

## Chapter 30: Hurray for Democracy

Lynne respected the intelligence and experience of Father Akimbo. She thought of his strong opinion in the days ahead and waited for some public statement from the French. Then, on the Radio France, she heard a famous commentator on Africa praise democracy. The next day the Beninese President called a National Constitutional Convention. A respected cleric, Monsignor de Souza was appointed as chairman. Representatives from all parts of the country would come to Cotonou for the meetings which would start the following Monday.

Randy called Lynne in to see him. She felt he sometimes did this because he was lonesome and wanted someone to listen to his problems. He was still in the makeshift office. Down the hall, the pounding, dust, and welding continued.

After a perfunctory question about the English Language Program, he told Lynne, "Big problems at USAID. Big. Messy. And oddly, they want my help, my persuasive skills. They know there has been interagency hostility, but the Ambassador insists that I try to solve it."

Lynne wanted to know more, but he changed the subject and started a tirade against the security construction. "They are still there, still disrupting everything. And they don't really know what they are doing. The plans were stupid to start with. How can they make us more secure when they are going to end up once more with a big glass floor to ceiling window in my office? Half of what they do has to be torn out. That supervisor from Washington knows nothing of Africa. He just fired the best carpenter because he saw the man urinating on the street, across from the Center. The idiot doesn't know that is the custom here. We don't provide w.c.s for his crew. Unless you want them in the ELP john," he said, half jokingly.

Lynne protested, "We already have 300 people using the one near our classroom and the janitor only cleans it now and then. The construction people would track in all that plaster and dust."

"Of course. Idiot!" Randy roared. It seemed to give him pleasure to say the word. "Idiot," he repeated.

There was a tap on the door. Just then, Clara, the librarian rushed in. "They are here, three government ministers. They want a copy of the American Constitution."

Randy told her enthusiastically, "Give it to them!"

"I do not have one."

"I must have one somewhere." He rummaged through the dusty books he had rescued from his demolished office. "Here it is. The Constitution, with explanations. It's in English."

"Of course. But someone can translate. Some of the delegates want to use the Code Napoleon, but they can not find a copy. With this, they can get to work immediately."

After she left, Randy gleefully chortled to Lynne, "For once we'll beat the French. You just wait and see. The Beninese constitution will be based on the American system."

Lynne wondered if this blustering patriot was a murderer. Had any real evidence made its way to be examined by experts in America after the bungled investigation in Benin?

Lynne read many murder mysteries in an attempt to escape the real life pressures in Africa. In those stories, investigation seemed so easy, orderly and straight forward. Here, the most elementary things were overlooked. She knew that Randy's guards swore he could not be the murderer. But she wished she knew if Mc McDuff had found Randy's running shoes and if there was plaster dust in the crevices.

## Chapter 31: Just a Country Boy

On her way back to her office she saw Gerald Tangevi in the hall. "Lynne, I hear there is an investigator here from Washington. Please, don't tell him I was in the building that night!" Surprised, she murmured something noncommittal and went on. In the office, she rechecked the class schedule. Gerald had not had a class the night of the murder. What was he doing in the building? Did the man without a country have a guilty secret? Did he too have a good reason to want Minerva dead? Just then the telephone rang.

It was Nicole. She had not spoken to Lynne since she had explained that Lynne's suspicions of her son, Zulu were unfounded. Now her voice seemed almost friendly but her words sounded spiteful. "Now that you know my poor boy is not dangerous, you probably need someone else to suspect. Why don't you turn your attention to Jean Luc? He is a slimy character. And he had good reason to want Minerva dead. I knew them both in Senegal. Check into his past!"

Musing on this new development while she was eating the packed lunch she brought with her, she heard a knock of her office door.

"Come in. *Entrez.*"

In came Felicity, distraught. She poured out a torrent of French. Lynne missed a few words, but got the gist. And what a story! Felicity said she had finished most of her work and decided to take a short nap before she returned home. She was lying on a mat on the floor, just fell asleep. She heard something, opened her eyes. There was Mamadou, naked as the day his mother bore him. She screamed. He said, "Don't be afraid, I only want to love you." She jumped up, got the broom and began to hit him. He ran out the door snatching at his clothes as he went.

Felicity's French was careful and correct. "Madam I am my husband's respected junior wife. When he hears this he will want satisfaction against Mamadou. Those northern people do not know how to treat a woman."

Lynne knew that Mamadou was fresh off the farm, had been raised in a village far in the north. But, didn't he know that was bad behavior, she puzzled. "I will fire him. Don't worry. And if he gives you any more trouble, I will call the police."

"Oh, no, not the police. They will beat him, maybe, kill him. But fire him and tell him my husband will kill him if he touches me."

That night, Lynne headed home after her class ended at nine. She had an easy trip with her own car and driver. On the streets, clusters of people were gathered around radios, listening to the plans for the convention. A large crowd was outside the appliance store that had demonstration televisions turned on in the window, showing convention news on the only station. All the way home she thought about Mamadou. She would fire him, of course. She didn't really need a guard, anyway. She had lived in West Africa five years and most of the time she hadn't had a one.

Mamadou was standing in front of her wall, with a group of friends, listening to news about the convention on the radio. She asked Mamadou to come to talk to her on the veranda. He stood before her, eyes on the ground. His face had a blank and

uncomprehending look. But she had seen his elementary school certificate which he had finally attained after taking difficult examinations at the age of 20. Though he knew no English his French was good.

“Mamadou, Felicity says you bothered her.”

“Madam. I was just courting her.”

“I cannot have this. You are fired. Go now. I do not want to see you again.”

He seemed sad and dazed. “Madam, she is a beautiful woman. In my village beautiful women expect a man to respond to beauty.”

As he left, he stopped and said, “Madame, a Beninese man with a long head came to see you. He said he will return. Madame, you really need me. I can protect you.”

## Chapter 32: Come Fly with Me

After Mamadou left, looking disconsolate, James parked the car in the drive inside the wall. He gave her the car papers and the keys. She locked the antique lock in the rusty tin gate with the old skeleton key. As she crossed to the house, she admired the bougainvillea, flaming with orange and fuchsia blossoms and smelled sweet jasmine blooming.

How good to have the work week over and be in her own home! She was glad to have privacy again. She knew that all the big houses had paid *guardiens*, combination janitors and watchman. But she had noticed in her five years here in this desperately poor country, that the people seemed basically gentle and non violent. She felt having a guard was merely a matter of custom. After all, they were usually young boys or old men, unarmed, and inclined toward sleep on the post. Despite the current civil unrest, after five years in West Africa, she had a basic faith in the people. They were kind to strangers and didn't blame them for their political problems. She felt that on this street her neighbors would look after her.

She put her purse in the big mahogany wardrobe and locked it. Felicity came early in the morning and despite her basic trust in her, she didn't want to tempt her by leaving large amounts of money unattended. And, because cash was used for everything, she always had a big wad of CFA in her purse. She went to the kitchen and rummaged in her little fridge for something to eat. She made a cheese sandwich and poured a glass of cool water.

She was pleased that she had bought a television set even though the first broadcasts of the day on TV began at six PM and had only one channel. Usually, first came the news in French and then sports and then a dreary French movie in Parisian French with slurred pronunciation and little action.

Now, there was a big local story, the convention. But the combination of her unfamiliarity with the names and sections of the country and the wordy oratorical style of the speakers daunted her.

She watched only a short time. Restless, she looked out the window. Her bougainvillea sprawled picturesquely on the crumbling cement wall. The street had almost all African neighbors, with a large unfinished house across the street on the left. Next door to her on the right there was a huge imposing house. The carpenter had told her the Ambassador of Zaire had lived there. One day he got a message to come home. Instead, he escaped to Paris where he had a house. He knew death might await him in Zaire. Now a group of Air France pilots and stewardesses used it to rest and party in. She wrote a few notes in her diary, mentioning her new suspicion of Gerald. She suddenly thought of what Mamadou had told her, that a man with a long head had asked for her earlier. Why would he come to her house? Oh, had she made a mistake? Did she need a guard after all?

Even though she heard loud sounds of revelry from the house next doors, she enjoyed her sleep. It was good to have neighbors. Later she would get acquainted. Tired, she slept deeply. Suddenly, she awoke with a start. It was half light, probably 5 o'clock.

She heard the sound of her car. Someone had pried open the flimsy gate and was in her car, trying to start it and take it. "Arrum arrum arrum," she heard the sound that on a winter morning in Michigan meant there was something wrong with the starter or battery. "Voleur! Thief!", she shouted out the window. She saw from her window that the door on the driver side of the car opened, and someone left the car. A dark slim young man ran out. She ran from her room. As she passed the living room she noticed her TV was gone. She rushed to the door. Somehow it was unlocked. She ran out to the yard, bare footed. An ant bit her. Then she shouted again. "Stop. Arret, help, police, thief." She ran out across the yard, shouting, "Voleur, voleur, thief, help, aideyz moi." When she got out in the street, the thief man was nowhere in sight. No willing neighbors came to her aid. A passing seller, with a huge basket of French bread looked at her, and went on. In the garage of the big unfinished house on her left she could hear the sounds of the Muslims' morning prayer. A boubou dressed figure wearing a turban looked down at her from the top of the unfinished building. But no one came to help her. She ran to the large house next door on the right. She urged their guard in French, "Tell them I need help. Someone broke in, stole my TV and tried to steal my car. He is still in the neighborhood."

The guard answered, "My masters said do not let anyone in. They work for Air France. They had a late party last night. They are tired. They do not want to be awakened. In my job, I do not look for trouble." Her basic trust in Africa was shattered. She had thought she was considered part of the neighborhood and she had been sure that someone would come to help her if she needed them. She went back in the house to see what the thief had stolen. Besides the TV set, the short wave radio was gone. The gold chain she had left on her bedside table was gone as well as the doily it had been on. Luckily her purse was locked up. So that was all. Well, it could be worse. She remembered the Peace Corps director had said at the first orientation meeting when she arrived in West Africa. "I hope you haven't brought anything that is valuable or that you care a lot about. This is a very poor country. Think of it this way, there will be a slow and inevitable transfer of every thing you brought with you into the hands of the local people."

When James arrived that morning he told her why the car didn't start, why the thieves hadn't succeeded in stealing it. Fearing something like this, every night when he went home he took the distributor cap with him.

The attempt to steal the car pained him. He said, "That is *mon bureau*, my office, they tried to take from me and you." He drove her to the nearest police station. In her best French, which was still not like a native, she explained the problem. "My neighbors who were praying down the street didn't help me. Maybe the thief joined them. Come right away. Maybe we can find him."

The police man explained that they would have to give him a ride since he had no car. They took him with them to the house. Instead of looking for the thief, he maddeningly examined her front door very thoroughly. He showed how the flimsy lock could be opened by using a pencil from the outside through the slots of the shuttered

door. And the bolt in the center wasn't deeply seated enough, a good push could open the whole thing.

"Yes I understand. I will get a new door," she said. "And now, now, will you go and ask my neighbors if they have seen the thief."

"We will take care of everything. He sauntered out onto the street and started chatting, laughing and talking with the guard in the big unfinished house."

She sat on her veranda, dully staring at the street with unseeing eyes. The police were uncooperative. The Beninese neighbors ignored her. The French neighbors were sleeping off the effects of their party. Then, in the corner of her eye, she saw someone leaving the Air France house. Five stewardesses, two pilots, and one man without a uniform. Curious, she looked more intently. He seemed to be hurrying to enter the van, between two of the others. It wasn't, it couldn't be... Her eyes must be playing tricks on her. Do all good looking French men look alike?

She must really be sleep dazed. He looked just like Jean Luc!

### Chapter 33: A Turning Point

When the Air France van left the house next door she pulled herself together and asked James to take her to the carpenter's shop to order a strong door. The carpenter came immediately and went to work. After he measured the big expanse and did some calculating, he collected the equivalent of twenty five dollars, half the cost, in advance for the beautiful, unseasoned mahogany. It was the strongest and cheapest wood available.

As she watched the carpenter start his construction of a mahogany door beautiful enough for a church or theatre and she hoped, strong enough to keep out intruders, she tried to regain her previous confidence in life in Africa. But she brooded about seeing John Luc with the Air France people. Now she knew that he always hurried in and out of her house to avoid meeting his friends there and having her see they knew them. But why? He had a right to associate with anyone he pleased.

Felicity arrived and started her daily routine. Lynne told her about the burglary. Felicity muttered in French, "*Malins! Les voisins, c'est les drogues.* Bad people, those neighbors, it's the drugs." But she wouldn't explain. "Madam, we must get Mamadou back."

"After the way he acted with you? You think we should?"

"Yes. He has learned his lesson. He will protect the house. He has ties with the landlord. I can take a zemijohn to the landlord's office and make arrangements for him to come back to work."

Lynne decided to send her on the mission and gave her 100 CFA to pay the zemijohn, the motorcycle taxi. She would wait at the house until she returned in order to see that the house was safe. The two young apprentices of the carpenter were thin and ragged. She knew the temptation to steal a few little things was great.

Surprised that Felicity said to rehire the man who had almost forced himself on her, she realized once again how far she was from understanding Africa. But, she wasn't doing so well in understanding a certain French-English man she had thought she was in love with. Suspicious thoughts about Jean Luc were growing. Whenever anyone acted strange, she started wondering if they were connected to the murder. Jean Luc had seemed nice. But Nicole had warned her against him. Was Lynne's mysterious swain a murderer? And what was Felicity saying about drugs? When she saw him, she would ask him when what time he left the Cultural Center the night of Minerva's murder. Maybe she could tell by the look on his face if he was telling the truth. But she would stage her discussion in a public place. She no longer would feel safe alone with him. She thought of his intense sex appeal. "Come now Lynne, this is a bad un," she told herself. She vowed this was the end. She repeated three times aloud, "I do not want Jean Luc. I do not want Jean Luc. I do not want Jean Luc." Then she added. "I do not like Jean Luc!" That one came easier.

The carpenter said in French, "You spoke, madame?"

She decided to be quiet, but she kept on thinking. She tried looking at the situation coolly. Was he a good suspect as murderer? He had been at the Center Thursday night to teach his class. She didn't know when he left. He had some kind of

secret, relationship with the people next door. "Did snoop Minerva know about that and threaten to expose him? Was it all tied together?"

What guilty secrets did he have? She knew so little of him, it seemed possible that he killed Minerva. Nicole said he knew Minerva in Senegal. He probably disliked her as everyone else did. And was she too one of the women he had romanced? Had he applied for the job with the ELP just to get access to the building in order to kill Minerva privately and courted Lynne to monitor what the officials thought about it? She would tell Mc Duff she didn't trust Jean Luc. Charming as he was, she had always suspected his character. And now, what was he doing with her French neighbors that made sneak around like a teenager out after curfew?

## Chapter 34: A Rival

When Felicity returned with the good news that Mamadou wanted his job back and would be there that night, she hurried off to work. She was three hours late. She rushed into Randy's office as soon as she reached the center. As she entered, she encountered Sherry, the pretty consular officer's wife who taught in Lynne's program. She was just leaving. Again, Lynne got a cold look and a nod in response to her, "Good morning, Sherry!"

"Yes Lynne, what can I do for you?" It was the pleasant Randy, on duty today. She wondered how long that would last.

"I see Sherry just visited you. She has always seemed to resent me. Have you any idea why?"

Randy looked embarrassed. "She just stopped in with a message from her husband. His phone is down. We play rugby together."

"Oh, so you know them fairly well. Well, do you know why she resents me?"

"I learned recently that Sherry had hoped to be appointed Director of the ELP when the other one didn't return. She was a friend of the previous director and he left a letter recommending her. Unfortunately it was misplaced."

"Oh!"

"I didn't read the letter until you were all settled in. And I didn't know there was another qualified person right here. I hope you have given her a good teaching assignment." His voice sounded cold and unfriendly. Was he regretting his choice of directors? She was silent for a minute, but he didn't continue.

"Was that why you wanted to see me?"

"No. My house was broken into last night and things were stolen."

He asked some details and took notes. "I have to send a report to Washington. But, there really is nothing I can do. Maybe you should move."

As always, Lynne was observing him carefully, trying to decide if she thought he was a murderer or her protector "Thanks. But, I like my house. I'm going to have a guard again and I'm having a stronger door made. That should make it more safe. Another thing, can I have James leave the car at the Cultural Center every night?"

"Yes. But don't keep asking favors. I hope that is all. I have a lot of people to see this morning."

She knew there was a crowd of Beninese waiting to see him. This afternoon the national constitutional conventions would start. Americans would be in the background, but American interests were important.

Lynne went back to attack her big work load, feeling distraught and isolated. She wondered if Randy was hoping she would give up and quit her difficult job. She wished Everett would get back to Benin and would be available to her. Right now, his solid virtues seemed appealing.

After her meeting with Randy, Lynne stopped at the American Cultural Center Library for a few words about borrowing some books for the English Language Program. It was a pleasant room and well run with about as many books and magazines as an

American suburban city high school library. It was the best and only English library in the city and was crammed with Benin University English majors, taking turns to get access to their text books.

She saw Allabi, reading at one of the front tables. So much for the vaunted tight security. He looked very non threatening. He smiled in his optimistic way and in a low voice greeted her politely. She noticed he was reading a history of the United States.

Something was teasing her mind. A new danger, or an old one. Ah. Gerald Tangevi. Why did he try to see her yesterday afternoon?

Was he connected to the robbery at her house?

## Chapter 35: Ambassador in Wonderland

Shaken by the robbery, disillusioned about Jean Luc, fearful about Gerald Tangevi's visit and harassed by her erratic boss, Randy, Lynne threw herself into her never-ending duties at the United States Information Agency English Language Program. Glad that she had her own car now, she asked her driver, James, to take her to the Embassy with the accumulated tuition funds which new regulations laid down by Minerva required her to deposit personally. All along the streets, radios blared with news of the start of the national convention which might bring democracy instead of revolution to Benin. The Embassy courtyard was dotted with knots of guards and visitors listening to the crucial meetings.

But radios were not allowed inside the Embassy building. As she waited in a long line at the Embassy administration section, she heard people gossiping in English and French as well as in several African languages. There was talk of the convention and scraps of other conversations reached her ears.

"The cashier is at a meeting."

"Everyone is at a meeting."

"The Ambassador is still ill. She was poisoned at Courtney Browning's party and has terrible pains in her stomach."

Someone protested and said the Ambassador ate dinner at her own home that night and didn't eat at the party. Others went on with versions of the story, as if reciting an often told folk tale, interrupting each other to make corrections and continuations.

"The Peace Corps nurse looked at her. She told her to stay in bed and eat no solid food. But she is still doing some Embassy business. She had a disagreement with her cook who wanted her to lend him money to pay school fees for his twelfth child by his fourth wife. He put ground glass in her food."

Another broke in, "Yes. He tried a fetisher and the spells didn't work."

People sounded sympathetic toward the Ambassador even though they made some jokes about the long cascade of bright yellow, polyester curls tumbling from her serious, middle aged face.

At last it was Lynne's turn to see the surly cashier. He counted the whole bag full of money, three million CFA, slowly and methodically and she finally had a receipt. Just as she was leaving, she was surprised to see an old acquaintance join the line. She and Lita met with the uneasy stance of people who had been strangers, then friends, then enemies starting when they were both volunteers in the Peace Corps in Togo. Then they had both been involved in a mystery surrounding deaths in the American community. They looked warily at each other. At one time Lynne had thought Lita might go to jail but knew that she was now a Fulbright researcher in Benin studying population. She told Lynne she had been here for a year and visited villages to take a census of the inhabitants.

Lynne decided to make a friendly gesture. "We must have lunch before you go to the village again."

“Yeah. Good idea. I’ll let you know when I have some free time. How are you, any love life?”

“Ah, it’s all confused again. How about you?”

“I’ve given up on African men. But, there is a non-African. A real hero type. Sort of French. Who knows?”

A suspicion crossed Lynne’s mind, but she didn’t pursue it.

Soon after she returned to the Cultural Center, Randy suddenly popped into her office. He had made one of his personality transformations. Once again he had a friendly, confidential tone. “Lynne, the Ambassador is going to take a leave of absence for health reasons.”

“Ground glass in her food?”

“So you’ve been listening to the colorful rumors. No, nothing like that. Her cook is a fine man. I’m hoping to convince him to work for me.”

“But what is her problem?”

“She has an ulcer. She had been having stomach problems for a long time, but a terrible emotional shock caused a hemorrhage.”

“And the shock, can I know what it was?”

“You mustn’t tell anyone.” Lynne was relieved to be once again one of those people Randy told his-not-really-secret secrets too. Knowing he was probably telling his tidbit to many people she played along and said, “I won’t tell a soul.”

“Our Alice in Wonderland had a good looking young Togolese lover. The messenger at Courtney’s party told her that he was shot crossing at the border on his way to return to her.

“Oh! Did he have beautiful golden skin?”

“That is what they say. One had golden hair, the other golden skin. His name was Kwami Annan. He is once of those Ghanaian-Togolese that are accused of voting in elections in both countries.”

“Do you know why was he shot?”

“He got involved in the Togolese struggle for democracy. Togolese soldiers followed him out of the country.”

“And shot him at the Beninese border station.”

“You knew this?”

“I’ve been trying to tell you about it since I came. I saw it. Is he dead?”

“Yes, he died almost immediately after the incident.”:

“Tragic! He was a beautiful young man.”

“Yes, the Ambassador thought so too. She almost died over it. He was living with her while he attended the university in Benin.”

He continued, “At least physically, probably the Ambassador will be all right after some treatment in an American hospital. Everett Knowlton is returning by tonight’s plane. He will be acting Ambassador until they appoint a new one.” He gave her a knowing, half-teasing look. “Put in a good word for me, will you? I have heard he’s a friend of yours!”

## Chapter 36: Two Telephone Calls

Randy popped back out as abruptly as he had arrived. The telephone rang. "Lynne Lewis here."

"Inspector Mc Duff here! They finally got me a telephone on my desk. I have been working hard on the case and don't have time to see you," he said gruffly.

Lynne waited, wondering why he had called.

He continued. "But, I could use your help."

"What do you want me to do?"

"That Jean Luc character is shady. See what you can learn about him. Get a better feel for him. As you know, he was teaching at the Cultural Center the night Minerva was killed."

"Mr. Mc Duff, Yes, he a friend of mine, but he, I agree, he is very shady."

"And I have asked a colleague in Senegal to check out what Jean Luc doing in there and if he knew Minerva. But Jean Luc is not the only suspicious teacher in your program. Also, get to know young Gerald Tangevi better. See if you can find a link in the past with Minerva and see if he really is as cool and reasonable as he seems. He has that fine university degree. Is his job at USAID in danger? Does he have secrets he's afraid will come out? The guards say he left the center before classes disbanded the night of the murder. If we seriously suspect either of them, we have to check the witnesses very carefully to find if we have been given really correct information about when they left the center."

"With both, see them in public. We still don't know who our murderer is. You should consider both of them potentially dangerous. And remember. The second murder is always easier."

Lynne's mind leapt into action, making plans. But the phone rang again. It was Everett. "Lynne, "You probably know I am back in I Benin. Now that the Ambassador is gone, they decided they to make me officially Acting Ambassador for a while. Sorry I haven't called. You wouldn't believe the things that have been happening. But I want to see you. Can you ask your driver to deliver you to the Embassy at the close of the day?"

That evening James took her to the Embassy. She showed her ID to a guard, then walked across a little garden, then entered the building that had a metal detector, new since the increased terrorist activity in the world. The secretaries were on their way out. But one stayed at the desk and told her she should go in.

He was working in the Ambassador's palatial office, four times the size of an ordinary one, with Persian rugs, fine overstuffed furniture, works of art on the wall.

Somehow not awed, because this was, after all, her longtime friend and lover, Lynne greeted him, happily.

"How good to see you, Everett! At last!"

Everett laughed. "Yes. Welcome to my humble workplace. We haven't seen each other in a long time. First, some business. I've been wanting to tell you something. You know that character, Allabi, who wanted to attend Your ELP classes and had a Libyan friend who would pay his tuition?"

“Yes. I see him around from time to time. He really doesn’t look sinister in the day light.”

“Yes. The Ambassador turned the case over to me. Some highly placed Beninese official interceded and asked me to talk to him.

It seems the old friend, a Beninese who studied in Libya, offered to pay for the tuition just to help him. The friend is not a Libyan sympathizer at all. He learned to dislike Libya being there. He works for the Beninese government in their foreign affairs department. Our friend Allabi seems naive and rather nice. He said he reads English detective stories and was intrigued by the murder of Minerva. He wants to be in your level Seven class. I’m going to give him permission to join it, if you don’t object.

Lynne was relieved at this official approval of Allabi. She hadn’t reported seeing him in the center library several times. She knew the security ban wasn’t working and somehow hadn’t been able to bear to thwart the optimistic young man by reporting him again.

“That’s great. I think he is really an innocent, ambitious man.”

“Yes. Now, enough talk. Lynne, at last!” This time, it was the Acting Ambassador, the usually staid and careful Everett, who put his arms around her on government property. He told her fervently that she was very important to him. His tender kisses made her feel he meant it.”

Afterwards, they sat close together on the magnificent couch. “Tell me about your life.” Everett said, looking at her fondly. “How are you? What have you been doing while my work made me neglect you?”

Lynne was careful not to confess about her latest temptation to break with him. Everett was such a really a dear.

“I’m fine. Tell me about your life.”

Everett said, “Well, you know, I did this Acting Ambassador bit in Togo. I’m just trying to keep things together. After the night of the branches, and then the National Convention, the Embassy has been deeply involved in trying to negotiate peace between the factions. There is also a problem at USAID that I can’t tell you about. And then, this Minerva business, Mc Duff claims to be close to being able to prove who the killer was. He expects to get it cleared up in two weeks. I hope so. If the country calms down a bit, Gore still plans a visit. Before you came, most business at the Embassy was pushed aside while everyone worked on getting ready for the two hours he will be here. The Cultural Center will host an event for Tipper. Soon you will notice the staff there is concentrating on that too. If the murderer isn’t caught before that, heads will roll, starting with Mc Duff’s and including mine.”

Someone tapped on the door. Everett said, “I told them not to bother me.”

But his secretary said through the door, “There’s something in a newspaper that just hit the streets that you should know. She brought in the little newspapers, and left.

On the front page, a story said that French citizens, some of them Air France employees, had been arrested for transporting illegal drugs. It even listed names. The French somehow got advanced notice and swooped in and talked the group out of jail .

They flew them to France for trial. John Luc's name was included in the list. They identified him as an employee of USAID.

"I bet this drug thing was somehow the reason for Minerva's murder. Jean Luc taught from seven to nine that night. Probably after that he went up and pushed Minerva out the window!" Lynne was pleased to have a solution.

Everett's reaction was more cautious. "Yes, that could be what happened. Mc Duff had better get to work and find some convincing proof."

## Chapter 37: Torrid Zone

The next morning, Lynne entered her office as usual by way of the long, open corridor. The outdoor air blasted her with its intense heat. Thinking of the story of the Ambassador's love affair Randy had told her yesterday, Lynne mused that Africa was torrid in another sense. It was a sexy place. Maybe it was the fertility statues like the huge twice life sized authentic one in the Sheraton with sexual organs five times normal, and, as an African assistant described it, ready for action. When Lynne sent postcards featuring the gigantic statue of a fertility God at Ouida she pasted a little sticker over a crucial part, in order not to offend the sensibilities of the postal officials and her friends in America.

She was not immune to this charged atmosphere. She loved the African men, with their trim, muscular bodies, flashing eyes, high cheekbones, pouty lips. But in her five previous years in West Africa she had had some unfortunate experiences with them. She found they usually had from one to four wives already.

Here in Benin, despite all her intentions to stick to the calm, reasoned life, she had almost fallen in love with half French Jean Luc who she now thought was the murderer. Knowing that he was secretive and probably had several other women in his life, she had still been about to act so rashly with him it would destroy her long time relationship with Everett.

Getting down to work, Lynne called the only one of her teachers who had a telephone, Adin. Since he was Lydia's husband, she could reach him through her. But, she felt it more professional to communicate with him directly. When she asked him if he would take over the class assigned to Jean Luc, he was pleased at the opportunity to earn more money. She just hung up when the telephone rang.

"This is Lita"

"Lita, I am glad to hear from you." Despite their antagonism in the past, she realized she meant it and had been lonely for a woman friend.

"What's up?"

Lita sounded frank and friendly. "I just realized how lonely I am. We used to share a lot in the Peace Corps. Could we get together for a chat?"

"Lita, why don't you come and have a little supper with me? I can't do fancy cooking on my little bottle gas burner, but I can throw something together. At least I have a refrigerator."

"That sounds good. Do you mean tonight?"

"Yes, fine." She explained to her the directions to find her house which had no number and was on a street with no name.

That evening, at six o'clock, Mamadou told her there was a woman at the gate. Lynne showed Lita into her house. Lynne was proud that the house looked like a home, but she was conscious of how uncomfortable it was, even in the early evening, with the extremely high temperature and high humidity. She vowed that she would buy a fan, now that she was in a city that sold them and she had a car to transport one.

"I've made us an omelet and I have French bread and a papaya."

"Whew! Hot enough in here," Lita said, wiping her face. But she ate hungrily. When the omelet was demolished, Lita said, "I know you like helping investigators. Are you looking for the killer of that horrid woman, Minerva?"

"I'd like to help more. But my job is a killer. It keeps me busy every minute of the day. And some evenings."

"Why don't you tell me who you think did it? Knowing you, you must have theories. Some stranger? A Beninese offended by her?"

Even though Lita seemed rather grumpy, Lynne thought how wonderful it was to have someone to talk to. She started at the beginning. She told her the story of the shooting at the border and her suspicion of the Rastafari man who turned out to be the harmless teenage son of Nicole, the Fulbright professor.

"Then, even though I like him, I thought it might be Randy. But the guards said he was at home all evening and night."

"But, now, now! Who do you suspect now?" Lita insisted urgently. "Who do you suspect now?"

"There is a man, part English, part French who works for USAID and who taught in my program. He is in France right now. I think I saw you talking to him at a meeting. I have some new information that makes me distrust him. And I know he disliked her intensely."

Lita exploded. Lynne remembered from their time in Togo how hostile she could be and also how loyal to a suspected man. "Lynne, you are impossible. Jean Luc is no murderer. He's a fine man! The government has framed him with these drug charges. In France they will clear him."

"Now I see. Lita, you said your new lover was not an American or a Beninese. Do you mean it is Jean Luc?"

"Yes, but we have been keeping it quiet until he gets his divorce."

"Divorce?"

Lynne's dismay made Lita in her turn realize something. "Oh no. You aren't involved with him, too?"

"No longer, but we were headed that way. I didn't know he had a wife. What do you know about his relationship with Minerva? He told me he hated her."

"Yes, indeed, he knew her in Senegal and she was a blackmailer, told Jan Luc she would reveal a little indiscretion if he didn't give her money.

"That witch, Miranda demanded money. But really, what she wanted was sex too. Jean Luc was so disgusted with her he was beside himself. But he wouldn't kill her. He is too fine a man!"

Lynne groaned. "You haven't changed. You like these suspicious types."

"Lynne, you're insulting and unfair. I'm sorry I came tonight." She pushed away from the table and stalked to the door. Halfway out of it she stopped and continued. "I can prove that he is innocent. He left the center right after class, with me. I wanted him to spend the night at my house. He wanted us to spend it at his house. You can ask anyone. Ask Professor Adin. He saw us having a little lover's quarrel right outside the gate a few minutes after nine."

## Chapter 38: A Beninese Wedding And A Funeral

The next morning at work Lynne was trying to digest the dramatic interaction with Lita. She gave up, and called Mc Duff.

“Mc Duff here. Ah, Lynne. Your gallant suitor, Jean Luc looks like a likely murderer, doesn't he?”

“I don't think so. I had a private talk with Lita, the Fulbright researcher. She said she met Jean Luc immediately after class and he left with her. She says we can check it out a number of people, including Adin since she and Jean Luc were having a lover's quarrel.” Lynne told him Lita's stories about the love affairs and Minerva's black mail.”

“I'll check this out. No one mentioned this, but may remember if reminded. If witnesses agree it looks like Jean Luc is cleared.”

Later, she was in the big downstairs video room arranging for a showing for an English class. A group of Beninese staff gathered around the television set, avidly listening to the details of the constitutional convention. They scattered when Courtney came early, to attend a three agency meeting. Gerald Tangevi was with him.

Courtney spoke in his mellifluous voice, “Young lady, Lynne, is it? I hear you are doing fine things for our Atlas students. It is commendable that you are trying to keep things normal in these abnormal times.”

That sounded good to Lynne. His continued use of her program to train his grantees was very important to her finances.

“Listen, we are all going to the wedding of my assistant, Selina on Saturday. She taught in your program before we hired her. Would you like to go with us? Gerald here, will act as your escort, I'm sure.”

He was high handed, but he had an infectious smile. She had talked to Selina on the phone. As opposed to the indiscreet and short lived romances of some American expatriates, that of Selina showed constancy and long range planning. She had been engaged for five years all during the time she was earning a degree in America at Bob Jones university. Now she was going to marry her Beninese sweetheart Gilbert Anana who just graduated from a University in Canada.

Lynne wanted to see a real Beninese wedding. And it would be a fine chance to help repair the strained relations between the agencies. Inspector Mc Duff had asked her to watch Gerald. This was a good opportunity for her to see more of him. Right now, with Jean Luc having a fine alibi, Gerald seemed a likely suspect for the murderer.

She said, “Of course.”

“Gerald, will you pick her up in the USAID van Saturday morning?”

“I will be delighted to. I will have our driver talk to her driver to find out where you live.”

Lynne knew this was the best way for them to find her house. Without street names or house numbers, directions depended on some well-known features like public buildings and then directions like “Turn right at the unfinished house, turn left at the trash heap, go straight past the swamp.”

Gerald's smile seemed sweet. "We will come for you at eight o'clock. I tried to visit you at your home last week. You had not returned."

"Yes, the guard told me." She knew she had a question in her voice

"I wanted to talk to you more about that matter I hinted at when I saw you at your office. Someday we must talk about it in private."

That last word made Lynne nervous. She would be sure she was not alone with him as long as he seemed like a good suspect as murderer.

Saturday, a group of twelve crowded into the USAID van and went to the modest Assemblée de Dieu church, which was established by American missionaries and had a white Southern American as minister. It was different from a typical United States wedding. The minister gave Selina a long lecture in French which was then translated into Fon. He instructed her to be subservient to her husband. He said, "Your husband will be tired from his day at work. Make him a good dinner and help him to relax. This will build a happy marriage." Ironically, at the present time, Selina had a demanding job working for Courtney at USAID while her husband was looking for work at the Embassy.

At last, the three-hour ceremony was over. Courtney remained in good spirits. As they left the church he said to Lynne and others around them, "We will have no doubt that Selina is well and truly married."

Everyone went to the big veranda in the back of the church, decorated with American crepe paper and local blossoms for punch and cake. Courtney was charming. His witty talk showed that he had a sympathetic, although ironic view of the Beninese government. He seemed to have an easy, joking relationship with his Beninese employees. Lynne thought of his bad reputation and her earlier reaction to him. Was this the same man whose scornful tirades filled Randy with resentment?

She noticed that everyone she knew that worked at USAID was there, except the very rude Hassan Assan, the man who had tried to take her pamphlets. Many of them had brought portable radios and were catching up on what was happening on the last day of the National convention.

Lynne and Gerald sat at a picnic table. Was there something sinister beneath his exquisite manners and high intelligence?

She said, "Thank you for escorting me."

"I have been enjoying it. Weddings are pleasant to attend. But somehow here in Benin, we get involved in many more ceremonies of a different kind. Funerals are not so nice.

I meant to tell you something at Minerva's funeral."

"Yes. What was it?"

He was quiet as if thinking what phrases to use. Then he merely said, "Lynne, there are some problems in USAID, but I was unwise to mention them. That is my main job and I have a loyalty to the agency."

"You are mysterious."

"Yes. I must be. Ask your friend Everett. Let us talk about something else."

"Ok. It was unpleasant to have a funeral ceremony at the cultural Center."

"Yes. Sadly, there is a possibility of more."

It sounded like a warning. She shivered, despite the ninety degree heat.”

Gerald’s words were interrupted by a group of his colleagues, joining them at the table. That was the last chance they had for private talk. As the others listened to radio reports of the National Convention and commented on them, Lynne kept thinking about Gerald. He was not sexy and gorgeous. He was even odd looking. But there was something special about him. Was it especially good? Or cleverly hidden evil?

Just as she was about to enter the USAID van to return home, she realized Gerald wasn’t with them. She scanned the crowd, trying to see if he was still in the group around the church door. Then she gasped. Gerald was in a very confidential, almost furtive way with a tall, well dressed man who seemed to be a *metis*, a man with half black and half white heritage. It was one of those Air France pilots that had looked with scorn and unfriendliness on her the night her house was broken into. How did Gerald know him? Felicity had hinted that drugs were involved in that house. Was he in the drug business too? And was the drug business tied to Minerva’s death? Maybe she had threatened to tell Washington secrets more serious than misfiled bits of paper. She would have to find out what Gerald was doing at the Cultural Center the night of the murder.

That night the radio carried the dramatic end to the convention. It was decided that there would be free elections in Benin. The old dictator made a peace making speech calling on everyone to vote and everyone to abide by the results of the election.

A wonderful wedding present for Selena!

## Chapter 39: National Voodoo Day

Everyone was in a mood of high anticipation concerning the forthcoming election. All day Sunday the local radio rang with praises of the President and his willingness to allow an election. This was something almost no African ruler would accept.

When Lynne turned the radio on as she was getting ready for work on Monday, the following day, she was surprised when she heard a Beninese government proclamation that all business, public and private, would be suspended until nightfall because the day was a holiday, National Voodoo Religion Day.

She knew statistical sources listed voodoo and other local religions as being practiced by 80 per cent of the Beninese people. But there had never been an official voodoo day holiday. She thought she could figure out why it was started now. Thanks to the successful, peaceful National Convention and the acceptance of its decision by the dictator, for the first time in seventeen years there was free campaigning for the presidency. The dictator agreed to hold elections, but decided to run and was competing with the democracy candidate. Still chairman of the country, he was probably wooing the animist vote even though as a communist for seventeen years he spoke of his atheism. Even the twenty per cent of the Beninese people who called themselves Christian or Muslim had some remnants of voodoo beliefs.

She had expected today while working to do some quiet investigation of Gerald Tangevi after seeing his suspicious meeting with her discredited Air France neighbor at the Beninese wedding. Mc Duff had said Gerald was a top suspect for the murder of awful Minerva. But she immediately changed her plans for the day. With the announcements, all agencies, including The American Cultural Center, would be closed. Lynne would take a holiday, too. Despite Everett's recent declaration of warm feelings for her, she knew she couldn't count on him to spend this holiday with her. Doubtless he, as Acting Ambassador, had many official things to attend to.

She asked her faithful driver, James to take her to the official Voodoo Day celebration. He looked startled, but answered in his careful grammar school French, "Of course, Madam. I will do anything you ask. You are my mother and my father. Because of you, my children are fed."

The radio said the big ceremony was to be held in Ouida, long a stronghold of voodoo priests and officials. It took about forty five minutes to get there on the only east-west road in the south of the country. On the way, she saw a big hand lettered sign at the side of the road written in French, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." An indignant Christian, probably.

Ouida was an overwhelming place, on the ocean, shadeless, with a moist temperature of ninety two. The beach was spotted with booths, tents, low fences and big signs written in African languages and in French. Most proclaimed the names of specific voodoo associations. She noticed the West Cotonou Voodoo Association. That was the area she lived in. Behind and above the booths loomed the big monument, the Bridge of No Return. It had been constructed to attract tourists a few years before, but even so, was a touching monument to the millions of Africans that had passed that area in chains,

forced into little boats to board the ocean going ships that took them to death on the high seas or slavery in America.

Lynne wandered from one association area to another. Each had members chanting or dancing, wearing colorful costumes. They welcomed her and seemed to enjoy having her as a spectator. The sun was blazing, the heat stifling. The humid breeze from the ocean made her feel like she was in a steam bath. The voodoo pope appeared. He was a tall, ornately robed gentleman with a hat much like the Catholic pope's. He walked under a canopy carried by four of the faithful. He made his slow way from one side to the other, scattering blessings and incense.

Lynne saw only one other American in the vast sea of faces, probably two thousand, on the baking beach. One was Lita, the Fulbright researcher. Her official mission was to take a census of village people in Benin. But Lynne had heard that she was also studying a special interest of hers, voodoo. She only gave a distant wave. That dinner meeting when Lita ardently defended the two timing, drug dealing John Luc left them again as adversaries. Far away at the other side of the sea of humanity, she was surprised to see Courtney Browning, the head of United States Aid in Development. He was with an African. It was too far to tell for sure, but was he with the obnoxious man that had tried to steal her pamphlets? What was his name? Abdul Hassan? But Gerald had said he was fired and sent back to Senegal.

At one of the voodoo dance performances she was drawn to, there was a circle of dancing haystacks. One in particular was executing graceful dance steps even though all she could see was a conical haystack, with moving feet. The hay stack man awed her, reminded her of British movies about Africa she had seen when she was a child. The dancing feet were graceful, despite being topped by the cumbersome stack of hay. The haystack danced and walked and occasionally talked. The Africans treated it with great respect. It, he, was considered to be the spirit of punishment for evil or taboo deeds.

Lynne was close. She spoke to it or him in polite French.

"Good day sir. Greetings."

The haystack man answered in French also, "American, welcome, but be careful. You cannot trust your friends. Especially, not gallant men."

"What," Lynne gasped. It was as if a tree had read her mind and spoken, "What do you mean?"

But he danced out of her range, deep into a crowd of voodoo celebrants. Whose voice had she heard? It sounded familiar and unearthly at the same time.