

Chapter 20: A Local Observer

Sunday, a battered truck made its unsteady way down the street which was littered with garbage and with several ruts so deep that they were crevices. A group of young, strong, sweating men somehow got the new refrigerator into the house and placed it in the only corner of the kitchen where it could possibly fit. They also brought the little television set. They turned it on at the single station available in Cotonou to test it. The soccer match it showed didn't interest Lynne, but the deliverymen had trouble detaching themselves from fascinated viewing.

When they left, she bustled around humming to herself placing things in the proper rooms, hanging a few pictures. She ate some canned meat, Vache Qui Rit cheese, french bread and fresh fruit. She stirred some powdered milk into some bottled water and drank it warm. Ugh! But after today, she would have refrigerated food. About three, Mr. Baloubi, the carpenter delivered the solid mahogany table and chairs she had ordered Friday. They were not exactly the size she had asked for. But, she accepted them gladly, used to a land where tape measures were seldom used.

She asked Mr. Baloubi to make her other things, a big bed and night stand, simple shelves for the bedroom and living room and a narrow stand for the bathroom. She asked for teak this time because the mahogany was so heavy she had to use both hands to lift a dining room chair.

He measured all the spaces, took notes, and asked her for half of the finished price. Obviously he liked to talk and he lingered at the door. He spoke French fast, but pronounced each word carefully and clearly as he had been taught in elementary school. He said he had worked for Cultural Center people for years. He told her that Napoleon always agreed to fix things, then never did. He collected deposits, spent them, then had no money for parts. He did this to *yovos*, foreigners, even some highly placed one, bad enough, but also, to hard working Beninese people at the Cultural Center.

He went on with his gossip, "Ah, yes. I know the Center well. That woman, Minerva made them cut down the tree, the beautiful spreading tree in the courtyard." He stopped, then dramatically continued, "The spirit of the tree haunted her. It got its vengeance."

"You think the ghost of the tree pushed her out the window?"

"Yes. The spirit has human friends that she also offended."

"Please tell me more!"

"I must go." He opened the door. Then he stopped again. "Mawu is not mocked!".

Chapter 21: Sometimes On Sunday

At one minute to eight Lynne was waiting outside the gate. Jean Luc came exactly on time. She leaped into his car and was immediately swept up by his flattering comments on her dress, her hair, her beauty, even her intelligence. She didn't mention his rude farewell on Saturday.

"I am taking you to a Russian restaurant. Don't ask me why it is here, but it is a lark and a change from French fries and broiled fish, the standard of haute cuisine in the French restaurants here."

They went to the road behind the railroad, then turned left on an unlighted, narrow path-like road, past a big rubble heap, past three unfinished large houses, then to the next block, past ten mud brick houses with straw roofs. The road ended abruptly. In front of them, in between two unfinished houses, loaming white grey, in the headlights.

"Here we are," Jean Luc said.

La Belle Russe was a small mud brick house with two enclosed verandas. A woman with dark brown skin wearing a Russian type peasant blouse and long wrapped skirt showed them to a table. Only two other tables were occupied. There were bushes all around the veranda and the roof was open. The stars were bright and beautiful. A light wind made the palms, bougainvillea and hibiscus surrounding them wave. A string of Christmas fairy lights twinkled amidst the greenery. It seemed strange and wonderful to Lynne. Jean Luc had the same reaction. They ordered dinner from a short grease spotted menu, in French. It offered cabbage borsch, chicken Kiev, doubtless made with the local spinach-like *boma*. There was even some of the brown bread that could be bought by special order at one of the bakeries in town.

It was another of those lovely lilted evenings that Lynne had found herself susceptible to. Jean Luc said, "You are a fascinating creature. Tell me all about yourself. Why are you here? What motivates you? What do you want?"

"Ah, Africa, I love it. But, after six years, I still don't understand it, and sometimes I hate it."

Jean Luc put his arm loosely around her, and occasionally at appropriate moments, gave an affectionate squeeze.

Lynne was happy for a chance to talk to a sympathetic man. She asked a question, "This new violence, the death of the much despised Minerva. What do you think about that?"

"Who ever pushed her out of that window performed a service to public order." He said, fiercely. "But let us not waste our time together speaking of that unpleasant woman."

She suddenly remembered one of the reasons she had wanted to talk to him more. "Ok. Please, tell me about yourself. I want to know you well."

"Ah, there is so much to tell, and also nothing to tell. I spent my childhood shuttling between Paris and London. I studied at universities in both places. I married and divorced. I worked as a contractor for USAID for a while in Senegal. Now, I have a good job, a new life, a new environment. For the first time I hope to find my real self."

Once more she fell in love. Everett would soon be back in Benin and had said he would call her when he arrived. But Jean Luc was so much more exciting. She loved his gallant British/French ways. She wanted him for her lover even though she felt he had a secret. “Jean Luc, you said something about an American who is in trouble. Can you tell me more?”

“Ah. I was indiscreet. I have friends at the French Embassy and realize I must keep confidential things confidential. Sorry I mentioned it.”

She didn't press it. She wondered if it has something to do with the Ambassador's strange illness. But that had nothing to do with the French. Or did it? Some people seemed to think everything in this country had something to do with the French.

Once more, he dropped her off at the gate and left abruptly, not even waiting to see if she had trouble unlocking it.

The beautiful bubble of joy the evening had brought was deflated. What was this man's problem?

Chapter 22: A Simple Ceremony

When she arrived at the Cultural Center the Monday after the defenestration, Lynne was relieved to see the driveway looked almost normal. Some sand had blown onto the grim spot where dead Minerva was found and there was some comforting litter. When she entered the building and hurried up the stairs, she observed scurrying and banging in the construction area behind the glass door. How right Randy had been when he moaned that the security remodeling crew would ruin everything!

She visited Lydia briefly and asked her to have someone find Napoleon, the elusive, rascally repair man and send him to see her, immediately. It was crucial to ask him what he knew about the Rastafari man, who might also be involved in the latest death, awful Minerva's fall from the window.

"I will try to find him. And Lynne, you said you would talk to me about the injustice done to me here."

"I will Lydia. But right now, I need to talk to Napoleon."

After she had talked to him, she would insist that someone in authority listen to her suspicions about the Rastafari man's part in the shooting at the border of the man with the golden skin.

"I will try, Lynne. But he probably thinks you want to ask for the VCR he said he would return this week. He took a deposit for parts for it a year ago."

That afternoon the Embassy held a simple ceremony commemorating Minerva's death. The gathering was held in the courtyard, the largest meeting area available to the American community in Cotonou. The tropical sun beat down on most of the Americans in Cotonou and a handful of students and teachers in the English Language Program. As a priest from the historic Catholic Church in Haie Vive gave a prayer in English with a Ghanaian accent he mopped the sweat rolling off his wrinkled brows with a large white handkerchief.

Everett Knowlton was back from his trip to Washington and today was subbing for the Ambassador, who was still very ill. She had never regained her health after the Interagency party given by Courtney Browning.

Everett was looking good in a light weight dress suit. Lynne thought, as she often had in the five years off and on that they had gone together, that he was nice looking, but not outstanding. When he had to, he just blended into the scenery. Now, as Acting Ambassador, he looked strong, substantial, a leader. Lynne felt a surge of affection for him. Probably one day he would be a real ambassador. When Everett passed Lynne, he said in a low voice, "I just got in from America. I have several meetings and then I've just got to get some sleep. I'll call you tomorrow."

She welcomed him and agreed, trying to seem enthusiastic. After her evening with the dashing French-English Jean Luc, once more her feelings for Everett were on hold. There was a time in her first years in Togo when she wanted the protection being Everett's wife would bring her in her African life. But, since then, she had learned that she was good at facing danger and making decisions under perilous conditions by herself. Right now, exotic Jean Luc, despite his moodiness, seemed more appealing.

She glanced at the row of English Language Program teachers. Sherry, still the human Barbie doll, was in an outfit that looked like it had just come from America. She looked at Lynne with hostile eyes when their glance met. Jean Luc radiated charisma. He was chatting with the two Fulbrighters Nicole, the professor and Lynne's old Peace Corps friend, Lita, the researcher. She noticed a sort of glow on Lita's beautiful face. Jean Luc seemed to notice it too. He bent down to say something in her delicate ear. Then, he saw Lynne watching him. He gave a sexy half smile and a little wave.

Almost all of the Cultural Center employees attended. She kept looking for Napoleon but he was not in sight.

Then, at the end of the service, as she was leaving, in an inconspicuous corner near the ELP classrooms, she saw the Rastafari man. This time, she would report him, find out the truth. Maybe they would put him in jail immediately. She rushed to the nearest person who happened to be Nicole. "Do you know where Randy is? There's someone here ... He is connected to a murder. Maybe he killed Minerva too."

Nicole said, "I don't know where Randy is. But, let's find a guard. Where is the man? What does he look like?"

"He's over there. See him near the corner? Young and good looking, but sinister with Rastafari curls."

Nicole drew herself up angrily. "You're ridiculous, Lynne. You are describing my son, Zulu. There's nothing sinister about him!"

Chapter 23: Suspicious Characters

Nicole explained in an exasperated tone that her son Zulu's Rastafari hair style was popular at his high school in Atlanta, Georgia. He felt it made a statement of African pride. Narrow-minded people were always prejudging him. He was born when she was a student at the Sorbonne in Paris. His father who came from Senegal was a student, too, at the time. She and his father had eventually divorced. She wanted Zulu to get acquainted with his African roots. When they passed through Paris on the way to Benin he had a terrible experience. The police at the Paris airport tried to grab him and put him in the French army, to satisfy a requirement of all young male French citizens. It had taken the intervention of the American Embassy to get him released and let him continue on to Benin. He was nervous around officials because of the situation, made worse because he couldn't speak French. He had a problem again last week, returning from a visit with friends in Ghana. He was at the border of Benin when he was challenged. He was reaching in his pocket trying to get out the papers and letters he had been given when shots rang out. Since he didn't understand French, he didn't know if they stopped him over the army service problems, or something else. And he couldn't explain. When things continued to be violent and confusing, he ran off on the pedestrian walkway. He hid in the palm grove at the side of the road for a while until he was sure no one was looking for him. Then, he hitched a ride into town on a banana truck.

"Why does he always run off when he sees me?"

"You know young people. He's tall, but he's only 16. He's shy around grownups. I don't think he knows who you are. Maybe he thinks you will start yammering away at him in French."

So that was the story of the dramatic young man that she had cast as the villain of the piece. He was probably the American in trouble that Jean Luc had started to tell her about. Her suspicions seemed funny, really. But she could see in her mind's eye the golden skinned man lying still and bloody. That wasn't funny. Someone must know who he was and why he was killed. She would force Randy to concentrate long enough to listen to her story. Why had the Ambassador reacted so strongly when she mentioned him? She was sick now, so Lynne wouldn't have a chance to ask her, even if she dared. But, if Mr. Rastafari was only Zulu, Nicole's son, an innocent and ill at ease young American, was she left with her friend Randy as the only suspect for Minerva's murder?

The telephone rang. Lydia said, "I found Napoleon. He's here."

"Great! Send him in."

Now that she had information from someone else, he finally turned up! "Come in," she said, to the tentative tap on her door.

Napoleon entered, looking embarrassed, timid, and arrogant at the same time. In a land where most other Beninese always looked impeccably dressed and groomed, Napoleon as usual, looked ragged and scruffy.

"You want me?" He spoke in English.

"Yes, Napoleon. I had been trying to learn more about the young man with Rastafari curls. I saw you talk to him last week, the very night that Minerva was killed."

“Oh, madame, that had nothing to do with the death of that nagging woman.”

“Yes, but you were with him. What do you know about him?”

“I will fix it very soon, next week!”

Lynne wondered if his English was good enough for this conversation. “What are you talking about?”

“I have the stereo of Madame Nicole, the mother of the young man. He came to ask me when it would be repaired. I told him, very soon.”

“That is why you talked to him?” Oh, imagination and suspicion are powerful things. “But, that night, I called you, and both of you suddenly disappeared.”

“Oh, madame, we went into my cabine.”

“Cabine? What do you mean?”

“It is my little office, in the corner of the building. I use it as my workshop.”

Deflated, she continued to see if he could help her. “Do you know anything at all about how Minerva came to die?”

“Ask Randy. And tell him and Madame Nicole the stereo will be ready tomorrow!”

Chapter 24: Reinforcements Arrive

There was no doubt about it; one of her mysteries was cleared up. The Rastafari man was just Zulu, a trendy American teenager, skulking around because he didn't know French and was avoiding French military service, trying to get his boom box back from Napoleon. His mother's explanation of his activities at the check point were believable. She still wished she knew more about who the golden skinned man was, and why he was shot. But probably it was only coincidence that Lynne saw two bodies within a week. And since there was no way to tie it to the death of Minerva, she had no clue at all as to who killed that unpleasant woman. What was needed was some official person in charge who could interview everyone and find out just who was in the building after hours. She didn't have the authority and also didn't have the time. Her duty was to get the program running. If it failed, she would be out of a job.

When she reached the office the next morning, the guard at the gate seemed somehow more alert, standing tall. He actually asked for her identification papers even though he knew her well. Luckily she had something in her purse that satisfied him. Then when she entered the building, Lucien, the receptionist, too seemed to be working with especial zeal.

"What's happening?"

"Oh Lynne, a security officer has been sent to us from Washington . He's upstairs with Randy."

Curious, instead of going directly to her office, she keyed in the numbers and opened the glass door, trying to appear as if an urgent look in her mail box was her destination. As she passed the Director's borrowed office, Randy's voice rang out, "Lynne, come here. An old friend of yours has come to help us."

There was Mc Duff who had investigated the deaths that occurred in Togo when she was in the Peace Corps. He was looking as sober and formal as ever, a stiff, prissy, cold little man, out of place in the heat and disorder of Africa and especially in the dusty torn apart office section of the Cultural Center. Dressed in a tan pin striped suit, he wore an elaborately folded handkerchief in his breast pocket which also held a designer pen. His ginger colored hair was cut short. A little grey was added by the four years since Lynne had helped him in Togo.

He still had that supercilious look on his face that changed to something like outright scorn from time to time as he talked. Nevertheless, Lynne greeted him fondly. They had gone through perilous times together.

"Ah, madam detective. Trouble again. Are you going to help me again?" A glimmer of a smile lurked on his face. He turned to Randy, "Mr. Public Affairs Officer, these small country investigations are unorthodox. I have almost no staff to work with me. Your crime scene is long ago compromised or destroyed as is the spot where the body landed. It is good that you took pictures even though they are poor quality. The upstairs room, which was the actual scene of the perpetration, is like all such things in West Africa, unusual. And there has been no covering to the window. There is just a large hole, open to the elements. The wind has been blowing. There even was rain."

Randy started acting sheepish and apologetic but worked himself into defensive fury as he talked. "I heard that we shouldn't touch the crime scene more than necessary. I got everyone out as soon as possible and locked the door carefully. And to tell the truth, we have had one emergency after another in this country, the Ambassador sick, a near revolution, a scandal I can't tell you about. And this mess, with these security fiends tearing everything up. I run in circles every day, trying to deal with everything and then the next day there is something new. Like you, fresh from Washington, blaming me!" By now he was glaring at Mc Duff.

Mc Duff answered calmly, "Your reaction is interesting."

A little chastened, Randy continued in a more moderate tone. "I hope you can find out something. We need to know how Minerva met her death."

"I can tell you this much. The results of the autopsy given in Washington find the cause of death was a fall. There are no fingerprints on the body or her clothes. We will see if we can find anything on the window ledge and surrounding area. The time of death is estimated at about nine o'clock but could be an hour earlier or later.

"You took photos of the disturbance of cement dust on the floor. That is good. When I looked today, the patterns are no longer there, not surprising, with no window and the wind blowing in.

"I will do a series of interviews. Lynne, you helped me before. Give me a list of people in your program who were on the grounds that night. And Randy, give me a list of all your employees."

Randy got a telephone call, and muttered, "I'll have to leave you. There's a problem down stairs."

Mc Duff suddenly switched to an authoritative, almost hostile tone. "Yes, we will go on without you. But one of the pictures showed a very clear imprint of an American jogging shoe. I have sent an assistant to your house to collect all your sports shoes for testing. You don't mind, do you?"

Randy gulped, then his face contorted with the effort to contain his anger. "I know the Bill of Rights doesn't apply here in Benin. Do what ever you want to. Even though she fell out of my office, I did not enter it Thursday night wearing a jogging shoe!"

When he left, Mc Duff spoke calmly to Lynne, "I wanted to see his reaction. Actually, I've told the one assistant they gave me, the junior consular officer, to go to the homes of certain people who were or might have been in the center that night to pick up any running shoes. If he finds some, we will bundle them up and send them to Washington to be tested."

"Good. But, don't you think the guilty person has thrown the shoes away already?"

"Could be. But you know it's hard to get good running shoes here. He may take a chance. And most people don't know we have a photo of the shoe mark.

"Since we worked together, young lady, I have been promoted. I now am based in Washington and am only personally sent out for high profile cases. Oddly enough, your little death here is important. Both the victim and her husband are low on the State

Department prestige scale, but right now, we especially, don't want any scandals in Benin.

"They want me to get the matter cleared up long before the vice president comes to visit you."

"Gore is coming here? When?"

"In three months. He will stay two hours, bring Tipper with him. Every thing must be perfect for him, safe and organized. The Beninese government, with our funds is even going to build a two mile long security wall from the airport to town. They will ship in an armored car. At that time we cannot have any lingering doubts about a murderer of Americans on the loose. We need all the help we can get in this investigation. I will save myself some time and ask what you know immediately."

He had a bantering tone, but she felt he meant it. "What do you know or suspect?"

At last she had an opportunity to talk. She opened her mouth, hoping something wise would come out. Who did kill Minerva? Not the Rastafari man. There was no real reason to believe her death was connected to the shooting of the golden skinned man. Then who? The friend of the Libyan spy? Now that was silly. What motive would he have? "Mr. Mc Duff. Thank you for your faith in me. I'll think about it. I have some really strange characters on my teaching staff. I can give you a list of people that I know disliked Minerva. And I will give you a list of ELP students that were in the classroom building that night and teachers that taught that night."

"Yes. I will check them all out. But, you know that there is one immediately obvious suspect."

"Oh.. . Do you mean Randy? Napoleon hinted that he knows something."

"Napoleon? Who's he?"

"He's the repairman. But you must meet him. He's beyond description. About Randy, do you really think he is the obvious suspect? He has been trying to protect the evidence."

"But did he really safeguard the evidence? He put on a show of trying. But, it is like having the fox guard the chicken house. And from all the reports I have heard about him and his erratic personality, he is the obvious suspect for killing. He and Minerva had both sent messages to Washington complaining about the other and asking that the other be fired. He had a motive. He also had keys to his office."

"But he went home about six. Do you have evidence that he came back later?"

"Randy says he didn't. But, we will check it out. Watch him. Notice what he does and says. And be careful. There is a good chance he is a dangerous man." He gave a feeble smile. "Don't stand too close to open windows. People will notice that you are snooping. And there's definitely a murderer around!"

Chapter 25. Defending the Book Rack

Lynne went to her office and immediately made a list for Mc Duff of teachers on duty that Thursday night: Lydia's husband Adin, Malik, Sherry, and Jean Luc. She photocopied the enrollment lists of all students assigned in Thursday night classes. She made another list, titled, People I know that disliked Minerva:

Randy, Louis, Monique, Napoleon, Lydia, me,

She tore up the third list, but placed the other two in an inter office mail envelope and put it in Mc Duff's box. Then she called the Embassy to talk to Susan Nelson. It took a full hour to find the line clear and convince Susan's secretary to disturb her.

Finally. "Susan Nelson here."

"Ms. Nelson, you told me to tell you when I had ideas about the investigation of Minerva's murder."

"That's up to Mc Duff now. I'm busy with a thousand things, including preparations for the vice-president's visit."

"But, please, something you might know. Mc Duff suspects Randy. Is there any evidence to show that Randy could have been in the Center about nine o'clock?"

"No, he wasn't there. The guard at the center swears to it. And the guard at his house says he didn't leave after six pm. You know I'm in charge of the guards, both at his house and at the Cultural Center. They swear that no one entered after the students and teachers left. It's lucky Randy has good alibi. Everyone knew he practically threatened to kill Minerva at Courtney's party."

"Thank you. I know you have pressing responsibilities. I won't call you again."

About an hour later, Lydia banged on Lynne's office door, alarmed. "Lynne, a man promenaded into my room and took booklets from the display rack. I told him that they are for sale at a good price. But he just shouted, 'I will not pay. I work for the US government too. I need them. Get out of my way or I'll...'" Then I ran here. Maybe he is still there."

Lynne rushed with her. The man was still there, still gathering up booklets. He didn't look Beninese. He was taller and had the blue black skin of some groups in Senegal.

Lynne too told him he must pay for the books or give them back. "If you won't I will call the guard."

He drew himself up proudly and said "I am Abdul Hassan from Senegal. I work for Courtney Browning at USAID. I am a close friend of his. I will tell him you do not cooperate. You will regret this. He will withdraw his support of your Atlas program."

He threw the pamphlets on the desk and stalked out. He was dressed in westernized business clothes, but somehow in his forceful stride, evoked the princely look of a man in an embroidered and flowing full boubou outfit. His threat diminished Lynne's composure. She knew that the ATLAS contract with USAID to train their grantees for study in America was the element in the financial picture that made the difference between the balanced budget Washington wanted and a loss. She asked Lydia, "What do you know about this man? How much power does he really have?"

Lydia responded, "He is obnoxious. Is that a good English word? He worked at the American Culture Center in Senegal. When they had a protest strike there he came here and got in good with Courtney. He has been trying to act the big boss all over town."

Lynne immediately presented herself at Randy's makeshift office. She looked at him in a new light now that Mc Duff had said that he was under suspicion. Randy had on a spectacular pair of cowboy boots. Aside from that he was wearing typical foreign service clothes, a summer weight dress suit and a pastel dress shirt. She told him the story about the booklets.

"Yes, I agree, if USAID wants him to have our publications for his work, they can pay for them, just like anyone else. Courtney knows the funding situation. As for ATLAS, he needs you to train his grantees as much as we need the money."

He stopped and seemed to be puzzling out something. "There's a situation over there... but it doesn't change our pamphlet policy. I've heard of this Hassan. If he comes back, let me know."

"Randy, I want to ask you about another matter!"

"I don't have time. That stiff little suit, Mc Duff, from Washington is disrupting everything with his questions. And in three minutes I have to be at the Ambassador's. Even though she is sick she has called this meeting. Big problems are brewing, in the Embassy and USAID."

Recognizing the authority and intensity in his remarks, Lynne started moving away "Okay, another time, Randy."

As she was crossing the hot corridor to her office she encountered the teacher, Malik, on his way to the listening lab..

"Lynne. Are you all right?"

"Of course. Why?"

"I was outside when that strange man burst out of the ELP office. Lydia said he was rude and threatening to you."

"Yes, he was. He is an unpleasant man."

"Maybe more than that."

"What do you mean?"

"The night Minerva was murdered. I left my classroom briefly about eight o'clock to go to the W.C. and saw someone in the shadows that I did not know. I thought of questioning him, but had no authority to do so. He was in the shadows, as if waiting."

"What are you telling me? Who was it?"

"It was this man, the man who tried to take the pamphlets and insulted you."

Chapter 26: The Night Of The Branches

Lynne stopped in to see Lydia. She was calm again after her encounter with the rude man from Senegal. “I have some good news for you, Lydia said, beaming. “I found you a housekeeper who will work well, be very careful and fast. She is very honest!”

It turned out that it was Lydia’s sister, Felicity. “And in a few days I will find someone to rent you a car,” she continued, confidently. While they waited, Lydia at last had a chance to tell Lynne her job complaints. As Lynne listened, an over reaching sadness came to her for Africa and its many problems. Lydia was in a much better a situation than most of her country women. She was paid more than a Beninese high school teacher. But, as she listened, she realized what Lydia said was true. Lydia had no contract, no sick leave, no job security, and was paid only a tiny percentage of what an American would be paid in the job.

“Ok Lydia. I get it. I have many rules, regulations coming from Washington and from also from my boss, the director. But, give me some time and I will try to improve things a little for you.”

Felicity arrived at the office soon after to talk about hours and duties. She spoke in clear, simple and correct French. She was buxom and pretty, not as stylish as her office working sister, but lively and cheerful, with a good sense of humor.

Lynne wished she could magically keep things clean without having a housekeeper. She didn’t like people waiting on her. But here, there were no dishwashers, vacuum cleaners or washing machines, and she would be working long hours at the Center. She gave Felicity a key to the house and a list of duties to do each day of the week and said she could go home every day as soon as she accomplished them. She would work Monday through Friday and be paid for a full day’s work each day. She could see that the plan appealed to Felicity. One duty would be to wash the dirty clothes by hand once a week and then to iron everything to prevent bot fly infestation, an unpleasant condition that was only cured by pulling the resultant worms out of wounds that developed in the skin if clothes were dried outside. She must also boil big pots of water out doors over charcoal, then when cooled, pour it into a plastic filter and put it into two quart jugs, for use. She said she had done all these things before for Americans she had worked for. She would start work at once.

Pleased, Lynne had some peace of mind as she rushed through her day’s work. She constantly had to make instant decisions. She saw Mc Duff once in the hall, but he, too, was too busy to talk. She was relieved that Everett had not called as he had promised.. Her thoughts kept going to the dashing French-Englishman, who was very charming, even though sometimes strangely gauche.

That evening she had to start teaching the Level Seven class. She worked until five, then locked her door, and taking out a little pillow she had hidden, stretched out on the floor and slept for an hour. At six she awoke, washed her face, and decided to walk to the Sheraton hotel six blocks away where she knew she could get some coffee and a meat pastry in the lobby shop. As she walked down the boulevard she noticed a wild commotion. There were crowds of unruly people, chanting loudly in an African language.

The people had green branches in their hands and they were stopping each car, talking vigorously and usually attaching a branch to the windshield. In some cases, the drivers would shake their heads, and seem to be refusing. The argument would be more heated. She watched one car. The protesting driver started up his car. The throng followed him, pounding on the window glass, attempting to attach the branch, surrounding the car. One man was almost run over. Another car, absolutely could not leave, but remained encircled by shouting, pounding, angry people. Lynne decided she was no longer hungry and returned to the center. She asked the guard, "What is happening, what does it mean?"

He replied in French that sounded as if it had been lifted from a pamphlet, "The day of revenge has arrived! The people are rising up. The green branches mean we want our freedom, we are tired of communist dictators."

A little before seven, Lynne inspected the classrooms. Remembering her mistake in locking Napoleon in, she was careful, making sure no one was lurking in a nook or cranny, and checked to see if the air conditioning worked in each room and everything was ready. Yes, the classrooms were in order, but what about the country?

When time came for her class, Lynne found only half of the enrolled students, a faithful ten, looking stunned and worried. One of them was trembling. She asked them, "Do you want class or do you want to go home?"

"Home," they chorused. "The streets are not safe, and will get worse later on," one of the best students explained in careful English.

After dismissing the class, Lynne had the problem of getting home. She didn't see any taxis on the main street, so started walking. She hoped to find one on the road. But there were none, and she ran into more repetitions of frightening scenes. Groups were aggressive, stopping cars and pounding on them, insistent, pressing forward, attaching green branches to the cars.

"*Vive democracie*," was the chant.

She liked democracy. She took it for granted at home. But, seeking it sometimes caused trouble. Would people be killed here in Cotonou over it? She got home safely, sometimes hiding in the shadows, sometimes almost running or detouring. Her own street was quiet. Gratefully she entered her house. She made a vow. She must get a car. Tomorrow. She couldn't bear another homecoming like this.

Chapter 27: Love Amidst The Rubble

The next morning, Lynne left her house early. She tried to rent a private taxi, but ended with a driver who picked up and delivered three other people to far-flung parts of the city. Since he understood almost no French her protests were useless. When everyone else was dropped off, He said, one French word, “*Ou?* Where? She alternated saying American Cultural Center and *Centre Culturel Americaine* insistently, over and over. He must have understood because he finally dropped her in front of the Center’s gate.

The building was still ringing with the sounds of pounding and tearing. A glance through the glass door made her decide to wait to get her mail until it looked safer on the construction site. She hurried into Lydia’s, office. “Please help me. You must know someone that wants to rent me a car. I need one desperately. Today!”

Lydia came up with a solution. Her friend Colette, who had a hairdressing shop, was short of money right now. She would be willing to rent her car by the month to Lynne. Lydia made a few calls and within an hour, slim, trim and chic Colette was in the office. She said the car came with a driver who would keep the 15 year old Peugeot in good repair for her. She explained that James was a fine man, a Togolese, driven out of his country by the violence there. Despite the English name, he spoke only French and Mina. Lynne gave Colette a stack of African CFA notes for the first month’s rent. It was decided that James would drop Colette off at her shop and then would return to the center to wait in the parking area until Lynne needed him.

During that day she heard the rumors that were flying. Randy had met with the Ambassador and leaked some news to everyone he talked to. Tension was increasing and people were anticipating a coup or a revolution. Also, that pamphlet snatcher was causing trouble, something far worse than the pamphlets. The Ambassador urged Mc Duff to find Minerva’s murder, immediately.

About two o’clock Lydia phoned her, “Lynne, that new teacher, the Frenchman wants to see you.”

“Send him in!”

Though somewhat annoyed with Jean Luc because of the boorish way he had left her at the gate after their date, when he opened the door she felt he was even better looking than he had been in her dreams the night before. He walked into her office, closed the door, and daringly and quickly kissed her.

“Jean Luc, this is an office.”

“Yes, but we are alone.”

He kissed her again. Strongly attracted, she found herself forgiving him. But she said, “Jean Luc, you left me abruptly Sunday night. What is going on?”

“Ah, *ma Cherie*, I am sorry. We must spend a weekend together, away from this town, and I will show you my deep feeling for you.”

“And explain why you are sometimes such a cold and rude man?”

He looked at her intently. “Yes. I will. We will find happiness together.”

Chapter 28: Information And Disinformation

Lydia called to say that Mc Duff wanted to see Lynne as soon as possible. Randy had found Mc Duff a tiny office, formerly a storage closet on the lower floor, to use as his headquarters. Outside the door, six of the Beninese staff chatted in three languages while they waited to see Mc Duff. Explaining that Mc Duff had called her, she knocked on the door, then opened it.

Mc Duff was making notes on a stack of papers neatly piled high all around him on his desk in the little makeshift office. Lynne nodded to Adin who was sitting next to Mc Duff. The inspector looked up. "Adin is helping me talk to the people who don't know English. Adin, you can take a break while I talk to Lynne."

"Sit down," he said, continuing his scribbling on the paper before him. Finally he looked up. "The unrest in the country makes everything difficult, but we must go on with the murder investigation. Let's start today with my official interview of you. First of all, where were you the night Minerva died and what do you know about who was at the Cultural Center?"

"Before I answer that, I want to tell you one thing I know. We know Randy left the Center about six o'clock. Susan Nelson tells me the guards at Randy's house and at the Cultural center swear he couldn't have returned to the Center that night."

"I know. And I hate to give him up as a suspect. But, answer my question."

"About six P.M. I checked the classrooms. They were all okay and empty. No murderers lurking in them." She said this lightly and was rewarded with Mc Duff's solemn stare. "Just before I left, at about six thirty, I saw Napoleon talking to the boy I now know is Zulu, the son of the Fulbright professor. I suspected Zulu of criminal activity because I saw him at the check point looking suspicious when the man I now know is Kwami Annan was shot. Do you know all these people I am mentioning?"

"Yes, I have heard of them in my interviews and investigations."

"I gave you the list of classes we held that night. A total of about 80 students in them. The teachers were Sherry, Adin, Jean Luc and Malik. From about seven to nine they were probably in class. And then, usually, they rush out all together."

"Yes. And I have learned that in the evening, even though the front door to the Cultural Center Building is unlocked, it is rare for students to go in that way. They use the stairway in the back before class to talk to Lydia in the ELP office or go directly to classes in the outbuilding. Lydia does last minute registrations and gives the teachers their keys. She usually goes home about 7:15. When she goes, the door leading out of her office to the corridor that goes to the front offices is locked."

"Yes. You've got it right. But, two nights a week, after she works, Lydia joins the level 6 class to improve her English. That class met Thursday night."

"Yes, and Lydia told me that after class on Thursday, she stayed in the courtyard for a while to take some notes. She looked up at the balcony that overlooks the patio and saw Minerva there, alone. She glanced at her watch and saw it was 9:20. That gives us a more precise hour for her death, some time after 9:20, after the main body of students had left. The autopsy in America is pretty much of a guess. We learned that she had a

sandwich at the Sheraton about 4 o'clock before returning to work with Louis all evening. That meal helped the experts estimate the death as between nine and ten. Now, Lydia's testimony tell us the murder occurred after the main body of students had left."

"So maybe someone came in before nine and stayed until things were quiet."

"Yes. A student or a teacher could have hidden in the shadows and stayed after the rest left," Mc Duff said thoughtfully.

"Some other suspicious people might have been there. I had a talk with that teacher, Georges Dossou dropped in to lend a book to Malik. He is a strange type. His prison stay may have made him a bit twisted mentally."

Lynne defended him." He actually is very nice and the students say, a good teacher."

"Ah. And he is not our culprit. He has an iron clad alibi. He lives with about 12 Togolese relatives who are refugees from the problems there. They all say he was with them all that evening and night."

McDuff looked at her, a little shyly. "I tell you all of this partly because it is hard working alone and helps to shared. But also, if you know more, you can be more helpful. You turned out to be very helpful in those problems in Togo. What do you have for me now?" He had certainly changed since he first met her in Togo and sneered at almost everything she said.

"Louis told me that the guards shut the big gate when the big group of people leave and also lock the little pedestrian door. He said he didn't pay attention to who left and when unless they talked to him or left keys with him. Of course, when they leave after he locks two of the entry points, people have to I talked to the guard at length. He said he was supposed to stay in the guard house and never makes a check of the premises unless he saw or heard something suspicious. And he noticed nothing worth investigating that night. The supervisor from the Embassy came to check on him 11:30. Luckily for him, he was wide awake. I gather there have been times when that wasn't true. But, he didn't check further, didn't look in the driveway.

"He said he had his radio on playing high life music from 9:30 to about 2 and would not have heard anything except very loud sounds. When he finished his tour of duty at seven, he expected to go straight out. But the day man came at seven and they chatted a while. Soon after, they unlocked the main gate in case Randy or one of the other officers wanted to drive in and start work early. When they did that they saw the body in the driveway." He stopped, then said, "You are a good observer. Do you know anything else about that evening?"

"When I left, about 6:30, I could see the silhouettes of Louis and Minerva in Louis' office. Minerva often made him work late. Did you know that Louis disliked Minerva very much? She humiliated him publicly."

"Yes, I heard about that. The lady had many enemies. But they weren't all murderers We must keep Louis on the list. Although actually, the guard spoke up to say

he had a long chat about football, that's what they call soccer here, with Louis on his way out about eight thirty."

"And Malik, one of the teachers, told me he left his classroom a few minutes around eight o'clock and saw Abdul Hassan, the one who made a fuss about pamphlets, standing in the shadows."

"Ah, I know that name. There is some kind of scandal brewing at USAID and he is involved. Maybe Minerva got into it and her death is because of it. All right. I'll add that to our findings. When morning came and his replacement opened the big double door to be ready when Randy wanted to drive in, he saw the body on the driveway. I interviewed the guard carefully, asking a French or Fon speaker to be with me and tried to get his records. He says he checks the identity card or passport of everyone coming in since the recent security breach when the Libyan sympathizer tried to enroll in class. But they keep almost no records. The guard insists that most people left right after the classes were dismissed at nine. He said no one entered after that hour. Especially, no white person, not Randy or any other person came in."

"Was it possible that Monique was there late that evening? She told me she hated Minerva and wanted something bad to happen to her."

Mc Duff shuffled through his notes. "No, she's out. The guard and the teacher, Adin, Lydia's husband, who came in very early saw her leave before six o'clock."

"Are we sure everyone left when the big group did?"

"The guard said that the teachers give their classroom keys to him when they leave. He said all the keys were returned that night. But, an off duty guard told me that every now and then a teacher asks a student to give the key to the guard."

"Yes, and we have some suspects who might have still been at the Center after nine o'clock. In order to really suspect them, we must figure out a way that they could leave without being seen."

"You know, the text book for teaching English in the seventh grade has a famous story about poor Bineta who turned into a bird and escaped when she was thwarted in love. Maybe something like that happened. It was late in the day for birds. But we do have some bats."

Chapter 29: Father Akimbo Speaks

Lynne had just returned to her office when Everett telephoned her. “Washington wants me to fly to America again for a briefing. Big things are happening and they want me to know as much as possible. I still haven’t seen you. I’ve missed you.” The tenderness in his voice impressed her. In the past, she had sometimes longed for some real feeling from him. But now, thoughts of Jean Luc’s dancing eyes leaped before her, despite her distrust of him. “Bon voyage. I hope Benin doesn’t erupt while you’re gone.”

“I know you’re brave. But watch yourself. It really might erupt. Something has to happen. Feelings in Benin are running high.”

Lynne tried to keep her mind on her work. The list of things to do never got shorter. The fact that there was a murderer loose in the American community topped up the pressure.

After the night of the branches, protests and demonstrations were almost constant. As they drove through the streets, sometimes James went blocks out of his way to avoid what looked like confrontational mobs. Cotonou was electric with tension. The American Cultural Center was trying to follow its usual routines. Lynne learned more about the back story of present events. The civil servants had been on strike for a year. It was almost impossible to get a permit or passport. For a year, too, the public school teachers had been on strike. Many children just went without lessons. For families with a little money, inadequate private schools had sprung up. Recently, more and more signs of a possible coup or revolution were apparent. Perilous times. And yet, the people lived on, politely and cheerfully, on the whole.

Inside the Cultural Center, the weird construction workers continued their messy and destructive work, following a Washington blue print for security. Real security was not there and wouldn’t be even after the reinforced windows were put in. There were no American soldiers or marines in Benin. The guards at the Center and the Embassy were mostly chosen because they were relatives of the powerful traditional families of Benin. The American Embassy guards had no arms except for wooden billy clubs. They were in awe of white people, and assumed they all were powerful and rich, which was partly true. White people were rich compared to them. Literally hundreds of people came to the Center every week, screened only by the amiable guards. Once called, comrade, most people were disgusted with the empty promises and the bankrupt country, but the communist leader was still president.

As Lynne made plans and preparations for expanding the English Language program she thought,

“I feel like I am building a tidy little building on top of a volcano.”

As she was thinking this, Randy called to Lynne to come to his office. “Father Akimbo won an international award for his Project Songhai, an experimental farm and school near Porto Novo. Father Akimbo is Nigerian and an English speaker, but uses French with his young Beninese trainees and their customers. He wants to talk to you about a program of English for his Songhai self help project.”

Very soon after the customary handshakes, Akimbo and Lynne went to Lynne's office chatting on the way. He was a lively and likeable young man with an international sophistication. "Yes, it would be helpful for our trainees to learn English. It would help them in business and in trade and also help them in their search for employment. Funding? Unfortunately, someone had stolen all the money in the bank and the agency had no funds."

Lynne gave him what she hoped looked like a sympathetic smile, "I guess we are both out of luck. You sell chickens at your farm, I sell English lessons."

Father Akimbo shrugged. He was used to the chronic state of despair and hopelessness of Africa. "I think I will leave you at the door of your office. When conditions change and we have some funds to work with, I will be back."

"Okay. Father, there is so much tension and suspense in the country. No one is at ease. When will this present situation be resolved? The country is at a standstill."

"This was a French colony. The French gave the country freedom when it was no longer profitable for them, but make no mistake, they still are powerful behind the scenes. They want Benin to provide markets for French tomato paste and flour. When they decide that French interests will be more successful under democracy, the communist regime will fall. The situation will change when the French want it to change."