

Chapter 40: Choices

The Sunday after the National Voodoo Celebration, the first democratic election in Benin in eleven years was held. Since it was James' day off with the car, Lynne stayed home. The BBC on her short wave radio gave reports from international observers at the main polling places, agreeing there were few irregularities.

She sat on the veranda, shaded by red bougainvillea, with her feet in a pan of cold water, trying to find some level of comfort that hot, muggy day. She decided to make a serious analysis of where she stood in her search for the murderer of awful Minerva at the Cultural Center. She got out her journal. Lately, the entries had been short and incomplete. Today she would really think things out and get at least a summary written down. She wrote in lists with careful titles. Maybe method in the organization would help her think clearly.

VIOLENT EVENTS IN COTONOU

Importance of discovering the murderer.

1. I will be personally in danger until I learn and make public who killed Minerva. That person can hurt me because he/she is almost surely one of the people I know and interact with.

She continued to write, pausing often, lost in thought. She wrote a second title.

People I once suspected but are probably not guilty:

1. The Rastafari man--he is only Nicole's sullen teenage son.

2. Randy-- he had an alibi for that night.

3. Jean Luc-- a womanizer and drug dealer, but he left the center with Lita before the murder occurred.

She frowned and made a new heading.

Other suspicious characters

1. Pamphlet man, Abdul Hassan--He sneaked around, acts suspicious, was at the center earlier in the evening of the murder. Gerald said he was fired and sent out of the country. But, didn't she see him at the voodoo festival?

2. Napoleon-- a slimy character. He, like everyone else, had fallen into the path of Minerva's wrath. She said she would tell Washington about him. And he was so slippery it was hard to get a straight story out of him. He told Mc Duff that after he talked to Zulu that Thursday night, he went home. When asked which home he went to, he kept changing his story. He had four wives and several girl friends. All of them agreed that he had spent the night with them. No one would be surprised if he had pushed Minerva out of the window.

Lynne looked up from her writing, thinking of this comic character. She kept hearing from more and more people that he had left their precious VCR or video or

stereo, so hard to come by here, half repaired, torn apart on their floor. He had a bad character. But was he a murderer? Somehow, no one took him seriously. And also, how would he have gotten back into the center that night after everyone saw him leave? It was hard to think of him making those dramatic Adidas marks in the dust since he had small feet. But, sometimes here, people wore hand me downs and stuffed paper in the toes if the shoes they were given were too large.

She started writing again.

Main suspect at this time-- Gerald.

Why?

1. He had asked her not to tell Mc Duff that he was at the Cultural Center the night Minerva was killed.

2. She saw him with unsavory neighbor at the wedding.

Stuck again, she stopped writing and thought. But, if Gerald was the murderer he must have worn running shoes that Thursday night. Had Mc Duff and his helpers searched his home for sport shoes? It was not his usual footwear. Why did he kill her? The common reasons? Blackmail? Revenge for her nastiness?

She wrote:

Bottom Line. I don't know who killed Minerva.

I hope Mc Duff has thought of a way to smoke out the murderer.

She decided to ask Mc Duff how thorough he had been in his search for the jogging shoes and what he had learned about them from the lab in Washington.

Late that evening, the BBC reported that Benin's first free election in seven years had been held with only a few incidents of violence and almost no delays in opening. No official results would be available until the paper ballots were counted by hand.

When they were made public, in a continent where democracy was new, the next question was, would the results be accepted or would this be the start of riots or a civil war? Lynne told herself, "Don't borrow trouble. For today, hurray for democracy!"

Chapter 41: A Little Learning

The next morning there was no announcement of results. That was not surprising. Counting by hand takes a long time. And without computers, in some areas without even typewriters, long lists would be made by hand. Many little villages did not have a single telephone. Probably the results would go down to Cotonou by bush taxi.

All that next week, the election was on every mind. The days went by, and still, no announcement. The country held its collective breath. Tension mounted. Lynne tried not to worry. There was nothing she could do about the dangerous situation she, personally was in.

If the results displeased the people and there was a real, armed revolution, Lynne should try to leave the country. She was not an official state department employee and would not automatically be evacuated. As a private person, escape would not be easy. There was only the one small airport with a few flights out each week. And there was only one east west road, going from Ivory Coast through to Nigeria. Going up on the sole north south road would be worse. There was no exit that way.

Mc Duff asked her to come to see him. He was still using his crowded, temporary office at the Cultural Center and according to rumor, still promising his superiors to make an arrest for Minerva's murder soon. Lynne told Mc Duff she thought that now that Jean Luc was out of the picture, Gerald was the best suspect. But, she also wondered about the pamphlet man, Abdul Hassan. Could Mc Duff ask Courtney to check him out?

Mc Duff said in a very definitive way. "Stay away from there, Lynne. It has all been taken care of."

Even though he seemed cross with her, she asked him firmly, "Mr. Mc Duff, you said the jogging shoe print was a good clue. Whose shoes did you examine and what did you learn?"

Mc Duff looked embarrassed. "That whole process was not handled well. At the time, I had almost no staff. I asked a very nice young Beninese Embassy officer to collect shoes from everyone that knew Minerva. But, you know how poor people are here. If they have a pair of jogging shoes, it is a prized possession. He couldn't produce any jogging shoes from the homes of the Beninese staff. He found about four pairs in Randy's closet. Washington said the shoe print was from Adidas. Randy's shoes were all other brands. But his housekeeper said Randy threw away a pair of the day after the murder of Minerva. That is one reason I suspected him so much. His housekeeper admitted that he took the shoes out of the trash and gave them to his son. When we retrieved them we found them old and worn, with almost no tread left and not Adidas."

"So, if Randy was the guilty one, he was smart enough to destroy the shoes he wore that night," Lynne responded.

"True. And we never collected shoes from Jean Luc or Gerald or people outside the center. We haven't been talking about it. When we really get a suspect, we will search the person's homes thoroughly, just in case they still have them."

“Have you sorted out Napoleon’s part in all this? He certainly is an unsavory character.”

“Yes, he is. Very. But slippery. We won’t discount him.”

Chapter 42: Waterloo for Napoleon?

The English Language Program somehow continued and even thrived. The university agronomy program students finished and had a graduation ceremony and party in the courtyard. This was slightly marred by the fact that Napoleon attacked Pierre with his fists in a dispute over an interview with a newsman. Fortunately he was a bad boxer and the teachers pulled the two apart before anyone got hurt.

Lynne was not Napoleon's supervisor, so left the investigation of that incident up to Randy. Even so, she decided to talk to Napoleon again. He was definitely a bad actor, someone that she would be happy to find was the murderer. He had his illegal finger in every pie in the center. Almost everyone had been stung by one of his promises that he would fix something after he received a deposit. Often the object disappeared or was returned even more damaged. Even if he didn't do the murder, maybe he overheard or knew something that would help nail down the person responsible.

All primed for forcing this interview with the elusive repairman, she learned he was in jail. A Frenchman demanded 100 thousand francs for the television set that he had kept for a full year instead of repairing it. She felt that at last, some justice was being done. He had cheated everyone with his scams.

But the employees of the center took up a collection to bail him out. When the solicitor, Dora, the librarian, came to Lynne with the list of contributors, Lynne was amazed. Even Pierre, the video man overlooked Napoleon's public attack on him and contributed. Lynne gave the average amount, to fit in, almost enjoying it, because it was so absurd. He probably had tricked every one on the list and still owed money to most of them.

Lynne mused, "The solidarity of the Beninese work force! I guess I will never understand Africa. And I never want to be on the wrong side of that impressive group loyalty."

When Napoleon came back to work, wearing a magnificent boubou, he danced a turn or two around the floor in celebration, with a cheering group of center employees clapping.

Afterwards, Lynne did have a chat with him. He was buoyed up by the shock of jail and then the release. He looked her straight in the eye for once. "What do you want to know?"

He chattered away, amiably in a mixture of English and French. "I told you to ask Randy who killed her because I knew that he hated her. He has a savage temper. Yes, Minerva was a bad woman. She was always nagging at me, wanted them to fire me. But, that night I was courting a new wife, the sister of Lucien. You can ask him. I was there all night."

"Yes, I will ask. But I believe you."

"Napoleon, now that this terrible thing happened to you and you were only saved by the generosity of your friends, are you going to change? There is a saying, honesty is the best policy."

When she said that, suddenly, the old, sneaky Napoleon was back. He stared at the floor and over her left shoulder and muttered, "Of course, madame. I will get your tape player back tomorrow. I just need a thousand francs for a special screw."

Chapter 43: War! War! In Cotonou!

Lynne talked to Lucien and asked him about Napoleon's alibi. He looked ashamed, but said, "Yes, it is true. Napoleon has many wives and he is a trickster. But he always has money. My sister has no work and needs a man. He is good to her and gives her cloth for dresses. My father has 30 children and can not buy nice things for his children.

Regretfully, Lynne decided that Napoleon was no longer on her suspect list.

By the next Saturday the wait for the results of the election became almost unbearable. Lynne decided do something different, to go to Porto Novo, the official capitol of the country. She knew that Gerald's family lived there. Maybe she could see the house. It might give her some insight into Gerald's character.

James took her on the two lane highway that was the only road that connected a chain of countries, Ivory Coast, Ghana, Togo, Benin, and Nigeria. Children at the side of the roads were selling beautiful rose-colored gasoline in gallon wine bottles. The road was bad and rutted. Every now and then there was a construction zone and they would have to go around a field to continue. Porto Nova was only a short distance from Cotonou, but the trip took an hour.

She asked James to inquire of some people at the market where the Tangevis lived. She knew no other way to find his home. There was no directory or telephone book with addresses here. Since Gerald's father was a famous man, local people probably would know where it was. While she waited for him to make inquiries, she shopped in the picturesque market. There were piles of oranges, platters of African beads, automobile parts, nuts and bolts, racks of cloth, piles of smelly dried fish, handwoven baskets, past date and rejected medicines, plastic pails and teakettles. She bought three handmade red beads.

James returned, looking triumphant and took her to a completely walled compound . It was large and nicely painted and in good repair, but she couldn't tell any more about it. She watched a while, but no one came or went. She gave up and they started to return to Cotonou. Suddenly, they saw the small road which ordinarily had one lane going to Cotonou, and one to Nigeria, converted into two lanes coming from Cotonou. People were shouting. "*Guerre! Guerre! En Cotonou! War! War! In Cotonou*" They saw cars racing madly. It was impossible to enter the main highway . People said that the election results had been announced and the vanquished leader would not accept them. James backed up and tried to get out of the way. Cars were racing through the streets of Porto Novo honking horns, scurrying like hysterical rats trying to escape from a maze. Some people shouted "*On doit aller a Nigerie. You must go to Nigeria. War! War in Cotonou.*"

James headed in the direction of Nigeria but soon saw a sign, Ferme Project Songhai. "We can get shelter here." A haven! She had always meant to visit Father Yakima's model project. They turned in and went up the long drive to a big cement block house with inviting verandas. Father Akimbo welcomed them. They told him what was happening. He said, "They finally announced this morning that the democratic challenger

has won the election. The old communist dictator is out. I wondered if he would accept the results." He shook his head sadly." And the answer is, no. The dictator's forces are revolting." They went into the big common room of the farm. The radio was on. Then the announcer said, in French, "We will now close for our usual two hour lunch break. We will be back at three. "Africa! Africa!. We can't find out whether or not we are at war until they come back from lunch and tell us. While they waited they visited the model farm. Its beautiful bucolic peace calmed Lynne. She looked at the unpainted wood hutches of rabbits, and tame agoutis, the edible muskrat-like rodents called in English, grass cutters. She saw a duck pond and flats of potted orchids, a fenced chicken yard, and pens of clean pigs.

For two hours, they made desultory conversation. As they wandered over the beautiful farm, constantly wiping the perspiration that covered her face, Lynne wondered, was this the end of democracy in Cotonou?. Was this the end of her English Language Program?

Akimba gloomily said "I should have known. In Africa, no leader voluntarily gives up power before death."

They returned to the house and tried the radio. The station was on the air again. The announcer said, in French, of course, "There has been a disturbance at the big Cotonou market, and the perpetrators have been arrested." But he didn't mention any war or general uprising."

Akimbo sent an assistant to the main road to see what was going on out there. When the man returned he said, in careful schoolboy French, "Cars are going toward Cotonou now. There is no problem."

Once their fear of war was over, Lynne asked Father Akimbo, "The Tangevi family lives in town here at Porto Novo. What do you know about Gerald?"

"I once met him at an educational conference in Cotonou. A very intelligent, serious man."

"Did Minerva, attend?"

"The lady that was killed?" He paused. "Yes, she was there. There was an emotional storm around her. Gerald, like me, tried to stay out of her way."

But he had no more to say.

When they returned to Cotonou they saw it was not at war, at least not on the surface. Outwardly it seemed especially peaceful. The BBC commented on the wild false rumors that had circulated. On the last news of the day, the communist leader admitted defeat. He said a new era was beginning in Benin.

The next morning when Lynne bought some french pastries at the bakery on the way to work, the sales woman, wearing a towering print turban said, Thank god for the comrade president. He saved us from a revolution!"

Chapter 44: In Another Country

Nothing was simple in this mysterious land. The challenging democratic president won, but the story came out that he was so ill he was almost carried in to vote. As was the case for sickness of high profile people in this land of poor medical care, he was sent to Paris for treatment. Various sources mentioned his illnesses, slipped disc, typhoid and ulcer. Privately, people nodded and said to each other, "Of course. Voodoo." The Inauguration was put off for three weeks. The people were anxious. If he was not able to take the oath of office, the country would be thrown into chaos. The greatly honored Monsignor de Souza had a radio broadcast in which he asked every school child to say a prayer every day, "Dear god, take care of the new President because we have need of him. He told everyone to pray, as Christians, Muslims, or animists.

It was almost Christmas. Washington faced the realities and postponed the expected visit from the vice president, waiting to see if the inauguration of the new president of Benin proceeded peacefully. And also, waiting until the investigation into Minerva's death was finished. They made a tentative new date for the visit, for three months ahead.

Randy decided to go to America for a week with his family, help them close up their house there and would bring them with him when he returned in January. Mc Duff decided to fly home for what he called consultations. The English Language Program had a week of vacation. Everett was asked to fly to Washington once more for orientation. For some reason, Courtney Browning, next on the state department was passed over as temporary Acting Ambassador. Susan Nelson added that distinction to her other overwhelming duties. They would all be back in time for the scheduled inauguration.

Lynne decided to go with the vacation trend. She had a week of leave coming to her and visited Ghana. Her faithful driver, James took her. They traveled back over the road that lead to Abidjan, stopped briefly at the border stations in Benin and Togo that were so fearful in Lynne's memory, and then drove another twenty miles to similar dual Togo, Ghana borders. It was easy to get out of Togo, but to get into Ghana, she had to pay some dash, tips, and buy an expensive permit for the entry of the car. They learned not to travel after night fall, which came at seven o'clock since there was a regulation against foreign cars on the roads in the dark that resulted in the need to pay in order to travel. On Boxing Day, the 26 of December, the Ghanaian children sang songs and begged for coins dressed like a 16th century explorers and courtiers. Lynne stayed at the Lord Nelson guest house which was falling down, unrepaired since the British left when Ghana became independent in the sixties. Exotic sounds and posters in Esperanto greeted her. Most of the resort was taken up by the West African branch of the international Esperanto society.

Once day when she was sitting in the shade of a palm tree overlooking the ocean, she saw a man in the Esperanto group who looked very much like the tragic golden skinned man. Could it be a brother? He kept staring at her and she stared back. He wore the costume of a Ghanaian chief, made of one long panel of cloth, starting at his feet

and ending by being thrown over one shoulder like a Roman toga. If she spoke to him, would he understand her language? She spoke no Esperanto. When the group stopped, he came near her and stood over her, his shadow adding to that of the palm tree. Since she was in Ghana, she tried English.

“Greetings, sir. Did you have a brother, one who lived in Togo and Benin?”

“Ah madam I did. My poor lost brother. I too lived in Togo. In fact, I met you there”

“Me?”

“Were you the Fulbright professor there?”

“Yes,”

“I had a friend attending the University of Togo. She was in your class. She was Beninese, the daughter of a great man.

“Tangevi?”

“Yes.”

“Her brother, Gerald works with me.”

“Ah madame, do you know an American lady named Minerva?”

“Yes, I did.”

“One day my friend was crying. That lady had threatened to reveal her brother’s secrets and keep him from getting a fine job at USAID. He knew Minerva in a post in Senegal when they both served there.”

““What had he done?”

“Really nothing. He had helped his father in a little plan to try to overthrow the dictator. The plan failed and no one accused the father, but if the US had known they wouldn’t have hired him.”

“She wanted money, but he had none. He got the job, but agreed to pay her part of his salary each month.”

“Why are telling me all this?”

“God gave me this opportunity. Perhaps you can help. Hiding it has done no good. Maybe you can stop her. She is a bad woman!”

Lynne was caught up in the story. Yes, bad. Then she answered, “She is no longer bad. Someone pushed her out of a window. She is dead!”

Chapter 45: Serpents In Paradise

After her return from Ghana, Monday morning, Lynne was eager to talk to Mc Duff. She was sure now she knew the truth. Gerald was the murderer. He had more than one possible motive. And he had admitted to her he was at the center the night of the murder, even though he didn't have a class. They just had to figure out how he had gotten out after killing that unpleasant woman. When Lynne got to the office, she saw that the security construction crew had finished their work and made a half-hearted attempt at cleaning up after themselves. Peeking in through the open door, she saw Randy's things had been returned to his office. But she was frustrated to learn that neither Randy and nor Mc Duff would return until the Air France plane came in from Paris that night.

She found morale was good at the center and in Benin. The word from Paris was the president elect was making a good recovery and the date for the inauguration was confirmed for a week from Sunday.

She worked hard the rest of the day, getting the program going after a week's vacation. She wrote a careful letter to Mc Duff, giving him all her new evidence and saying how sure she was that Gerald was the most likely suspect. She put it in his box where he would get it when he first came back to work. She was not going to be in the office Tuesday morning. She had long been scheduled to travel in the Cultural Center Car up North to Natitingo to discuss the possibility of having an extension branch in the northland.

The next morning when the center van driven by Placide pulled up in front of her house at eight o'clock, she was shocked to see on the left side of the second seat a familiar, and right now, frightening face. Gerald said pleasantly, "Good morning, Lynne.

He explained, "USAID wants me to check out some things up North and as an economy measure, asked if I could go in the car with you."

She made an effort to return his greeting calmly. She decided to take advantage of the situation to ask him some questions. He probably had no idea she suspected him. If he was the murderer, she was safe with the driver there. After exchange of some small talk she said in as friendly and normal tone as she could muster, "Gerald, you didn't want me to tell Mc Duff you were at the center the night Minerva was killed. Why not? And why were you there?"

"I didn't want certain affairs made public. But, I was there to right a wrong. That man who tried to take the pamphlets was causing trouble for USAID. I wanted to reason with him and stop him."

"Can you tell me about it?"

"No, the office is trying to keep it quiet. But, Mc Duff knows all about it."

"How long were you at the center?"

"We met about eight o'clock and were talking outside the class rooms for about a half hour. But the man would not listen, was abusive to me and wanted me to give him

money. I left before the classes ended. He followed me out, immediately and tried to continue the conversation outside the gate, but I got on my moto and rushed away.

He obviously was impervious to guilt and suspicion. She had once though his oddly shaped head strange and appealing. Now his whole appearance seemed sinister. She felt a chill. She would have to stay close to the driver and away from this dangerous man. She didn't go on with her questions. Probably it was better not to let him know what she knew about him and what she had told Mc Duff in the letter back at the office.

They went by way of Ouida. Lynne had been told to improve her knowledge of the country by visiting two important historic sites at Ouida. On Voodoo day she had seen the other, the Place of No return. She was going to look at two opposing religious sites, right next to each other. One was a beautiful, spired Catholic Church that had been there for three hundred years. Right next to it, for far more than three hundred years had been the temple of the python. Before she started her Peace Corps tour of duty, she visited the African museum in Washington. She asked the charming Ghanaian man who was the director what she should expect to find in West Africa. He said, "You are going to paradise."

She thought of that now. She had not found it to be completely a paradise. But some parts of it had been a paradise for her. And now she was going to see a serpent. This voodoo site featured large pythons in a cage and a head priest of the python fetish that took care of it. People could come and pay a small fee and ask the priest to ask the python to intercede for them and help them with their problem. She wasn't eager for the encounter. She didn't like snakes.

Both of these contrasting religious sites had a backdrop of tropical trees and palm trees, close to the ocean, with no other house or buildings, on a large cleared area of sand. Gerald agreed to the visit, and said he went as a man on a pilgrimage, desperately seeking supernatural help because of his situation of psychological statelessness. First they visited the church with the stations of the cross showing black figures, done by a German artist. Then they went to the temple of the serpent. Gerald said he would pray there. Maybe the priest would have some words of folk wisdom as to how he could gain acceptance by his people. Lynne in all this stayed as close to the driver as she could trying to avoid being near either the snakes or Gerald. She distrusted Gerald and doubted the sincerity of his mission to the python temple. He went with the priest to the python's cage. Under his guidance, he stroked the large python in the outside cage, then went into the inner sanctum with the priest.

Suddenly she heard people shouting in French, and saw several African languages, and saw a cluster of excited people pushing their way into the inner room. Then she saw four tall young men carry out an inert body. It looked like Gerald. It was Gerald! "He was bit by a serpent." She heard the phrase in French from many lips. But she knew that pythons do not bite. They crush their victims and then swallow them whole. If a snake bit him, it was not a python. Someone got the priest from the Catholic Church. He talked to the people gathered around in French and Yoruba and then explained the situation in English to Lynne. He talked to the fetish priest who was very

upset. “He owns a red mamba, very poisonous. He always keeps it in a cage. He brought M. Tangevi to the back area room to talk about prayers and priestly fees. He left for a moment, then came back to see the red mamba was out of the cage and had bit Tangevi.”

“Was anyone else in that area?”

“There was just old Jobo. He sometimes sweeps for me for a coin or two. But he is a poor cousin of the Tangevis.”

“Where is he now?”

“He told me he was going home.”

Gerald was in almost unconscious. Lynne’s driver and the priest discussed what to do. There was a healing fetisher, in the next town. They put Gerald in the van and they jumped in, trying to revive him as they drove.

The fetisher put a poultice on Gerald and cursed his enemies. Gerald didn’t respond. Then left the priest there and continued to Cotonou where they hoped there would be anti venom medicine. Lynne sat in the second seat with Gerald’s head in her lap. She wiped his face from a bottle of drinking water she had brought.

She thought about this disaster. Who could have accomplished the attack? Only someone at the serpent temple, probably that part time sweeper. Was he paid to release the mamba by an enemy of Gerald? But how would he know Gerald was planning the visit? Only people in his office in Cotonou or his friends there would know. Had someone, alerted in Cotonou got word to the sweeper to wait in the python house, looking for a moment to release the snake?

She tried to get Gerald to rest, but he was half unconscious, moaning and muttering almost incoherently. He opened his eyes wide. “Lynne, someone knew I would be here. He hired my cousin to open the cage.”

“Who?, Why?”

“I know who killed Minerva. He knew that. I saw his car parked on the street in back he knew I knew he killed her.” He fell asleep for a moment, then continued. “Blackmail ... Senegal. He had to pay. He was there that night. There is a hole in the wall.”

“Who, Gerald. Who was there?” But, Gerald seemed asleep or unconscious. The driver drove as fast as he could on the narrow, rutted road the road to Lome. Gerald lay collapsed in the. She tried to remember what people do for snakebite. All she could think of was a serum.

He roused a little again and muttered, “I didn’t want to tell. He was good to me, helped me find work.” He continued to mutter scraps of sentences, and words. Some made sense to Lynne. Others didn’t. I tried to visit you at your house. I wanted to tell you not to trust... My cousin at Air France knew... Then his muttering turned to loud raving.

“Lynne, does he have a fever?” the driver asked. No flush was apparent on his dark But skin , but it was burning hot to the touch seat.

Now he was shouting, delirious. "I asked him to explain, last week I was visiting my friend, I saw his car. I saw him, told him. Now he paid my cousin to kill me."

"Who, Gerald, who are you talking about?"

But Gerald seemed to be really in a coma and said nothing, just seemed to struggle to keep producing deep gasping breaths.

They finally got to the Peace Corps medical office they told the nurse Gerald had been bitten by a red mamba. She examined him "He's in really bad condition. Have someone contact his family. I can give him some venom treatment, but he needs expert good care. His family should fly him to France." She said softly and sympathetically to Lynne, "I'm sorry to have to tell you this. You may not see Gerald again. The red mamba bite is usually fatal."

Chapter 46: Finding the Truth

The attack on Gerald, combined with his near-death semi-conscious disoriented mutterings convinced Lynne of Gerald's innocence, even his benevolence. She believed he knew who the murderer of Minera was and would have told her if he had not lapsed into a coma.

After getting assurance that Gerald's family would pay for the charges, the Peace Corps rushed Gerald to the airport in time to catch the six PM Air France flight to Paris where he would be taken to a good hospital.

Exhausted, Lynne asked the driver to take her home. She felt sad and once again remembered how much she had liked Gerald before her suspicions of him grew.

At the office the first thing the next morning, Lynne got a call from Mc Duff. "Come and see me, right away. We must talk."

When she got to his office Mc Duff plunged right in. He told her that he had spoken by telephone to the French security and explained that Gerald should be questioned as soon as he was well enough, to find who he thought was responsible for the attack on him. But the doctor in charge told the French police that Gerald might never regain consciousness. He said not only were red mamba bites usually fatal, but too many hours had gone by before Gerald got the antidote.

Mc Duff went on. "I read the note written before you left. Now this attack on Gerald. Tell me about it. Why were you and Gerald there in the first place?"

She told him about the visit to the python fetisher that had been scheduled by Randy and Gerald's office as part of business trips for each of them. She explained that Gerald went in the back room, was bitten by a red mamba and rushed to Lome.

"He was in bad shape, but he tried to talk to me on the way to Lome in the car. He was often incoherent but I think I can piece it together. He said that an important person must have hired his cousin, the sweeper to try to kill him because of his knowledge about Minerva's death. Gerald was at the center the night of the murder about eight where he talked to the pamphlet man. He left before nine. Later in the evening, he was visiting a friend who lives on the street behind the Cultural Center. He saw the car of an important person he knew parked on the street behind the center about 10 o'clock. He thought about it after he saw Minerva's body the next day. The car owner was someone who had helped him get work. He knew it would cause all kinds of problems if he told about it so he wanted to be especially fair and give the person a chance to explain before he told any one about it. He was just about to tell me the name of the person, when he slipped into his last coma. He said, "He didn't explain. He just had me killed!"

Lynne sighed. "Poor Gerald. I believe his story."

"Yes, I'm inclined to believe him too. But, even if we know the murderer left a car in back, how did he get in the center and how would he get out? And then did he circle that long block to get his car? Again?"

"Ah, I left out something very important. One thing he muttered was that there is a hole in the back of the wall near the car. Could that be true?"

Mc Duff was on the phone. "Louis, you manage this building and grounds." When Mc Duff told Louis the story about the hole, Louis was completely silent.

"Well?"

Mc Duff listened, then said to Lynne. "He says he does not know, that he has never looked at the back of the building."

"Get the guard from the front gate in here immediately, Louis. You come with him."

In a few minutes they were both in the little office, looking sheepish. Mc Duff turned to the guard. "Do you speak English? Is there a hole in the back of the wall of the building? Do you understand my question?"

The guard looked puzzled. "You asked is the back wall casse, broke?"

"Well?"

The guard earnestly explained in a combination of French and English that the guards never circled the building when on duty. They had instructions to stay in the guard room and watch who came in.

Hearing this, Mc Duff had a look of utter scorn. But, with great effort he continued calmly, and civilly. He turned to Louis, "And, who is in charge of upkeep? Someone must inspect things and make repairs. Who inspects the wall?"

Louis said, "The Embassy is in charge of repair. But they do not inspect. If we notice problems and insist, they come and patch things up."

Mc Duff stood up. "Ok, then, let's go and look." Across the street from the scrub land and the wall, there was a big two story apartment house that covered most of the block. Louis kept encountering people on the street that he knew and following the African tradition stopped to say hello to each and shake their hands. They stood gawking as the group from the Cultural Center made their search.

Mc Duff, the guard, Louis, and Lynne pushed their way onto the scrub land behind the little building that held the class rooms. The sun was broiling hot. The land was littered with wind blown trash. Some nettles caught on their ankles. They puffed, sweated, and wheezed as they pushed their way to the back wall. From a distance the area around it looked okay, even beautiful. There were palms growing near it, flashy bougainvillea, a large, dramatic cactus. But, when they checked the full length of the wall, pushing aside the vegetation, they found in it, a breach about the size of a big man. Looking around it, they found signs of recent entry and damage to the weeds. Mc Duff took a plastic bag from his pocket and used it to retrieve some scraps of cloth that had stuck on the brambles near the wall. The ground didn't show any marks from Adidas shoes, of course. There weren't many patches of dirt and there had been several rains since the night of the murder.

They made their way back to the center, and mopped their faces, streaming with perspiration, with kleenex from Mc Duff's precious box, brought from America.

After the guard and Louis had left, Lynne said. "Well, now we know. All this time, anyone who happened to know about that hole could go in and out whenever they

wanted to. And we could start all over with our list of possible suspects now that we know this.”

“True, “ Mc Duff said. “But, you and I really know who it must be. The way is clear to get him to admit it. We are back to the person I told you all along was the obvious murderer. He announced that he hated Minerva, his career was threatened by her, he is a man with an erratic personality, unable to control his temper. Did he ever tell you the once in China he smashed his hand through a pane of glass in anger? The Embassy had weeks of negotiations to get him forgiven for that.”

You are back to Randy again. But his guard gave him an alibi.”

“While you were in Ouida, I was busy. I went to his house and interviewed both of his guards, the one on duty all day from seven to seven and the one on duty at night from seven at night until seven in the morning. I took along an interpreter who speaks French and Fon to get everything clear and precise. I realize a lot depends on just exactly what question you ask. I had the translator help me tell them I was sure Randy had gotten out that night. Had the one on duty perhaps been asleep for a few minutes? They said, no, they had been alert every second and had not left their post. But when I bullied them and insisted, the young, the one who works days said, of course, it is only our duty to guard the front door. We are required to stay there.”

“Front door?” I groaned.” Is there another door?”

“Oh yes,” they said. There is a little side gate. And the garage nearby and has a back door. The master can use that whenever he wants.”

“Oh, Africa, I keep getting into these traps. If you don’t ask the right question, you don’t get the right answer. Since then, I talked to his housekeeper. She heard him sneak out of the house just before eight and she heard the car too. So. Forget poor Gerald. We have only one problem. How are we going to get Randy to admit that he pushed Minerva out of the window?”

“Oh, poor Randy is in trouble,” Lynne said.

“Yes, Lynne, he is in deep trouble.” McDuff mused aloud. “Randy is a walker. Chances are he is the only American of authority who in this heat has walked around this neighborhood, including past the back wall in years. But, maybe having a back entrance in his house gave him the idea of looking for one at the office. I knew he had the personality and the motive for the murder. Now I that know his alibi is blown I’m going to find a way to get this guilty and emotional man to confess.”

Chapter 47: Mc Duff Has a Plan

Lynne was deep in thought as she returned to her office. She knew that Mc Duff at this point in the murder in the Peace Corps had arranged a reenactment, inviting everyone who had been in the room when the death occurred to repeat their actions. He seemed to like that sort of thing. Maybe he learned it in detective school. Or maybe it was a hangover from a childhood reading Agatha Christie mysteries.

She wondered if he would try something like it again. But, how could the events surrounding the defenestration be reenacted? This murder had been done privately in a room with probably only the murderer and Miranda. And no one else would admit to being anywhere in the building.

The next day, Mc Duff called her to his office again. "Tony Mariani was in charge of an investigation of s murder in the American community in Togo. You participated. You remember he called for a *palabre* or palaver as it is called in Ghana, an African custom in which they have a meeting of all concerned people to discuss a problem, pool their information and come up with a solution. It worked in Togo, more or less. Someone was moved to admit knowing some crucial evidence."

Lynne remembered very well and the shocking discovery that came out during the meeting. Mc Duff continued, "I had this letter sent to about one hundred selected US government employees who had some contact with Miranda at the Embassy, USAID or the Cultural Center. They are ordered to attend a meeting here at 4 o'clock. It is signed by the Acting Ambassador, Everett Knowlton." When he said this name, he looked significantly at Lynne. He returned from Washington several days ago. I had the letters hand carried to the offices so we people they got them." He said he sent a different letter to the students who attended classes that night in the English Language Program. He promised them a free book for attending.

He passed two letters to her. She glanced at them. Yes they should bring them to the meeting. She had some doubts about the value of holding it. With so many people there, witnesses would be timid and reluctant to reveal what they knew. But she didn't protest. He was the boss. And, some information might come out.

She saw the list was long but still incomplete.

Lynne guessed that Mc Duff just wanted a crowd to mask the fact that he was out to get Randy and was hoping, possibly, some new evidence to convict him would come or Randy would be pressured into confessing.

The next day by three PM rented chairs were in rows, filling all available spaces in the courtyard. The cement stage had big wooden chairs and microphones on for dignitaries and speakers. From the loud speaker came lively American patriotic music. Napoleon, who was in charge of the public address system must be treating this as a celebration, like graduation. Lynne made a check of her classrooms before the big meeting. She wanted to be sure they were all locked to keep the crowd out. Regular classes would be held at 7 PM and she wanted them to remain clean and trouble free. When she went to classroom and entered the hall leading to the little W.C. she turned the

handle on the closed W.C. door to open it and check it. But it wouldn't open. It must be locked on the inside. She waited politely about five minutes, but when no one left, she knocked on the door gently. "*Qui est la?* Who is in there?"

But there was no answer. After five more minutes, she became more aggressive. She banged on the door, hard and said several times, in French and in English in a loud, stern voice, "Who's there? You must leave. We need the room." There was no sound from inside.

What should she do? Maybe the person inside was sick. Or maybe it was a thief, waiting inside until he found a good time to leave and creep into one of the other rooms to steal something. She had an awful thought. What if there was a dead body in there? If the person actually died, the Beninese would want an exorcism service before they would enter the center again. The meeting that was so important to the community and the American government would have to be postponed for a long time. After much banging, she saw by her watch the meeting was about to start. The courtyard was full of people. She felt definitely she should do something and stood at the entrance of room E, wondering. She saw Mc Duff on his way to the stage. She asked him, "What shall I do. I think there's someone inside."

"Well, we don't have time for that now. The meeting is about to begin. It's very important to hold it."

"I'll ask someone to stay here and stop the person when he finally leaves." Just then, William, the young enthusiastic teacher she had hired for the level six class entered the courtyard. Lynne stopped him and explained the situation to him. She asked him to stay at the door of Room E and check the person out when he finally is ready to leave. If there is anything suspicious about him, take him to a guard."

William gave his radiant smile. "I will be glad to help in any way, Lynne"

By ten minutes after four o'clock there were at least 200 people in the courtyard. The letters had done their work. Probably some people came without receiving a letter, just for curiosity. Everett presided as Acting Ambassador to give the meeting solemnity. He stood before the crowd in a light weight navy suit, looking the part of a presiding diplomat. When there was silence, he said in careful, correct French, "Ladies and gentlemen, we have an official from Washington here with us, a specialist in criminal affairs. He will be in charge of this meeting which we hope will shed light on the unfortunate death of Minerva Jones, our much esteemed RPMAO, traveling administrator, sent from Washington. Security Officer Mc Duff, please take over the meeting." And he sat down with his eyes fixed on Mc Duff.

Mc Duff stood and looked over the crowd. He looked as if he wondered what he had been thinking to call this meeting. After a pause he started talking. He didn't know French and at least half of the people there couldn't completely understand him. He explained that he was looking for people who had been in the center the day Minerva was pushed out of the window.

Sybil Sanford, the mousy looking Peace Corps Director's wife, sat in the second row close to Lynne and was listening intently.

First, Mc Duff described the scene when the Cultural Center employees came to work the day after the murder. He asked if there were any questions? He was surprised when Sherry Copeland asked him, "There was an Adidas shoe print in the dust near the window she fell from. You collected some people's shoes and sent them to Washington. Did you find a match for the tread on the sole?"

Mc Duff looked cross. "No. We didn't. But many days had passed before I got on the case. The murderer had plenty of time to dispose of those incriminating shoes. Probably he gave me some old shoes, just to look like he was cooperating."

He looked at Sherry at the beginning of the answer, but then his eyes seemed to shift to the front row where the heads of the three American agencies sat.

Mc Duff consulted his notes. He said, "Now, we will talk about who was at the center at the precise time Minerva was pushed out the window.

Please, will Koffi Amanou the guard who was on duty stand up?"

Poor Koffi! The new husband of Selina from USAID, Gilbert Anana, sitting near him spoke up. "Please, sir, Koffi is not used to speaking before crowds and does not know the English perfectly. May I offer my services as translator?"

Mc Duff agreed, and the three way question answer sequence started. "Who left the Center between 5 and 8?"

"Randy, Monica, Napoleon, Lynne, the rest of the Beninese staff."

"When did the students leave the center?"

After consultation with Koffi, answered, "Classes were over at nine. By 9:15 most of them left. They do not sign out so the guard can be sure exactly who left and when."

"And, when did the teachers leave?"

Gerald was there for a while. He left with the Senegalese man who worked at USAID at about 8:30. The four teachers, Sherry, Karim, Adin, and Jean Luc left by 9:20." They stopped by the guard's shelter and left their classroom keys.

"Who left afterwards?"

"Lydia left a few minutes after the teachers. After that, no one left. No one at all before the guard went off duty at 7 AM. And before he left, we all saw Minerva's dead body."

Mc Duff said, "So you have no answer to who was there and who pushed Minerva out the window." He paused dramatically. "Let me tell you, we have learned that there is a hole in the back wall. Anyone that knew about it could push through the weeds and enter the center and then leave with perfect ease."

Almost everyone in the crowd had a reaction. Most of the Americans were shocked and angry, muttering about incompetence and poor management. Some of the Beninese employees of the Cultural Center nodded to each other. "Yes, I knew that." or "Yes, I told you about that." Yes, I had heard rumors of that hole."

Mc Duff said, "Now, that problem is cleared up. Let us get to the key situation." He said the death room was locked until shortly before the murder. "Who had keys?"

Randy spoke up, "Monique and Louis had keys. After the death, we locked the room again and put our keys in the safe in Louis' room."

"Ah. It was your room she fell from. So you had a key, Randy." He said this with emphasis and seemed about to go on. But Monique, usually silent in big meetings stood up and said, "Please, excuse me, it was not just the three of us who had keys. Napoleon had a key. He used it when he tried to fix the tape player in the director's office and, never returned it even though I asked For it. Napoleon owed people a lot of favors. He lent that key to people who said they needed to get into the office when it was locked and I wasn't at my desk."

Many people swiveled and turned to observe Napoleon who looked guilty and sneaky as usual.

Mc Duff looked unhappy. His chain of evidence was partially broken. But he went on. "Public Affairs Officer Randy Powell, you are an honored man, the director of this center. But you disliked Minerva, didn't you?"

Randy said firmly, "I am a religious man. I try not to dislike anyone."

Mc Duff said, "Yes, but..."

Randy relented, "All right, I'm sorry for it, but I disliked her and told people I hated her in public."

"And you admit that you had a key to your office."

"Of course."

"Now, we know there was a hole in the back wall. You took inspection tours of the center and also took long runs in the neighborhood. You could have discovered that back way in and out."

Randy was used to controlling meetings, to being deferred to as the sole foreign service officer in the American Cultural Center. This was his realm. He was a tall slim man. He had left his cow boy boots at home today, was wearing some conservative black tie shoes. His face was a picture of rage. Randy said, "I could have known about it, but I didn't. You sound like you are trying to pin the murder of that terrible woman on me. But I did not return to the center that night. My house guards will tell you I returned to my house at around six pm and didn't leave again."

"You are hiding something. Your guards also told me that you have a back door to your house that they do not check. They say you keep your car in the back where you can drive it out and return without them knowing about it. Randy, I have a witness." McDuff called on Randy's cook. "When did you leave the house?"

Lucky for him the cook spoke English. She was a buxom, middle aged woman with a perpetual ingratiating smile on her face. "I made supper for Mr. Randy, a good man, a fine boss. I cleaned the dishes and then cut up the pineapple for breakfast. At eight I went out the back door. My work was finished."

"Did you see anyone when you left. Yes, I saw Mr. Randy. He went to get his car in the back of the house."

"Which way did he go?"

"Toward Embassy Road, toward the office. I know he did nothing bad. He is a good man."

“But he did leave the house after eight? Thank you.” There was deep satisfaction in his voice.

Mc Duff looked up as if locating the center guards who could make an arrest.

Randy had that rage-out-of-control look on his face that Lynne had seen several times. Randy burst out, “I did not kill Minerva. I couldn’t have done it. I will tell you where I was.” He looked out at someone in the audience and said, “I’m sorry my dear, but I must do this. I spent the time from eight until morning at the house of Sherry Copeland.”

Mc Duff said, “Is this true?”

Sherry spoke up. Even in the heat of the African late afternoon, she looked like a neat Barbie doll just out of the package. She was all in pink with a pink bow in her hair. “Yes, it is true. He was with me from about eight o’clock until seven in the morning. My husband was out of town.”

For a moment Mc Duff was speechless. He had not planned on this. Lynne thought he must be regretting this palaver which had embarrassed the Embassy, shamed two members of the diplomatic corps, and had not found the murderer.

There was an uproar of private conversations. Everett, who had opened the meeting, stood up. Mc Duff said in a low voice, “This is terrible. Maybe we should end the meeting.”

He struggled for words to dismiss the crowd which was muttering, murmuring, and gabbling in French, English, Fon, Hausa, Mina, and Yoruba. Randy had cleared himself, at the price of a public scandal. Now, who was left as a suspect? Who was the real murderer?

Chapter 48. Solving the Locked Door Mystery

Mc Duff was just about to give up and call the meeting a failure. But at this moment, a man burst out of Classroom E, eluding William who was chasing him. It was the pamphlet man. He pushed his way through the crowd and stopped at the foot of the elevated platform where Mc Duff and the other officials sat. He said in a loud voice, in good, English, with a French African accent, "I will tell you who the murderer is. They thought they were finished with me. They gave me a little money, and told me to go back to Senegal. But I returned. I will reveal his crime, the man they call the chevalier. They call him that because he likes to ride the young good looking African men that work for him. But I didn't know that. I thought he loved me. He promised to help my career, then he fired me. The witch Minerva heard us arguing about it. She is a blackmailer. When he wouldn't pay she said she would tell the world. Early that Thursday night I was at the center. First, Gerald Tangevi talked to me, asked me not to cause trouble for USAID. Stupid meddler! I left with him through the front gate. ...but I returned by the back way later nine that Thursday night. I saw his car parked near the hole. Do you know who I am talking about?"

Lynne noticed that Courtney had stood up, was trying to push through the crowded rows of seating that led to the door. McDuff said,

"Courtney, stay where you were. Many of us know this man threatened to blackmail you. But now, he is telling more. Let us hear it." He looked in a receptive way at the pamphlet man and said, "Please tell us what you saw."

"Later that evening I was visiting a friend on the street behind the center. Many people live there. White people think that no one sees them because there are no white people around. But we see everything, especially a strange white man. I saw Courtney park his car. He was wearing a leisure suit and sneakers. I followed him, carefully so he couldn't see me. after he pushed his way through the weeds and brambles, I did too. The thorns tore my shirt and scratched my arms. Then, I waited in the compound of the center, hiding in the shadows. I went into the building after him, He talked to Minerva, got a key from his pocket, asked her to enter so they could talk and he could give her something. I think she expected money. From the outside I could not see, but I heard a scream, and crash, and a thump. I hid under a desk. Courtney came out."

"Courtney, go with our guards to the director's office. Mr. Acting Ambassador, come with us. We must talk." Mc Duff's voice sounded excited. Then he looked at the crowd with a pleased expression. "The rest of you may go. This has been a fine palaver."

Chapter 49: The Four W's and How

Lynne returned to her house, keyed up. Was the mystery really solved? She was cut off from all sources of information. She didn't even have a telephone. As close as she and Everett were in some ways, he was on the inside, she, on the outside.

She slept restlessly that night, woke early, eager to get to work and learn what people were saying.

There was a message from Everett in her box. "Lynne, sorry I couldn't talk to you last night about the dramatic revelations at the *palabre*. But, there will be an official meeting about it for a select few at 10:00 o'clock in the Ambassador's big office, which I am using now days. I made sure that you are invited."

She got to the Embassy on the dot of ten. As she entered the room, she saw she was indeed in elite company. Everett was sitting at the huge mahogany Ambassador's desk. Randy, Mc Duff, and Susan Nelson, the Peace Corps Director and his wife were all there. Lynne wondered why they were included. And there was a somberly dressed American that Lynne didn't recognize. Chairs were arranged in a semicircle facing Everett.

Mc Duff stood next to Everett. He was conducting the meeting. "Courtney will be flying to Washington under guard. Ronald Mac Neil, the regional security officer has come from Lome to escort him. Courtney has given his word as a gentleman not to try to escape, so we won't use handcuffs."

At that characterization of Courtney, Randy gave a low laugh. Randy said, "What did this gentleman say when you questioned him?"

"At first he coolly denied everything. But then we found the Adidas shoes and an important shirt in Courtney's house, in a locked suitcase deep in a closet under a pile of old magazines." Mc Duff reached his hand into a bag on the desk and brought out a clean, new looking pair of Adidas. "We looked carefully at the tread. It is similar to the marks on the floor that were photographed and, although this has been cleaned, with tweezers I have no doubt our forensic men in Washington will be able to find some bits of cement and plaster. Even better, we found this shirt." He held up a pale yellow long sleeved dress shirt. You see, it has little rips, and even some thorns and a twig or two. This, I think our expert will agree, is vegetation similar to a selection we are sending along that grows around the hole in the wall. Then we told him the pamphlet man is flying to America to testify against him. He is delighted to make a trip to Washington since he hopes some day to immigrate. As the evidence mounted up and we kept questioning him, Courtney lost his temper and said, "I had agreed to meet her there so we could talk privately. That witch wouldn't listen to reason. She wanted money to keep the secret of a small problem I had in Senegal. She said she was returning to Senegal in the morning to get some letters and documents there that she could ruin me with. I told her that my problems were now known by the Acting Ambassador of Benin and it had been decided that my services were valuable and I would keep my post. I would no longer pay to keep the secret. But she started with her refrain, "I'll tell Washington. You know Washington

says we should follow Beninese law and homosexuality is illegal in Benin. You should be in prison.”

He said he didn't plan to hurt her, but she laughed at him and mockingly kissed him. I couldn't stand it, and just gave a small push.

Mc Duff said, musingly, “It seems, Courtney really doesn't like women to touch him. Then of course he was appalled at what he had admitted, and wouldn't say a word more.”

Everett spoke. “I'm just glad we've got him now. I don't like having a murderer on the loose. Courtney is locked in Randy's office until the flight leaves with two United States marines that we rushed from Lome, since we have none in Benin.”

Everyone was quiet. Sybil, the Peace Corps director's wife spoke up. “He did some good work here. The Peace Corps Volunteers had a successful education program that was suggested by Courtney and then funded by USAID through him. I worked for him at USAID. A difficult man, but very intelligent and good at making programs work.”

Everett spoke up. “Yes, that's why I invited you. I know you worked for him and Sam as Peace Corps director had cooperative programs with him.” He looked at Sam.

Sam spoke. “I didn't like him. But, he worked hard and by and large did the job under difficult circumstances.”

Everett said, “Well, if Washington wants character references, I'll give them your names.”

Chapter 50: The Beckoning Future

After that revealing meeting, Lynne went to her office and tried to take up her work in the English Language Program. It was the day to calculate the teacher's pay. She kept getting lost in thought half way through a column she was adding.

Without knocking, Randy burst into her office. She hadn't seen him look so happy for weeks. "Lynne, I was just on the phone with the area chief in Washington. Cape Verde has sent out an emergency please for a junior foreign service officer to take over the job as consular officer immediately. They just learned that the one they had has resigned because of family reasons."

Lynne tried not to react, and waited for the rest.

"I just called Gregory Copeland and asked him if he wants the job. He agreed and he and Sherry will leave on the plane to Paris tomorrow night."

"Ah, that's...good." Lynne said, tentatively.

"Yes it is. We won't have time for a farewell party. My wife and children will arrive on the following day. As it happens, we are scheduled to get a second state department trainee in two weeks. We can turn Greg's duties over to him.

Lynne answered, "I will give young William a second class to make up for the change in personnel you have mentioned."

Randy was the cheerful sprite, again. "Lynne, I've been meaning to tell you. I've been highly pleased with your work here. Will you sign a contract for a second year in your job? I can afford to give you a slight raise."

Lynne quickly said yes. She had been hoping that things would calm down enough so she could ask Randy to give her a renewal.

Randy went on with his buoyant talk. "I can't believe how well it all turned out. We got rid of Minerva, we found the murderer, the Cultural center can't be blamed, and Courtney is shown up to be the undesirable type I always knew he was." The little office seemed too small to hold his manic enthusiasm. "Lynne, come out into the corridor. I want to tell you about a plan I have for the grounds."

They stood on the outdoor corridor outside her office, overlooking the big patio area. He outlined an ambitious plan, talking fast, gesticulating. "Over there, to the left, we will tear down the bushes and repair the wall, paint it red, white and blue. In the area in front of it, over there, we will make a pavilion, open air, with a cement floor and pillars supporting a straw roof. We will have hanging baskets and plants, floodlights for night use. We can have meetings and ceremonies and some of your classes there."

Lynne bit her tongue to be sure she didn't mention the heat and the mosquitoes that would make his pavilion less than pleasurable.

Randy finished his description in a rush.

"I must get back to my office. I have a meeting with the voodoo pope. He's going to initiate me into his council of elders. Fine things are happening in Benin. Did you know that Time Magazine called Benin the Hope of Africa?"

Chapter 51: At the End of the Day

In June, on graduation day for her English Language Program, Lynne lingered on the big patio after the crowd had left and the janitors had swept up the bottle caps, straws, and cookie crumbs littering the cement. It was six thirty, almost sundown, and the day had cooled down a little. She took a few moments to think over her time in Benin.

The histories said Cotonou meant house of death because there was once a large burying ground there. Lynne mused that Benin had meant death for the golden skinned man and Minerva and Gerald. But for her, it seemed now a place of hope. A surging sense of life overtook her. She no longer had to wonder which of her colleagues was a murderer. She was succeeding in her job. One Sunday in January, the newly elected president of Benin flew back from Paris in good health. Handsome, confident, charming, wearing a traditional Beninese robe and Beninese hat like a tall pill box pushed down on one side, he was inaugurated in an inspiring ceremony at the soccer stadium before a cheering crowd of hundreds.

Benin had successfully held an election to displace a dictator and choose a president in a democratic election, a set of circumstance almost unknown in Africa.

Everett had asked Lynne to attend the inauguration with him. Afterwards, they had a dinner in the restaurant in Grand Popo on the beach near the ocean where the sound of lapping waves punctuated their close and affectionate conversation.

“Lynne, you told me you agreed to stay on your job another year. My term here in Benin is for a year too. The new ambassador will be here in a few months and I will have more time for a personal life. Do you think we can try to see each other more and let our feelings for each other grow?”

“What do you mean, Everett?”

“I mean I hope we can get married in a year. Would you be willing to be the wife of a Foreign Service Officer?”

“Do you love me, Everett?”

“Yes, I think I have loved you for several years. I don’t ever want to lose you.”

“Then, that is a good plan. Let’s let our love grow and decide in a year.”

“I have decided, lovely Lynne.”

She continued to think of the past few months. Soon she would have to hurry home to change her clothes for the reception for the Ambassador of Russian that she was attending with Everett. Since Everett’s declaration of love, they had been close. She and Everett made a good team.

News from America had come saying that Courtney was convicted of manslaughter and was sentenced to five years in a very comfortable federal prison. Word was that his tennis game was excellent.

Once the murderer was caught and the Beninese president was peacefully inaugurated, the visit from the American vice-president was back on schedule. The Gores came and attended some carefully scripted, picturesque Beninese ceremonies.

Everything went well and they were warmly welcomed by people from all levels of Beninese society. They were given a fanciful appliquéd map of Benin.

Washington was pleased and Everett was given a promotion and was now a notch higher on the rating system. The new Ambassador arrived, so Everett was back to being Economic officer, second in command at the Embassy.

Randy's wife and children had joined him, on schedule. No one mentioned, aloud, the alibi provided by Sherry. He succeeded in getting his pavilion built in time for the graduation party. Lynne convinced him to give Lydia a small raise and a contract.

The new RPMAO was a pleasant man named Bobby who didn't threaten anyone. Father Akimba was given an international Award for his farm project. With the extra funding he got, he contracted for an ambitious course of English lessons for his workers through Lynne's program.

Randy's spell of cheerfulness and optimism continued. He somehow was able to control his temper when inspectors from America told him that unfortunately, the construction was done wrong and the crew would be back to rip everything out again and do it over.

William, the young, enthusiastic teacher came to tell Lynne that he had won a Fulbright scholarship and was off to America to get a doctorate in African Studies. He told Lynne he would reveal a sacred secret, he had acted as a haystack man at the voodoo festival. He had tried to warn her against her dangerous interest in Jean Luc. He said he was going to specialize in telling folk tales at the university and would add to his repertory one about the day that he was unable to stop the pamphlet man from bursting on stage and solving the mystery of who killed the wicked witch, Minerva.