no answer to that. She understood his reasoning.

He said, "You both hated her, . but you did not kill her. The director is not here. What shall we do now?"

"Can you come back tomorrow to see the director about registering?"

"That will be all right," he said, suddenly relaxed and cheerful again, as they hurried out of the desolate corridor.

Back in her office, she picked up the phone to inform Susan Nelson, theoretically the security officer, about the man's strange remarks and the potentially dangerous situation she had found herself in. The phone was dead. Of course. The phones were always turned off at 5 o'clock when Lucien, the receptionist went home.

The next day, the first thing, Lynne complained to Louis that the suspected spy had slipped past the guard despite the new orders to keep unidentified and possibly dangerous interlopers out.

Louis said, "I will report it to the supervisor of the guards. Don't worry. I will make sure that nothing like that happens again. The Ambassador says he may not enter the center again. They will tell the man and prevent him from coming in. The guard who let him in will be fired. That will make a big impression on the others. He may never find another job. No one will slip through again!"

Before she went to sleep that night, she wrote in her journal, "What did Allabi really want at the center? Did his Libyan friend have a sinister purpose? And who was this Abdul Hassan?"

Chapter 19: Saturday's Child

With her usual resilience Lynne woke cheerful on Saturday morning despite the horrendous week. It was a suffocatingly hot morning. She wiped perspiration from her eyes and recalled the line from the nursery rhyme, Saturday's child must work for a living. She was born on Saturday. Just being in this climate seemed like work. But, at last she had a day off, to do the work of settling into her new home. She knew that Susan Nelson, the official security officer, was overwhelmed by other duties, but she hoped someone else was working at solving the two murders. Lynne was frustrated that she still had not gotten anyone to listen to her account of the death of the golden skinned man and the involvement of lurking Rastafari man. Susan had asked her to do what she could to untangle the knot of mystery of Minerva's death. But, Lynne didn't even have a telephone. She didn't know how to get in touch with anyone on the weekend and couldn't decide who she should talk to anyway. She also didn't want to jeopardize her new, badly needed job. She decided to concentrate on the practical problems of daily life she had to solve.

She quickly took a delicious cold shower and dressed in a voluminous *boubou*, a loose African dress that was cool because it let the air circulate over her body. She walked to the corner near the Bon Coin and found a taxi. She liked to shop and she needed everything. She had only part of the jar of peanut butter left for food. And she needed many things to have a livable home. She had a thick wad of CFA in her purse. Lucky she had brought all her savings with her in cash. No one used checks or credit cards. In a few minutes she was in the center of Cotonou. Looking around the sprawl of shops and shacks and rutted roads she had to remind herself this was the economic capital of Benin. Just as in Togo, there were only a few *etages*, two story buildings. The downtown section had fewer and smaller stores than a typical suburban shopping center in America. The streets were lined with makeshift stalls covered with straw or tin, selling cloth, souvenirs, leather goods, watches, French bread, peanuts, and tomato paste. High life music blared from the stands that sold pirated cassette tapes. The main road was pot holed tar, the side road were unpaved. Louis had told her that during the long economic decline since the Marxist government took over 17 years ago, most taxis went out of business. In Cotonou, there were thirty thousand *zemijahns*, motorcycle taxis. It looked like they were all going to market today!

The streets were thronging with people, laughing, talking, moving. After five years in West Africa, Lynne had still not gotten over the thrill of seeing people wear beautiful, bright clothes made of the hundreds of different patterns of cotton cloth designed for the African market. Even today, subdued by the check point event and the death of Minerva, she noticed some especially striking cloth patterns. That pink and purple one with elephants!

She saw some faded red flags and communist slogan left over from the early, more militant communist days when she had been told, people had to address each other as comrade.

She was lavished with attention in the appliance store. Except when she went to the food stalls, she seemed to be the only person actually buying things everywhere she went. She bought a tabletop three burner bottled gas stove and a small refrigerator. She even bought a cheap little black and white television set. All would be delivered on Sunday. At the tiny Mayfair grocery store she bought enough food, paper goods, and cleaning supplies for a week.

She had so many packages she had a precarious grip on some of them. She was struggling out to the roadside to find a taxi when she almost bumped into an attractive white man with a subtle smile. Jean Luc!

"Madam director," he said, lightly. "My car is right here. May I take you home?" She agreed. For one thing, she had been wanting to ask him about his mysterious allusion to the American in trouble with the French government.

She loaded her things into Jean Luc's car. Once he had negotiated his way out of the side street, packed with people and motorcycles, and was on a slightly more better road he said, "This is a fine piece of luck, meeting you. May I take you to dinner tomorrow evening?"

"Yes. Thank you. I'll enjoy that."

"Good. Now, where do you live?"

When she said, "*Haie Vive*," she thought he looked startled.

As they turned onto the road that the Petit Coin was on, he seemed uneasy. He said "Is it far from here?"

"No. Go past the store, then turn right." as they turned onto the muddy, littered road, he was silent, a look of, what, on his face? Earlier he had said he would come in and see how she was progressing on getting settled in. But, at the gate, he made no move toward getting out. She struggled to get all the packages in her arms. Was this the chivalrous gentleman who had offered her a ride?

She said, "Can you come in for a few minutes? I want to talk to you and I have some things I want to show you."

He seemed nervous and ill at ease. "No . No. I must go, I realize I have an appointment."

"Then I'll see you tomorrow?"

"Yes, tomorrow. Meet me at your gate at eight o'clock."

What was going on? Why had her gallant courtier turned into such a boor? Before she went to sleep that night she wrote in her journal, "Does John Luc have a shameful side to his life?"