

Chapter Twenty: An Unhealthy Situation

"Ron, look at this!"

Lynne showed him the newspaper.

"Well, that minister's a Mina, one of the few in the president's cabinet. Maybe the president is using this as a way to get rid of him. Or, maybe he didn't give the others their cut of the bribe money."

"Ron, you're so cynical. But Richie. He has such a fine reputation in the American community. Do you think he's a crook?"

"Come on Lynne, don't be so naive. Calling someone a crook is just a matter of definition. Did you think he ran that whole cash checking thing as a charity? You know he was playing big time in the money market. And with all the corruption and restrictive laws, there is no way to do all that legally."

"Ron, do you think Richie had something to do with killing the Ambassador?" And she told him her often repeated story about the strange occurrence in Richie's office with the man who had been the boubou clad waiter in Kara. "Do you think he had the Ambassador killed to keep some of his shady secrets?"

"No, I doubt it. He and the Ambassador were buddies. He often went to Embassy parties. My guess is that now that the Ambassador is gone, Everett, Mr. Acting Ambassador, is doing exactly what the Ambassador would be. He is probably talking to the Togolese Ministry of Justice right now, trying to get Richie out of jail. Richie's an important part of the American community."

"And the boubou man with the pussycat scars?"

Ron laughed. "What a description. I can't figure out what that scene was all about. But, probably he was one of the people Richie dealt with in his business. People are always fighting over pay and money."

"Well, what was he doing working as a waiter in Kara?"

"Lynne, I can't know everything. I can't even guess everything. When the police find him, they'll beat it out of him. Then we'll know."

"You're right. I'm asking you to be my seer. Thanks for your insights. You're always good at knowing what's in the grapevine." Then suddenly, on impulse she said. "It seems like everyone in power is tainted. The only leader we have that I trust is Luke."

"Luke?" Ron's wicked joy was evident. "Luke is pretty good at his job. But, he's not exactly a plaster saint. Sometime I'll tell you what I know about him."

"Oh, I know he has two wives. But that's accepted here."

Ron laughed gleefully. "No. It's not that. You'll be surprised. I did some really fancy snooping to find this out. But I'm trying to decide who to tell and when to reveal it." His beautiful eyes glowed with malicious pleasure.

"I can't believe it's anything bad. But, keep your secret if you want to. It's good to see you perking up a bit. You seemed so down, this whole trip."

"Yes, this is a bummer. I can scarcely bear it. This whole thing's making me sick. I think I'm getting an ulcer from worry about what Dudley will do. Sometimes I feel like going to Everett and telling him the whole thing about Dudley. Maybe I'd be better off out of the Peace Corps and in San Francisco again. I know too many secrets. I've gone from having little enemies to big ones. I know so much about them, I'm a threat. If I'm dangerous to them, maybe they're dangerous to me."

Suddenly a shadow appeared in front of them. Someone was standing over them.

"Dudley, you startled me." Lynne wondered how long he'd been near and what he had heard.

"I want to talk to you two about our plans. We've changed our minds, Ron, about your role in these Self Help inspections. We don't need so many people evaluating Michael's library. We are going to drop you off in Sotoubua. Cindy is doing a project with honey production. Visit her and see what she is doing. We'll pick you up on our way down tomorrow."

Ron looked astonished. He protested feebly.

"Dudley, you know I'm working in education."

"Just give us your impressions, that's all we want."

Ron didn't protest any more. Lynne knew that he'd be glad to get away from Dudley for a day.

"Okay, you're the boss."

Dudley smiled. "Yes, that's right. I am the boss. And Lynne, you and I and Luke are going to see Michael's project. I didn't really brief you before. He is supposed to have built a library with Self Help funds given him last year. But the reports I hear say he never did it. Now, you are a friend of his..."

"Sort of a friend."

"Well he thinks of you as a friend. At least you aren't his enemy. People will trust what you say about it. We will write a report about it together."

"Dudley, I'll look at it with you. And I'll help write a report showing what we see." She chose her words carefully. She didn't want to defy him unnecessarily, but she wanted it clear that she was not a hired gun for him.

"Of course. I only want your honest, unbiased judgment." That relieved her a little, but she remembered Dudley's words during the notorious row in Kara, "I am in charge here. I will exercise my power."

Chapter Twenty One: Book Lovers

After lunch they resumed their journey. Now that they were in the north country, Lynne saw again the compounds of round mud houses that were so familiar to her from Dapaong. And she began to see pintades, African guinea hens. Their feathers had an attractive small polka dot pattern and they made a sound like oink, oink, oink, that would always mean northland to her.

They dropped Ron off at Sotoubua. Later, Lynne wished she had made a bigger thing of the goodbye, kissed him as she usually did. But the situation was strained and Ron was eager to get away before the others changed their minds again. He asked to be dropped off at the center of town, saying he would find out where Cindy lived and walk there. In her last glimpse of him he was moving with his graceful, buoyant walk, his red shirt contrasting with the drab landscape, his great pleasure at his release making him almost glow. Despite her earlier disapproval of him she found herself thinking fondly that he was a really a gorgeous young man. She didn't realize that would be the last time she would ever see him.

They drove two more hours and arrived in Bassar, one of the four biggest towns in Togo. That meant only that there were a few sand block buildings, a few government offices, one store with a refrigerator, and countless shanties and shacks for people to live in or for small businesses.

Dudley turned to Luke and said earnestly, almost threateningly, "Luke, I expect you to back me up here. I know you tend to take the side of your teacher volunteers. But, taking the Ambassador's fund money and for almost two years stalling and giving excuses instead of performance is a serious thing."

Luke sounded weary, depressed. "I'll do my duty, Dudley. Don't worry about that."

They pulled up in front of Michael's residence. He lived in a compound made up of five houses and several outbuildings, owned by the family of a school teacher. There were three round mud houses with grass roofs and two more modern ones built of the sun dried brick, square, with glass in the windows and tin roofs.

As their paying guest, Michael had the newest, most modern house. It was a dull grey, since the family funds had not stretched to painting it yet. In the center of the compound there was the usual well, but also, Lynne noticed a modern luxury, a water faucet. In front of the house a woman squatted near a fire, occasionally stirring a big pot of sauce. She wiped her hands on the pagne around her waist and shook hands with Lynne. She directed the tiny girl of about three who stood at her knee also to shake hands. Then, she proudly encouraged her tiny child to show off her verbal skills in French. The little girl, with angelic solemnity recited the familiar chant:

*Yovo yovo
Bon soir
Ca va bien?*

Mer ci

Lynne reminded herself that some people said yovo meant foreigner as well as white person. Luke had told her of traveling in the isolated villages with black American government officials, dressed in American business suits and looking prosperous. He said the children sang the yovo song to them too. Lynne thanked them and shook hands with both of them. The Africans in French speaking countries followed the French custom of constant handshakes. She had been carefully taught to shake hands with everyone when she met them and then again when she said goodbye, even if the encounter only lasted five minutes.

Dudley and Luke wasted no time on these niceties with the woman today, but pushed ahead. Michael was at the door of his house, his scruffy dark beard grown out a little, dressed in a fairly neat shirt and pair of chinos, wearing good leather sandals, acceptable dress for a teacher. He started out with a cold, sullen look on his face but soon was trying to be pleasant.

"Hello Dudley, hello Luke." And then with more warmth, "Hello, Lynne. Come on in."

Michael's house reflected his disorganized life style. Almost every chair or surface was piled with something, wadded up clothes, either clean or dirty, dirty dishes, scraps of paper, beer and wine bottles. There was a big stack of much dog-eared Playboy magazines and several large piles of books. Curious, Lynne looked closer. Most of them were the worn, torn, ragged and partly coverless paperbacks that were donated to the Peace Corps library and were available for long term loan to volunteers. Many were escape fiction-- adventure, mystery, science fiction, and westerns but some were on criminology and sociology, literature, and philosophy. There was even a worn copy of Shakespeare's complete plays and a coverless copy of the dialogues of Plato. So Michael really did like books!

"Sorry for the mess. I've been busy. I haven't seen you since the big blowout in Kara, Dudley. You were busy when I tried to visit you in Lome. I hope there aren't any hard feelings about that little disagreement. You know, I'd been partying and as they say, it was the booze talking."

"Michael, we'll talk about that another time. Now, we want to hear about your project." Dudley, who managed to keep himself and his things neat and clean despite the difficulties of African living, looked around the room with disgust. Even at that moment, after the long dusty journey, he looked crisp and fresh.

"Yes. You ready to go see it now? You know, they gave me just enough money to build the room itself. I still have to figure out how to get some shelves. And I've been collecting books all over. I got some from the Ranfurly Library service in London. I'm making progress, but it's still all just potential as far as using it is concerned."

Dudley listened to this without comment, nodding occasionally, as if humoring a madman. Lynne knew he had no doubt that the inspection would reveal that the construction was not finished, probably, not started. He seemed to be trying to hide his

enjoyment of the situation. He hurried to the car, eager for the confrontation and also probably in a hurry to escape the squalor of Michael's home.

Lynne followed him more slowly. She didn't want to be alone with Dudley in the car and have to hear another lecture about how he expected her to be a team player. Luke and Michael were deep in a private conversation. Luke seemed angry and upset and Michael worried but determined about something. "They'll want to see the books," Michael said. "That's for sure. And when they do, there's nothing I can do."

Luke's voice was at a low volume. Lynne could only a tone of disagreement. More books. What was Michael up to? Luke wasn't going to be able to save him.

Kwami honked the horn, at Dudley's command, and the two quickly caught up to Lynne and hurried to the car. Michael gave Dudley directions to the school. It was only about a half mile down the road.

Lynne saw a typical sand block school, with holes for windows to let in the cooling breeze. A large flock of pintades wandered around the school yard making their distinctive discordant honking sound. The classrooms were in a U shape around a dirt courtyard. She also saw one of the short haired scrawny African sheep looking for a bit of grass near the school rooms. She thought of the old nursery rhyme, Mary had a little lamb.

The suspense was building up. Lynne had to hand it to Michael. He was calm and seemed confident. She wondered what complicated excuses and what rationalization he would spell out to try to cover the fact of the non existence of his building and to bring about their understanding and forgiveness. Michael introduced them to the headmaster, a beaming man in a faded *functionaire* suit. a mao style jacket worn without a shirt, and matching pants and they all exchanged greetings and shook hands. They followed where Michael led. They walked the length of the classroom building.

And there, attached to the school, was an additional room. They entered. It was about 10 by 20 feet long. There was a mud floor. It was built of blocks like the rest of the building. Since there was no electricity, it was hard to examine it carefully.

"Lynne, ask Kwami for a flashlight." Luke said.

Once they got the flashlight, Dudley flashed it on the walls. It was obvious that the room had been build recently. The cement was still not quite dry. But the room was built. It was obviously well constructed. A fine, big room, by local standards. On the floor were about twenty big boxes of books.

The headmaster tried out his small store of English. "It is good. Michael is good. Books is, are good."

He started another round of handshaking, to express his delight.

Michael said, "It's a good start. I'm applying for money for lumber to build the shelves. When I get that, we can get these books out so the teachers and students can use them."

Dudley was almost speechless. He started several sentences, but only produced some sputters.

Lynne had to struggle to keep from laughing. Dudley was so disappointed to see that Michael had somehow pulled it off. She could imagine the agonies of sudden hard work Michael had performed when he learned that Dudley was actually coming up on an inspection trip.

She knew how the volunteers stuck together. Probably all those stationed within twenty miles had worked night and day to help him make the complex arrangements to find and transport the carpenter and the mason and his assistants and also the forms and the cement, to make the blocks, and get the thing constructed in just a week.

"I've really hit my stride, Dudley," Michael said enthusiastically. "You can see that. With a third year I can get another grant for more shelving and more books. We can start a book club and really do something valuable educationally here. We're going to name this library, Dieu Merci, thank God. It took a lot cooperation to build it."

Dudley was still beyond speech. Luke was silent, perhaps out of loyalty to Dudley.

Lynne tried to keep her voice serious and neutral. "You might say that it was almost a miracle."

"Yes," Michael agreed, grinning at Lynne, "A miracle. With a little help from my friends."

Chapter Twenty Two: A Midnight Visitor

They left Michael at the school, gloating over his achievement, talking to the happy headmaster, who was sure that this visit by the Peace Corps Director would lead to more good things for his school.

Crushed after learning of Michael's disappointing success, Dudley was once more plunged into gloom. Kwami took them all to Affairs Sociales in Bassar, where they registered for rooms for the night. Since Dudley and Luke were important people and the car had diplomatic plates, registration only took a half hour. While they waited, Dudley tried to call Lome. "I tried at Atakpamay and the lines were down. I hope I can get through. There are several important matters..." Eventually he gave up trying. He grumbled, "That's the trouble with travel in the north. You might as well go to the moon, as far as communication with Lome and Washington is concerned. I'll try again tomorrow."

The building was like the one in Kara. Here today long lines of women with babies on their backs waited in line patiently to get the sack of protein supplement infant food provided by Cathwel with the requirement that they weigh their babies and submit to a bit of advise if the babies were not gaining.

Once they got their keys, they each went to their separate rooms to drop off their bags and wash off some of the red dust that had collected on their hair, skin and clothes. Soon it was 6:30 and dark. The place was almost deserted now. There were three or four men at the bar drinking Togolese beer.

Lynne and her two bosses sat on the veranda. Despite the shabbiness of the building, night brought a kind of glamour, with palm trees and tropical bushes waving and rustling in the breeze. The table was lighted by candles, stuck in old wine bottles. Lynne noticed again that Dudley and Luke were stiff with each other and did little talking. Luke occasionally made a little conversation with Lynne about their mutual acquaintances, the English teachers and the Inspectors. Inspector Oujano in Dapaong had been born in Bassar. Luke told her that he would be transferred to Kara where the head inspector could keep an eye on him. Lynne's complaints and those of the English teachers which she had passed on had something to do with it.

"He's an intelligent man. He studied in Paris and must be bored in Dapaong. I hope I haven't ruined his life," Lynne said.

"No, I think it will be good for him. He will be forced to control his drinking. And, he may even end by getting a promotion. He has a talent for making political speeches and Kara is the political capitol of the country. The change may be the making of him. And his transfer will make Inspector Lanagro happy. He hopes they will make him Head Inspector in Dapaong."

Dudley, in his turn, broke the next long silence by telling her more about the history of the plan for the library in Bassar. A previous volunteer had gotten some reference books for the school, but the headmaster had taken them home to adorn his

living room. He couldn't even read them, since they were in English which was not his subject.

When that headmaster was transferred, Michael was encouraged to apply for funds to build a library. The new headmaster promised to keep the books where all the teachers and students could use them. That was all almost two years ago. Dudley sighed. "So you see why I felt we should inspect it. But---"

Lynne listened carefully, trying to decide if he was the good leader she had always thought him or if he was petty and despicable, even dangerous.

At last, their dinner came. Dudley seemed glad to be interrupted. They ate the food on the menu that day, millet mush with peppery tomato- fish sauce. As soon as they finished eating, they parted immediately, agreeing to meet for breakfast at seven AM and start the trip back.

Lynne was happy to get go to her own room, even though it was tiny , almost like a monk's cell, with space in it for a bed and a chair and little besides. The room was lighted by a single 40 watt bulb suspended on a frayed looking wire from the ceiling. There were no screens in the window and she got bit by one of the whineless mosquitoes as soon as she entered . She hurried to get into the old shirt she used as a night gown and climbed into her bed, securely tying the mosquito net.

Lynne wrote in her notebook diary about her day, stressing the newspaper story and Michael's triumph. Once she turned out the light, she went to sleep almost as soon as her head hit the hard little local kapok stuffed pillow.

She was wakened by a sound of pebbles thrown at the window.

Logy, she looked at the window. The room was pitch dark and the night was moonless. She walked hesitantly to the window and pulled back the thin flowered curtain to look out. "Luke", she gasped.

"Quiet", he whispered. " Don't wake Dudley. Will you let me in?"

"Of course. Come to the door." When she opened the door for him, she was struck once more by how good looking he was. The most beautiful human being I have ever seen, she thought. And he cares for me!

"Oh Luke, I didn't dare hope that you would come. It's so hard to see you all day, but to have to act cool and businesslike."

"And it is the same for me. If we speak quietly, I think no one will know. I listened at Dudley's window and he is snoring, like some well fed animal."

"Luke, I get the feeling that you and Dudley are not getting along these days."

"It is true. We are not. He is a man with no flexibility, no compassion. I do not like working with him."

"This whole trip is unpleasant."

"My sweetheart, let us make one small part of it beautiful.

Let me lie on the bed with you and hold you. We will talk of our deepest feelings. Nobody understands me like you do, Lynne. We come from different ends of the earth, but we have so much in common."

Knowing that she might be ruining things by asking him, Lynne still felt impelled to say, " Luke, please tell me about your marriage. I find it difficult to be involved with a married man."

"Oh, my dear. My marriage is not important. My family arranged the marriage when I was only twenty. I never loved her, but felt I had to please my family. She was five years older, an elementary teacher. But she soon gave her teaching up to do petty commerce. She had a squad of women who sold tomato paste on street corners. She was good at it and enjoyed it. She always cared more about money than about ideas, or ideals. Now she manages the little hotel we own. I do not love her. I cannot talk to her. We spend very little time together. In the early days, our three children were born, but we have had almost no sexual relations for years." He looked at her with emotion, "Without love and understanding, sex does not interest me. I have been lonely." He added another word and said, slowly and with emphasis, " Very lonely."

"Oh, Luke!"

"I care a lot about my children and visit them when I can, to inspire them to work hard in school and to have good morals. I have many sides. Honor matters to me. I love Americans. I love their ideas of freedom and democracy and am amazed that they leave their comfortable lives in America to help the Togolese in their poor villages." His eyes glowed with admiration as he looked at Lynne. "You are a good example. Even when your house was burned, you still want to help."

"I had always wanted to do something like the Peace Corps. When my marriage ended, it gave me a chance to really do it."

"How could a man have a jewel like you and leave her? If you were mine, I would cherish you forever."

They heard a loud sound from the room next door. "Oh, it sounds like Dudley is awake and dropped something. Do you think he heard us?"

" No, we have not made much noise. And I will leave quietly." He kissed her sweetly and solemnly on the lips. "Goodnight my love. And Lynne, will you always remember this beautiful time together? Remember how we love each other? No matter what happens, will you remember? No matter what?"

"Oh Luke, I do love you. I will never forget this. A love like ours is a gift of the gods. I'll never forget it." When he left, she felt once more the joy of true, mutual adoration. How lucky she was to have and share this feeling.

She slept, but woke suddenly, feeling she had a bad dream she could not remember. Somehow, words echoed in her mind, "I wear a mask." That was a line from a poem. There were many masks in Africa. But why dream about them?

Chapter Twenty Three: Beware The Killer Bees

The next morning, they had a quick breakfast of bread and butter and instant coffee made with hot water that had been put in big thermos jugs the night before by the kitchen staff since the cooking fires were not lit until later. Since their mission was over, Kwami turned the car toward the branch of the main road which connected with the north/south road at Kara. From Kara the road went south, straight down and eventually reached Lome.

The plan was to stop at Cindy's house in Sotoubua and pick up Ron there and then continue south, stopping to eat a late lunch at Atakpamay. Lynne mused once more at the collection of unlikely friends or near friends she had in the Peace Corps. Fat, blonde, disheveled Cindy was nearly psychotic when she drank, which was often, at night after her work was done. There was a small scandal when she knocked a Togolese man down with her motorcycle, after an evening of celebrating at a local buvette. And Lynne remembered a frightening night when Cindy stayed at Lynne's house, had too much to drink at a local bar and was thrown out of it. It took hours to get her to settle down and go to sleep. She spent part of the time ranting and shouting at people she seemed to feel were in the room. She had many paranoid stories about people who had done her wrong, starting with her family and her father's will, going on to her college advisors and supervisors and crowned by a real hatred of both Dudley and Luke. That night she had seemed to be directing some of her drunken tirades at those Peace Corps administrators.

Lynne thought about the odd couples that Peace Corps brought about. She wondered how Ron and Cindy's day and night together had gone. Cindy came from a conservative family with a fundamentalist religion. She scorned and disliked Ron, and he, a lover of beauty, if not kindness, had a way of saying that she was unstylish, giving the word a special twist.

It was almost ten when they reached the rural road that led to Cindy's house near Sotoubua. They saw a crowd of people, mostly Togolese, but including a few volunteers and Europeans.

When they saw the Peace Corps car, the whole group started shouting urgently, in English, French, Cotokoli, and German. "Thank God you have come. Quick, get him to a hospital. He's just barely breathing."

Trying to make some sense of the urgent competing voices, Dudley and Luke got out of the car and followed where the crowd led.

"You stay in the car Lynne. There are already too many people milling around."

Lynne hated to be left out and tried to peer past the crowd to see what was going on. But soon, Luke returned to get a first aid kit from the car. "Yes, it is better that you stay out of the way. It is terrible. Ron is lying on a blanket at the side of the road. It looks like he is dead. His face is swollen and red, covered with some sort of We will do what we can to save him."

Lynne couldn't bear to stay in the car. She joined the crowd, making a great effort not to get in the way of Dudley and Luke. Dudley found Cindy in the crowd and addressed her directly. "Cindy tell me, what happened? What's the matter with him?"

"The people tell me he was attacked by a huge swarm of bees. They saw him running, completely covered from head to toe by buzzing, angry bees. The more he ran, the more they followed. He was screaming with pain and crying for help. They threw a blanket around him. Finally they got a smoky fire started and drove the bees away. But, by then, he was almost dead. They called the local nurse," Cindy gestured to a Togolese woman in a white uniform." She tried to do something, but it didn't help."

"When did this happen?"

"I wasn't here. They sent to get me at my house. They say it was all about forty five minutes ago."

"Kwami, get someone to help you carry Ron to the car. We've got to get him to a hospital. There's no use taking him to the one in Kara. They won't have any serum or supplies there. We'll take him to the Baptist hospital in Kpalime," Dudley said. "Cindy, how did this happen. Why was he alone?"

"You know Ron, he can't get along with anyone. He walked out after breakfast. Probably like a little kid, he was poking at the bee hive. He should have known that you have to be careful of the new strain of killer bees."

"But didn't you tell him that when you showed him your project yesterday?"

"We got in a fight as soon as he got here and he never went to see the project with me." She looked toward Ron with disgust.

"I'm sorry he got hurt, but it's his own fault. He always thinks he knows everything."

Dudley listened, but didn't take the time to respond.

"Lynne, I'll leave you here. Take a bush taxi home. Kwami will bring you your bag and a package for Irene. Take the taxi to Tablibo and go to Irene's house and give it to her. No matter what we've gone through up here, we'll never hear the end of it if we don't get her the mail and that package I promised her. Spend the night with her. You can get a taxi there to take you home the next morning."

He went to get instructions to Kwami who had succeeded in placing the inert blanket wrapped figure of Ron into the back of the Peace Corps van. A few minutes later, Kwami came with her bag and the things for Irene.

Kwami's kindly face was full of distress.

When the car with Dudley and Luke was gone, Cindy continued her explanation to Lynne.

"They didn't know how to get the bees off of him. They said it was awful. They were all over him, fuzzy and squirming. They were afraid to touch him because they thought the bees might turn on them. But, when I came we started the fire. We'd been trained in what to do if the bees got angry. This is the first time any one has ever been badly hurt by the bees. All the agronomy volunteers were warned carefully and told

not to approach them without a mask and gloves. And the locals knew enough to respect bees. They were always careful. And besides they have their own magic methods. But Ron, probably just blustered up to get a look."

" But why didn't you warn him, tell him."

" You know no one can tell Ron anything. What was he doing here anyway? He's not an agronomy volunteer." "Dudley sent him."

"Yes, Dudley sent him. What a strange thing to do. Maybe he was hoping this would happen. Ron was a pain in the neck since the day we set foot in the country."

The horror of hearing of Ron's encounter with the bees filled her. She knew his life was in real danger. There was no point in taking him to the nearest hospital. The volunteers had been told never to go there. The nurse, Fiona, had told them she saw them cleaning a deep head wound with a wad of absorbent cotton and their methods of sanitation were like the Civil War era in the States. She told them, if they went to any up country local hospital to be sure to take their own bandages and hypodermic needles. And they wouldn't have the right serum to counteract that massive dose of killer bee venom.

Killer bees. For years, it had been sort of a joke with her friends in America, the small articles from time to time in the newspapers about the killer bee menace that was slowly making its way from South America to the US. She hadn't known that some of the African honey bees sometimes went crazy and were life threatening.

Lynne felt sick, filled with pain over what happened. Peace Corps relationships had their own special quality. At home, she would never have met a man like Ron, and certainly would not choose him for a friend. But, after all they had shared in training, and in their meetings since, she felt he was a comrade or an ally. Was there any hope that he would live? The Baptist missionaries in Kpalime had a good hospital. But the trip there would take about four hours. By the time he got there he would be critically weak. And then if the Director of the hospital was in Germany on vacation or their supply of medications that they imported from Europe was depleted, he might not get really good care even there.

Ron had told her this was a cursed group. Maybe Ron would not survive. Then, he would never tell all those secrets he kept hinting at. She thought again of Cindy's question." Why did Dudley send him there? "

Why did Dudley leave him to stay with Cindy? He must have known that Cindy and Ron never did get along. Obviously they could only stand each other for a short time. Did he think or hope something like this would happen?

Maybe Ron's wild story about Dudley was true and Dudley felt it was necessary to silence him. Lynne shivered. Once again, she was left filled with strong suspicion of the Peace Corps Director. The recruiting posters had not prepared her for this.

Chapter Twenty Four: Good Night, Irene

Cindy walked with Lynne to the taxi station in Sotoubua which was just a muddy, littered large open area surrounded by shacks and stalls that sold everything from food to auto parts. After a two hour wait, the pickup truck that was the taxi going to Tablibo was filled with the 25 people that would fit into it. Then three huge bags of grain were jammed in near their feet and three chickens with their feet tied together. There was a slogan on the bumper that translated to "Who knows his destiny?" It was not reassuring. The truck looked like it could not make the journey without breaking down.

When they reached Atakpamay, four people got out and took the bags of grain with them. Lynne was pleased to be able to stretch out her feet again. But, after a half hour delay, five new people got in to fill up the space. At least the chickens had stopped struggling and seemed to be asleep.

After five hours of uncomfortable travel, Lynne reached the taxi station in Tablibo. As she usually did when visiting volunteers in small towns, she picked a fairly well dressed, alert looking boy and asked him, in French, "Do you know where an American lady lives, a Peace Corps volunteer?"

The boy's face lighted up with pleasure. " Oh, yes. Mama Peace Corps. I will take you there." And off they went at a fast pace through the dark, rutty, uneven, littered streets, turning into smaller, darker, more uneven paths. She saw at some of the houses they passed piles of stones, bowls, and shells stacked and put together to look vaguely like an eerie human. Lynne noticed these often in the rural parts of the country near Vogan, Tablibo, and Aneho. It was bad manners to comment on them to her African friends, but one of her Togolese French teachers had said they were household fetish gods, part of the voodoo religion which was centered in Benin, the neighboring country and had spread over much of Africa and also to Haiti and the New World.

After about twenty minutes of proceeding through the maze of paths, they arrived at a two story building with the lights on.

"Mama lives there," the boy said proudly.

"Thank you so much," she said. "Wait, let me give you something."

" It is not necessary. I am a friend of Americans. Will you take me to America with you? I will work hard."

She had an answer ready because she had been asked this by many others. "I'm sorry. I can't. In American I will not have anyone working for me." Despite his refusal of money, she gave him a 100 franc coin. He smiled even more broadly and left.

Looking up at the building Irene lived in, Lynne saw that as usual, Irene with her combination of pleading, demanding, scheming, and intimidation had gotten a better house than most volunteers. "Top of the line", Ron had wryly described it. And here she was, required to be a guest of her least favorite person. She expected Irene to be reluctant to put her up. On the contrary, Irene was delighted to see her. Lynne had often thought that Irene would rather be with the devil himself than be alone.

Irene was a good hostess and despite the problems of volunteer housekeeping, soon had a good cup of coffee and a plate of cheese and bread and a bowl of fruit before her. Lynne ate it. She was hungry. And besides, it would be rude to refuse. Lynne told Irene briefly why she was there-- the change of plans because of the ghastly bee attack on Ron. Irene was horrified at the latest threat to their lives that had surfaced here, but was unsympathetic about Ron's pain.

Irene had never liked Ron. In fact, she had often complained about him to the volunteers and also to Dudley and Luke. She said, perhaps echoing Dudley, that he was not a good representative of America. Somehow, this time, she managed not to express her dislike, but merely said, "Too bad." Then continued, "Ron as usual was probably doing something he wasn't supposed to do. You know he's a strange person. He just isn't the volunteer type."

Lynne didn't bother to try to defend him. For one thing, there was some truth in it. Lynne had often been repelled by him. Sometimes he was just too spiteful. And his latest revelation of blackmail was distasteful to her.

Even so, she did protest, "Now, Irene, please don't say things like that. Ron is my friend." And she didn't try to argue with her. Irene was so unreasonable and illogical that an argument with her was always frustrating and she knew that she never won.

She wanted to change the subject. Irene wanted to know all the latest news. But Lynne hated to get involved in a complicated discussion with her. She tried to steer the conversation to Irene and what she had been doing. Irene was soon telling her the latest in her mysterious romance with the person she called "an unknown Togolese official." After hearing these hints for many months, Lynne and the others were sure she was hinting at a romance with William Foli, the director of their training camp. He was a fine man and a good leader and Lynne felt he should have more sense and better taste than to get involved with Irene. But she had a way of hinting at secret assets in the United States and her desire to help Togolese get scholarships for higher education. Perhaps hope for the future had swayed him into accepting some sort of relationship. And once more, Lynne heard her excited hints and self congratulatory revelations, scarcely listening.

Just once, a spot of perversity made her make a comment.

"But Irene, he's probably married."

"Oh of course he is. They all are. But that doesn't cramp their style. You know the Togolese, the sexiest, most macho men on the globe. Just look at Luke."

"Luke?"

"Yes, Luke. He sometimes brings his wife to Peace Corps parties. She brings cookies that she's made, the same kind she makes to sell at the market. And there's wife number two. Actually, he never legally married her, but had a child with her when he was in college. She lives in a village not far from here. He visits the child on his birthday, and takes him some books. Those two women don't stop his romances with volunteers."

Lynne felt herself blushing. Did Irene know about their love affair? Somehow, despite their great efforts at secrecy everyone seemed to know.

But Irene went on. " Yes, volunteers. There was that Veronica who used to go with Michael. She went home early because of some secret problem, probably to have, my guess, an abortion. But whether it was Michael's or Luke's child we'll never know. And then, of course, there's Dulcie."

"Oh Irene, where do you get all this from?" She looked at her almost pleading. "You're joking, aren't you?"

"No, of course I'm not. Luke is the biggest tomcat in the country."

Lynne couldn't find words. She ended by lamely saying, "I'm awfully tired Irene. Could I go to sleep now? I'll be happy to sleep on your couch."

Irene was disappointed and hated to lose the opportunity to have someone to talk to. Lynne gave Irene her letters and the package that Dudley had been so conscientious about delivering. Irene opened them with delight, all the time commenting and chatting about who wrote each one, why it was sent, the usual torrent of Irene talk. All the time Lynne was rummaging in her backpack and laying out her pagnie and brushing her teeth, Irene continued with the non stop flow.

"Did Michael actually get that library started? I know for a fact that there wasn't a block built when he went to Kara three weeks ago. He's really shameful. Last time he stayed here on his way to Lome, he tried to get into my bedroom. I found it flattering, to tell the truth, but I didn't think it was a good idea. He was so drunk and is so crazy who knows what he would have done to me."

Intrigued by this strange story into commenting and risking encouragement of the conversation, Lynne said, "Michael tried to get into your bed?" Irene must be at least 60 years old.

"Yes, you notice the odd way this apartment is made. There's a screen door separating the living room from my bedroom. I usually leave the real door open and close that screen door. When I went to bed that night that Michael was here I was careful to hook the screen even though he had passed out on the couch and I thought that was the end of him until morning. But, about 2 o'clock I was wakened. I saw him, by the light of the moon, pushing and hitting the screen and cursing, but then he started begging. 'Irene, let me in, Irene, I'm lonesome ,please, it's so lonely here in this country, we can comfort each other!'

"I told him to go away and go back to his couch. Then he started cursing really violently and I really thought he would break the door. Finally I said, "Michael, I have a knife. If you come in here, I will slit your throat." Irene laughed with malicious glee.

"Did that do it?"

"He left right away. In fact, he grabbed his things and left the house and never came back. He's a maniac."

Lynne managed to convince Irene to let her take a shower in privacy. When she returned to the living room, Irene was waiting, expectantly, ready to continue with her endless tales, probably mostly untrue.

After the long day full of horrors and this unpleasant visit with Irene, Lynne was exhausted, both physically and mentally. Finally, really fed up with the incessant torrent of words coming from Irene's smeary painted mouth, Lynne started talking, halfway musing, to herself. "I'll be glad to get back to Lome. And I know one thing. I'm getting tired of this conspiracy of silence about the Ambassador's death. I've been writing in my notebook every night. I have pages of notes, and all the time I've been trying to sort things out. It's all beginning to fit in place. When I get to Lome, I'm going to type them all up on my computer and take them to the authorities."

"Do you think you know who killed the Ambassador?"

"Yes, I think I know. It's all tied to secrets and scandals. I want to be fair so I won't say anything yet, but when I get it all sorted out and ready I'll take it to someone who can do something about them."

Irene was silent for a moment. Then she said quietly, "You have good judgment, Lynne, and you're not a vindictive person. I don't think you will cause trouble for anyone unnecessarily."

Surprised at this praise, Lynne answered thoughtfully, "I do try to be fair and kind. And in this case I'll continue to try. But, no matter how sympathetic I might be or how compelling the reasons behind the action, I don't think a person should be allowed to get away with murder."

Really completely worn out she said, "I'm going to sleep now Irene. Thank you for your hospitality." She curled up on the couch, squeezed her eyes shut and covered her head with her pagne. "Good night Irene." And when her gregarious hostess tried to continue the conversation, she said, firmly, "Irene, good night!"

Chapter Twenty Five: Sunny Gets Blue

The next morning, Irene insisted on walking with Lynne to the taxi station and stayed with her until she was actually in a taxi. She kept up an unending flow of talk, but Lynne managed to successfully tune it out. At last she could say, " Good bye Irene. Thank you for your hospitality" and start off. After yesterday's terrible happenings capped off by the unpleasant visit with Irene she yearned for the comfort of a friend. Instead of taking a taxi directly to Lome she had decided to visit Sally at her post in Vogan. She had to talk to someone sensible and decent and try to sort out what was happening.

Down here in the south, bush taxis were cars and station wagons rather than pickup trucks and were a little more comfortable than the northern vehicles. At least there were not so many chickens and goats crammed in. And waits for taxis were shorter. She got in a beat up eight person taxi. The sign near the license plate said, in French, "Only god knows." Halfway to the next village, the taxi stopped at a crossroad and the engine died completely. All the passengers jumped out and positioned themselves on the back and sides to push. After a few minutes of this, the engine caught and they all struggled to get into it again without stopping and killing the motor. After that, the driver stopped for nothing-- goats, chickens and bicycles were greeted with a loud honking of the horn as the car slowed down a bit and whatever was in front of it scurried out of the way.

It was ten o'clock when she reached the taxi station in Vogan, a bare, muddy, vacant lot near the market. When Lynne asked a group where the volunteer lived, a little boy in a ragged pair of shorts with a sweet smile offered to take her there. He took her on a winding path around half finished buildings, past tin roofed huts, through a vacant lot where pigs and sheep were rooting out every scrap of nourishment left on a trash heap. He took her to Sally's house, a typical Peace Corps residence, a fine place by local standards, but rundown, with paint peeling off, unscreened windows, an old tin roof repaired with flattened pieces of cooking oil tins. She gave the little boy 100 francs and he thanked her fervently and left, an even sweeter smile on his face.

When she tapped lightly on the door, Sally opened it immediately. "Lynne, I'm glad to see you. I can really use some friendly company." Sally's usually clean, bouncy blond hair was dingy and bedraggled. She looked pale and strained. Lynne was surprised to see her looking so dispirited. She had often thought in the past that Sally would fit in well in a painting of a sunny day at a mid west farm house.

"You've never visited me before. You don't have to work in the office today?"

"Oh Sally, I've been on tourney with Luke and Dudley and Ron and it is all so hideous."

"I don't have a meeting until three, so come sit down and tell me all about it."

She told Sally about Ron's terrible encounter with the killer bees. She, too had been a little friendly with Ron.

Sally said she felt bad about him being dead or dying. "Imagine, Dudley and Luke had to make that grim journey home with what was left of poor Ron in the car."

"Ron told me that he knows a damaging secret about Dudley and Dudley knows that he knows it. Now this happens to Ron."

"I can't help wondering why Ron was sent to visit Cindy and her project of raising bees. Ron doesn't know anything about honey or bees, he's a city boy, through and through. He wouldn't have any idea that they were so dangerous."

"Yes, and Cindy explained to me that the agronomy volunteers were trained extensively to avoid problems with the bees who can be deadly. Do you think Dudley, knowing that Ron was impetuous and curious, sent him there hoping the killer bees would get him out of the way for him?"

Sally looked skeptical. "That sounds unlikely."

"Is there any official news about the Ambassador's death? We couldn't even get through on the telephone. Dudley tried from Bassar."

"No, no official news, at all."

"Oh Sally, so many terrible things keep happening. And I keep wondering if it's all tied to the Ambassador's death. Ron told me he thought this group of Peace Corps volunteers is cursed. Sometimes I think he's right."

"Cursed, or messed up. It's sure hard to tell the good guys from the bad guys."

In a lighter vein, Lynne told her about the outcome of the inspection of Michael's project.

Sally said, "I really get a kick out of that. I know Michael is a flake, but somehow, I hate to see him in more trouble than he usually is. I think we all know we spend too much time sitting under a tree in the shade instead of fighting in the hot tropical sun to achieve, achieve, achieve, and feel protective of volunteers who can't get their act together. Michael's not a nice person. He's done some bad things. But he's a fairly good teacher when he does his work. Unfortunately, he fell in love at the beginning of his training here with Veronica, you know, the one who lived in your apartment before you. Then instead of sticking to his job way up north in Bassar, he was always on the road visiting her in Lome. But she's gone now. She was sent home early instead of finishing her service. Somehow, Luke let her go two months early. The other volunteers in her group complained like mad. Even so, I can understand how the others banded together to help him build that library fast."

"Yes, it's funny how we feel a loyalty to the other volunteers, no matter what they do. Did you ever hear about the worst volunteer that ever served in Togo? They said his specialty was partying it up until late and spending the night in a ditch when he collapsed there finally. Sometimes a kind local person would bring a pagné and cover him up. Besides that, they said, he sponged off the Togolese totally; you know how hospitable they are. They'll share what ever they have on their table, even if it means short rations for the family. He ate every meal with them, didn't even get himself a stove to cook on, and when he returned to America he had almost his entire salary

saved. And yet, once when the director tried to get after him, a group of volunteers went to plead with him to let him stay."

"It's odd. In the Peace Corps you find yourself sticking up for people you wouldn't speak to at home." Sally said.

"Yes," Lynne agreed. "Peace Corps makes strange bed fellows." Then, she started to giggle, thinking of Irene's wild story about Michael's frustrated love.

When she told Sally the story, she listened seriously and did not laugh. "Lynne, I think Michael is a dangerous man. I saw some records once that showed he had violent episodes in his past. You saw how crazy he was in Kara. That is one volunteer I wouldn't like to be alone with."

"Irene also said---- she was full of so many stories, I can't believe them all. But she said... did you every hear about Luke having affairs with volunteers?"

Sally gave Lynne a penetrating look. "You mean present company excepted?"

"Yes, present company excepted."

"Lynne, you must know, or maybe you don't know, but everyone else knows, Luke is a tom cat."

"Oh. Irene used the same words."

"I don't know who said it first. But it's true. He's a nice tomcat, at least I've always thought so, but he's a tomcat. By the way, did you notice anything strange about Luke and Dudley on the trip? "

"Why?"

"It's still a secret. When I went to the Lome to get some news about my project yesterday, Linda, the volunteer support person, do you know her, she's a doll, a black American married to a Togolese man? She always does what she can to help us fight our way through the red tape. She told me that Luke is in some kind of trouble. She was mysterious about it and wouldn't tell me more."

"Do you think the trouble could have something to do with romancing volunteers?"

"It's possible. But, don't look so upset. You aren't in trouble. Linda told me that not only the Peace Corps administrators, but also Everett Knowlton have been singing your praises."

"That's good. Sally, did you hear Dulcie's story about the Ambassador?"

"No."

Lynne told her about Dulcie's humiliation at the dinner party.

Sally listened intently. "Lynne, we keep wondering who would want to kill the Ambassador. According to your story, Dulcie is one of the few people who had a grudge against the Ambassador, and a reason to want to kill him. You know she's waiting for a decision on a wonderful job she applied for. She wouldn't get it if the Ambassador gave a bad report on her. And she was right there at that lunch table, supervising the waiters."

"How could you even dream of suspecting Dulcie? The person that killed the Ambassador has to be much more sinister and diseased."

"But someone we know well must be more sinister and diseased than we think. There were only a few of us near the Ambassador when he died. Maybe Dulcie was deeply disturbed. Some people can put on a good front, and seem upbeat, cheerful, rational, but underneath there's another side, almost another personality that can do terrible things. Maybe she spent her adolescent years in a mental institution. How would we know?"

"How could she get into the Peace Corps?"

"You know that the main thing you have to do is get four people to write recommendations for you. Aside from that, little information is required."

"Oh, everything seems so messy and horrible. I'm discouraged. And you seem down today, too."

"Yes," Sally said, "Hearing about Ron really depresses me. But I was already discouraged today. You know my job in Peace Corps is working with women's cooperatives. I've spent probably 100 hours talking to everyone, making plans, getting agreement, looking for materials for a weaving project for them and now I find I have to go to the meeting and tell the women that there's no money. We can't start. It will probably make the group fall apart."

"Sometimes I just get sick and tired of always being hot and sweaty, always being uncomfortable. But, I'll let you go, now. You can find your way back to the taxi station, can't you? I've got to take a shower. And soon I'll go to the meeting with the bad news. I just hate that. I knew that the Ambassador was thinking of refusing the project, but I thought with his death I would have another chance at getting the funding. I just learned yesterday that the Ambassador trashed my project, definitively. He ruined my life."

"I wanted to prove myself before I settle down to being Mrs. Nice Doctor's Wife. Thanks to that bastard, the Ambassador, I'll probably never accomplish anything in my life except raising a couple of children. Yes, the message from Sunny Sally is that bastard should have died a little sooner. He won after all!"

Chapter Twenty Six: Pen In Hand

Lynne returned by bush taxi from Vogan at three o'clock on Thursday after visiting Sally. That trip only took two hours, a pleasant drive. Part of the way the road was near the sea so occasionally she got glimpses of a tropical scene with waves and also the stately coconut palm trees that were part of the agriculture established by the Germans to help find a source of income to replace the slave trade in the eighteenth hundreds. Since her apartment was on the main road going to the city, she was dropped off just in front of the university and only had about two blocks to walk before she was back to the building that held her apartment. She greeted the sleepy guard and the ever present ever lively group of children who this time said, "Bon arrivee" many times, singly and in chorus. This welcome made her feel good. She was no longer a stranger.

She was relieved to see that her apartment basically was in good order. There was a covering of dust, and some new ants, and a slightly rotten smell because of the spoiling of the bananas she had left on top of the refrigerator. She decided that she would not even attempt to contact the office or Peace Corps until morning. Without phones in most houses and with poor postal service, the easiest way to contact anyone was to go where they were. She would go back to work tomorrow.

She decided to unpack, do a little washing, take a shower, and remove some of the dust from her furniture. In the early evening she walked to the African version of a mom and pop store nearby. In Togo these were usually owned by Lebanese or Indians and partly staffed by families. There was no refrigerator, but she was able to find enough food to keep her for a few days, instant coffee, powdered milk, cookies, some Vache Qui Rit cheese. On the side of the street nearby, a woman with a baby playing around her knees was selling fruit. She bought oranges, a pineapple, and some bananas. Just past her another woman was selling loaves of the delicious fresh brown crusted french bread.

After supper she sat at the shaky table she used for a desk, writing in her notebook, trying to summarize her impressions of the mysterious events that had occurred since she had gone to Kara on her birthday. Maybe if she brought it up to date and organized her daily notes she would get some clear idea of what was going on.

The trip up north had been like a visit to another world, so different from life as she had always known it that it seemed like a fantasy realm. But now that she was back near to sources of authority and in contact with the States, she hoped things would become clearer. Her idea of who she suspected of the murder had been crystallizing for the last two days. But there were so many possibilities. She read over all her notebook entries since the trip to Kara, and started a clean page. She would organize her notes and try to make them make sense.

Just before she went to bed she reached the end of the ten pages of notes she had written. To summarize, she started a fresh page and made a chart. She printed neatly.

THE MURDER OF THE AMBASSADOR

Method	How given?	When?	Source
Poison, tuitui	In drink	At lunch	?

Then she started a chart of suspects. She printed in big letters a title:

WHO KILLED THE AMBASSADOR?

She listed four names as possible murderers.

She thought again and for fairness sake, added a name. Luke. She got this far and then thought, "This is a sexist list." She should be an equal opportunity suspecter. She added four names. She admitted to herself that she just had this full list to try to be orderly and logical. She felt she should include everyone at the head table at that fatal lunch and also those at the next table, which was close. And also, she had to include the boubou man and Dulcie who had been hovering nearby.

Her suspicions were really much narrower. But she filled out the chart as completely as she could. She had one column for possible motives. Someone had suggested that maybe the Ambassador was killed by mistake. Maybe Dudley was the intended victim.

So she included all those with a motive against Dudley.

She titled one column, How Likely. She put a star in that column for those that conceivably had a motive and ok for those that had none. She looked critically at the finished chart.

Possible suspect	Motive	How likely
Ron	meant to kill Dudley.	*
Michael	meant to kill Dudley	*
Dudley	to hide secret wrongdoing	*
Boubou man [for Richie]	to hide criminal activity	*
Luke	no motive	ok
Dulcie	to prevent bad reference	0
Sally	he refused project money	*
Fiona	no motive	ok
Cindy	meant to kill Dudley	*

She put a second star after the boubou man's name. Then she thought deeply. The bee attack on Ron seemed significant.

She went to the kitchen to get a drink and to the bathroom to wipe her face with water. She returned to her desk, read her list again and then put a second star next to a name. Dudley.

She really must talk to someone about all this.

Show her notes to someone official. It seemed like no one was doing anything. She was one person who had been involved from the first, nearby when the Ambassador died, and also close to the situation when Ron was attacked by the bees. If no one did anything, who knew who else would get hurt or killed?

Should break the promise of secrecy she made to Ron and tell someone the sordid story about his blackmailing Dudley. Ron could be in terrible danger.

And was Michael in danger? He had antagonized many people, including Dudley. If the motivation of the murders and attacks was to keep secrets from coming out, what secrets did Michael know? Or almost as dangerous, what secrets did he pretend to know and threaten to reveal?

And she, herself. Was she in danger? She had seen that strange fight with the boubou man. And so many people had talked to her and hinted scandalous things. Did others, especially Dudley, know that she knew these things? Or suspect? She vowed to

think of someone in authority that she could talk to tomorrow. She must act and get someone with authority and resources to act.

Chapter Twenty Seven: What Did The Butler Do?

Lynne had just arrived at her office at eight o'clock the next morning when the interoffice phone rang. She heard the haughty voice of Claudia Belmont. Lynne thought of a term for her. A power snob. She treated Lynne and the other volunteers as if they did not exist, looking through them if required in any way to have contact with them.

She spoke in her usual cold authoritative voice, "The Acting Ambassador wants to see you immediately."

Despite the command for instant action, Lynne took a few minutes to collect her thoughts. She could scarcely remember what she had been working on Monday before she left. She gathered together her folder of the outstanding proposals, a pad of paper and a pen. She also got from the files the folders for Michael's and Cindy's projects.

Everett Knowlton greeted her warmly. "I'm glad you're back, Lynne."

"I'm glad to be back." Once again, she had the problem of what to call him, so concentrated on not calling him anything. "It seems like horrible things happen when I'm up north, lately."

"Yes, that volunteer and the bees, a terrible thing."

Lynne took a deep breath, expecting to hear confirmation of Ron's death. "And Ron? How is he?"

"The Peace Corps Director managed to get a telephone line that was working and called us from Sokode. We were able to get an emergency helicopter to meet them in Kpalime after the Baptist hospital gave him some transfusions and serum. The helicopter flew him to Lome. Fortunately, the Air Afrique Flight left at 6 that night so they could send him to Abidjan almost immediately. And, after some treatment there, they will medivac him to the US for more treatment."

"He's alive!"

"Yes. He was critical at first, but he'll make it."

Lynne was relieved. She had been so sure he was dead. Maybe everything would turn out all right for all of them. "That's wonderful."

Everett Knowlton took in her relief. "You volunteers care a lot for each other, don't you?"

"Yes, we do. For better or worse, we're a family. Not always congenial or well matched, but still a family."

"And, I hear your little inspection tour showed the volunteer, Michael, had used the funds properly."

Lynne felt like laughing again when she thought of Michael's surprising accomplishment. But she said in a businesslike way, "Yes, the Ambassador's funds were well used."

"Good."

The Acting Ambassador seemed so casual and relaxed, Lynne wondered why he had called her in. Was he really devoting his valuable time to chat with her?

"Since you were out of town, you missed some of the happenings in the American community. You know Richie, the money changer."

"Oh yes, remember I told you I cashed a check there last week. And a strange thing happened, that man who waited on the table in Kara was in there and threatened him with a knife, some fight over some money he said Richie owed him."

Everett sighed. "Ah, yes. Richie's work takes him down some shady lanes. He was arrested at the airport because of a transaction with a Togolese cabinet minister. I spent two days seeing every official from the police on up in order to get him out. Did you read in the paper about Richie being in jail?"

"Yes, I did."

The Togolese government used the incident to get rid of a minister that was suspected of being loyal to the Olympio faction and the democracy movement. From what I can figure out, it seems that their transaction was a secret but accepted procedure, and it was a matter of politics to suddenly arrest him. It was one way to get a possible candidate out of the running."

"And, what will happen to Richie?"

"I think he may eventually pay a small fine. But, he's back in business, today."

"And Richie isn't really a criminal?"

Now Everett Knowlton smiled. "That is a semantic question. Criminal can mean someone who disobeys the laws. But sometimes the laws are made so they will be disobeyed and the government officials can get *cadeaux*, bribes for ignoring them. Richie assured the Ambassador that his operation was basically clean. He is honest in his own way, and is helpful to Americans. So, let's leave the label to philosophers."

He was saying the same thing Ron had predicted. "And did the Ambassador know all this? "

"Of course the arrest happened after the Ambassador's death. But he certainly knew the background information. He was the one who briefed me."

He paused, and once more Lynne was surprised at being able to take up his time and ask some of the things that she had been wondering about. "I know you have been concerned because we haven't made any announcements about the Ambassador's death. At last, we have the replacement for the American security officer that retired. Don McDuff has come to town and from now on can take over the whole security function. He will be in charge of coordinating the Togolese and American effort to investigate the death. We have all decided, with the approval of Washington, temporarily, to leave the cause of death officially as a heart attack and just make one announcement when we have finally found the murderer."

"But who do you suspect?"

"Oh, I'm not in the detective business. I'll not worry about suspecting anyone until the investigators tell me what they know."

"But have they found the waiter that was there when the Ambassador died?"

"They finally found him and questioned him carefully. He says that he makes a living working temporarily here and there. He used to hang around Richie's, in order to occasionally do errands for him. Richie was a money lender, besides being a money changer. I think that your boubou man may have had the job from time to time of impressing it upon people that they must pay their debts, sometimes rather forcefully. I hope they didn't do too much of that sort of thing. "

Lynne laughed weakly. "So that's what the butler did when he wasn't pouring drinks for the Ambassador. Doesn't anyone check the records of people they hire for Peace Corps functions?"

"Come on Lynne, this is Africa. We have no control over things like that. Most businesses here don't even have written records. And do remember that the Ambassador's visit was somewhat of a surprise. Originally they had planned to send me there.

"They found out a lot from the man. His name is Komi Bedeba. He said that last month he went up north where he has several wives and families. He works as a waiter from time and was happy to get the job as extra help at the Peace Corps meeting. That's why he was working at Affaires Sociales that day in Kara. He says he was frightened when the Ambassador died and was afraid that he would be blamed. You know people here are terribly afraid of witchcraft and of people putting potions and poisons in food and drinks. But, as far as anyone can tell, he had no motive to hurt the Ambassador. The police beat him thoroughly before they told us that they found him. That's all they got out of him. That, and the fact that he had tried to convince Richie to pay him a second time for a service he performed, telling Richie that someone had robbed him of the money. When Richie didn't fall for the story, he tried to force the issue."

Everett looked at her searchingly.

She was struck by what a nice looking man he was. There was nothing dramatic or flashy about his appearance, he just looked pleasant and inspired trust.

"You were with Luke and Dudley in the car all day, from morning to night. How did they get along together?" he asked.

"They seemed cold and formal. I couldn't make out what was going on."

Everett looked sad. "You'll learn soon. I've put it off because it is unpleasant, but I must make an announcement soon. You call the Peace Corps a family. There's a big problem in your family."

Which of her suspicions would be confirmed?

"So you can't tell me now?"

"No." There was a long pause. Everett remained silent.

Lynne wondered again why he had called her in. What was the real purpose of this meeting? It was pleasant to talk with him even about these unpleasant things. But was he leading up to something? Had she done something wrong?

Abruptly, Everett said, "Lynne, in this job I have so little free time, and no private life. But, I think I can polish off the most pressing things if I work late Friday night. Would you, will you go out to dinner with me Saturday? We could drive out to Robinson Beach, watch the waves a while, eat on the veranda overlooking the water. It's lovely there, simple and peaceful, with a nice cool breeze. Even though the restaurant is only a large veranda with a few cooking shacks and a refrigerator, they say that they have excellent chocolate mousse for dessert."

A torrent of mixed feelings surged through Lynne. She was pleased that such a nice, important man wanted to take her out on a real date. Of course he didn't know about her relationship with Luke and she couldn't tell him about it. But then she thought, why should she feel any loyalty to Luke? He had a wife or two, besides those worrisome possibilities hinted at by Irene and Sally. So, with only a barely perceptible pause, she said, "I'd love to. It sounds wonderful." And then she deliberately decided to

call him something. You had to call someone you are dating by a name. "Yes, I'll be glad to, Everett."

Chapter Twenty Eight: In The Dark

Everett's telephone rang. "Yes, Claudia, I'll get right on it," he said in a placating voice. After he hung up he said, "She's a little hard to take sometimes, but I'm lucky to have her. She's the one who knows what the Ambassador or an Acting Ambassador is supposed to do. I'd better get back to work. As usual, most of these things are urgent."

Lynne went back to her office in a happy mood. Everett had not given her any new instructions for work, so she busied herself processing the pile of applications she had started before her trip up north.

Without a tap or knock, the door burst open. She should have guessed. It was Irene. She beamed with expectation of an especially warm welcome, now that she had offered hospitality to Lynne. "I've got my application ready for my grant for a car. You have to get this to the Acting Ambassador today. We've got to get this all cleared up. I need transportation."

"Irene, you should realize this really isn't in the guidelines for the Ambassador's Self Help Fund, to get a car for your personal use. Are you sure you want to press this?"

"Of course. Here. I made it out just like you told me to."

Lynne never got over being surprised and repelled by the selfishness and gall of Irene. "You know, the money is to help the Togolese."

"What could help the Togolese more than to have me available to travel at any time? I'm here to help them. If you won't send it through I'll talk to the Acting Ambassador myself."

Wanting to spare Everett from an unpleasant scene and a great waste of his time, she hurriedly agreed. "I'll look it over and send it right through today. Call me in about a week and I'll tell you what's happening with it."

"A week. That's not fast enough. I'll be back in town Monday. I want an answer then."

Irene took Lynne's silence for agreement. Bubbling with enthusiasm, she started one of her stream of consciousness monologues about her plans for shopping, eating, and visiting while she was in Lome.

Lynne was deeply grateful when her telephone rang and the guard at the gate told her that a volunteer wanted to see her. "Sorry, Irene, I've got an appointment now. See you later."

When Irene left, still talking, she asked the guard who was there. It was Michael. She told him to send him up.

Michael came in looking pleased with himself.

"Lynne, I want to make an application for those funds to get the shelving for the library. And, did you talk to Dudley about my third year? I don't think he can refuse me now."

"You heard what happened to Ron, didn't you? We found him not many hours after we left you."

"Yes," Michael said, somberly. "It sounds like it's lights out for Ron. You never know what will happen. That's why I live every day for itself. Maybe it will be my last one."

Lynne knew that Michael did live like that. But she hadn't thought he would express it. She couldn't resist picking a small hole in his philosophy. "If you believe

that, maybe I don't need to bother to give you the application for the grant, or try to help you get your third year."

Michael laughed. "Well, that's just in case I do make it until then."

"Things aren't as bad as we all thought. I just learned that Ron isn't going to die. He is in Abidjan right now and doing well."

"Oh, that's good news. But, I'm sure he'll never be back here. He caused too much trouble for the administration. Ron never really fit in here. And Dudley doesn't like anyone that isn't a little tin soldier like he is. Or at least pretends to be. Dudley will use this as an excuse to keep him from coming back. Or maybe Ron will choose it. But, mark my words, we've seen the back of him."

"Maybe so."

"But anyway, back to Dudley. I'm going to talk to him again about the third year. He'd better give it to me. He really is a bad guy. He'd better watch out. He was lucky in Kara. But the next time he won't be so lucky."

"What do you mean about Kara?"

"Oh, you don't believe that Ambassador was the target of that death. That was a mistake. Nobody wanted to hurt the Ambassador. But Dudley, that's a different story."

"Yes, that's possible. Michael, at that meeting you asked a lot of questions that the volunteers had brought up about Carrie's death. Are you still suspicious about that?"

"No, I'm pretty satisfied with the news story and letter. All my Togolese friends are sure it was Pierre who killed Carrie and that Peace Corps officials had nothing to do with it. There was something strange about a locked door. It turned out that old Koudolo, the elder of the compound, had a key. He locked it to be sure no one got in and stole anything."

"I'm glad that's cleared up. It's good to have one death explained and one less thing to wonder about. But about Dudley, Michael, what kind of a person would kill another human being over any of the petty things people are complaining about. Could you kill someone?"

Michael thought a minute. "Yes, I could. Sometimes I get mad or drunk or just don't give a damn. But, I'd never use poison. I'd knock him down and kick him or stick a knife in him."

"Michael do you mean it?"

"Yes. It's not pretty but it's true. Some of the things I had to do as a prison guard, I came close to offing those animals." Lynne felt herself instinctively pulling away from Michael. And this was a man that most people, including Michael, considered to be her friend.

"Okay. But honestly, you didn't kill the Ambassador, or know who did?"

"No I didn't and don't, Lynne. Killing like that's not my style."

"Michael, you're a friend of Solomon. What did he mean when he made that prophesy? Did he somehow know that a murder was planned? Do you think he helped get the poison?"

"Lynne, I know you're interested in all of this. I'll tell you what I'll do. Solomon makes a sort of circuit, traveling the country, going from relative to relative, friend to friend, getting a some food and a little money from each one. Chances are he'll turn up in Bassar soon. I'll talk to him, try to find out why he said that about a curse on us."

"Will you really do that?"

"Yes I will. And, will you really talk to Dudley about me?"

"Oh Michael, why do you want to stay? You have missed so many classes this year your students probably won't pass their examinations."

"Lynne, I'm turning over a new leaf. Honestly. If I get the third year I'll stick to my job, teach the students and really develop the library."

"Okay, it's a deal." She gave Michael some tips on how to make his application effective and gave him a form.

That evening Lynne made her way home by taxi. She stopped at the SGGG store to buy some good groceries. The SGGG was almost like an American supermarket. It seemed like an amazing place to Lynne after her time in Dapaong, where the best store had only a tiny refrigerator and the electricity was off twelve hours a day. She feasted her eyes on its large selection of foods, carefully deciding which of the bounteous display of groceries she could afford. Afterwards she took a shared taxi with three assorted Togolese. They eyed her with a friendly curiosity as was the custom.

She in turn, smiled faintly and looked them over. She never got over her enjoyment of the wonderful Togolese clothes. There were at least a thousand different African prints worn currently. One of the men in the taxi wore a pink embroidered *complet*. It contrasted beautifully with his bittersweet chocolate skin. Shocking pink. She wished men in American would dress like that. But then she almost giggled as she thought of self important Brad in such a suit. With his pale skin he would look washed out in it, almost sickly. Darn. She had thought of him again!

She was home before dark came at 6:30.

She made another of her simple suppers. It was a treat to be able to prepare her own meal with fresh supplies. She even had bought some hamburger, something only sold at the SGGG and the two other yovo stores in town.

Because of all of the things she had heard about Luke lately, for once she hoped he wouldn't visit her this evening. She couldn't decide how to treat him, ignore the rumors or to ask him about them. And she felt a little guilty about her date with Everett. She would rather see how it turned out before she told Luke about it, if she did tell him.

By the time she had eaten and washed her dishes it was dark outside. She was tired after her first day back after her long journey. Even so, she took some time writing in her notebook and reread her speculations about the murder. It was a relief that this Mr. McDuff was going to really investigate it. She got ready for bed early.

Lynne was happy to be back in Lome, in her own apartment and her own bed. She felt safe and at home here. The fine breeze coming from the balcony made her comfortable and at least for the time, cool. She got into a clean old tee shirt for a night gown. As usual, she left one night light burning in the entryway near the door. It was weak but cast a dull glow over that area of the apartment.

As usual, she fell asleep almost as soon as her head hit the pillow. But, as often happened, she woke later. Drowsily she wondered why she had wakened. Was there a noise? Suddenly she jerked awake. The apartment was completely dark. The light near the door was out. Feeling uneasy, she thought it must have burned out. She turned the switch to turn on the reading lamp near her bed. It still was dark. She glanced out the window and saw the neighbors' lights were still burning. It wasn't a general failure. She started to feel worried. Then, she heard a sound at the door. Someone was trying to get in. Someone had turned off her lights at the fuse box and was trying to enter her

apartment in the darkness. She heard a scratching at the door and then a loud thud. In the unlighted darkness at the entrance, she could somehow see a darker area, the shape of a figure slowly coming in. Lynne was terrified. Was it the boubou man? Did she see a flashing gleam of a knife in his hand? Was he going to kill her, or... Probably at the back of her mind since she had arrived in this strange country she always had the fear that some night a strange man would enter her bedroom and molest her. Laura who had served in Burkina Faso told her that one night there she had wakened to find a strange man standing over her.

Lynne had never been a screamer, but she tried to scream now. No sound came out. Then she tried again. All she could produce was a loud, one note, piercing, wordless shriek. She deliberately repeated it one, two, three, four, five, six, seven times. The figure left the doorway, slammed the door and she could hear hurried steps on the stairs. She continued her piercing, one note shriek. After what seemed an eternity, she heard people on the stairs. She heard her neighbors' voices, speaking in French and Mina. "What is the matter. Are you all right?"

"Entrez." she said. "Come in." They asked her to turn on the light and tell them what was the matter. She explained that someone had turned the electricity off and had entered her room. Her kind neighbor, Komi, an English professor at the university got a flashlight from his apartment. He shined it on her to be sure she was all right. Then he went to the fuse box downstairs and threw the switch.

Immediately, Lynne's entrance light and the reading light went on. She quickly snatched up a length of doth from a chair and wrapped it around her like skirt. Her room was full of neighbors, men, women, and children, talking curiously and sympathetically to her in French and Mina.

"Komi, how did he get in? The door was locked."

"Ah, Lynne, the locks are old and weak. Almost any skeleton key and a good push will open our doors. You had better pay a locksmith to come here tomorrow and put a good double lock on. Someone really thought about how to get in. And it was your apartment they wanted to enter. They figured out which fuse to turn off and they walked up the stairs to the second floor."

"Who do you think it was?"

"There are a lot of thieves around here, but I think this was an American." He showed her a scrap of paper that he had found near the fuse box. It was torn from note paper. "Look. See what it says at the top-- Peace Corps Office."

Chapter Twenty Nine: The Fetish Market

Lynne woke early the next morning after fitful sleep and nightmarish dreams. She had barricaded the door with chairs and a table and felt no one could get in now without so much noise she would have plenty of warning. But she wasn't at ease, knowing that her lock was almost useless. Her kind neighbor had promised to send Mensah, a cousin of his who was a locksmith the first thing in the morning to help her make her home secure. She didn't want another episode like that again. She shuddered, just remembering it.

Soon, the locksmith came, one of the few fat Togolese men she had ever met. He carried a supply of locks, old and new, in an old flour sack. After a short consultation he started work, putting on a modern double lock and also a chain. It would cost 10,000 CFA, about 20 dollars. That took a large chunk out of her monthly stipend. But perhaps she could talk to Mr. Da Silva, the cross Assistant Peace Corps Director for Finances and see if this was a reimbursable expense. While he worked, Lynne busied herself with house work.

She made sure that her purse was hidden in the next room. It wasn't so much that she specifically distrusted Mensah, the locksmith, but she had remembered the words of the Peace Corp Assistant Director giving them orientation the first night in the country, "Don't buy anything valuable. If you brought expensive things here, think of your stay here as a gradual transfer of your goods from you into the hands of the Togolese." After losing her expense money several times she learned to always keep her money guarded carefully. But then in the fire in Dapaong everything had been destroyed except for what she could get together and carry out in those five minutes. What a pity that was. She wished now she had given her radio, her calculator, and her cassette player to the wistful Togolese children who had looked at them enviously.

She had tried to guard against thieves. But last night's incident gave her a new kind of pain. Someone from Peace Corps had been there last night. Who? One of the Togolese employees, hoping to find some money or valuables? Or was it tied to the Ambassador's death? A chill went down her back. She wouldn't feel safe until that murderer was revealed.

When Mensah finished his work, she tested the lock and door carefully. It was fine. She paid him and thanked him profusely for his quick, good work. She felt good. Her home was secure again. No one would get in again, as long as she was sure to lock her door.

Just as she was thinking this, she heard a strong knock on her door. After last night, her first reaction was apprehension. She called out in as stern and threatening a voice as she could, "Who is it?"

A woman's voice called back. "It's Dulcie. Am I bothering you?"

"Dulcie. How good to see you! Come in." The two women hugged and exchanged kisses on the cheek, just one. The three kisses that were the French custom always seemed silly to Lynne.

"I haven't seen you in a long time. I came yesterday to get some shots at the Health Office and spend the weekend."

"Dulcie, what're your plans for the day? I have an idea and I'd like some company."

"What do you want to do?"

"I've never gone to the fetish market and I want to go today."

"Oh, I've seen it. Maybe it's not a good idea. People here believe you can go there and buy a charm and put a curse on someone with it."

"Well, that's all nonsense, isn't it?"

"The way an old Africa hand explained it to me is this. Whatever you think about it, voodoo and magic spells work. They can make people sick, even kill them. Probably voodoo works by psychological suggestion."

"If you don't believe in it, then it can't hurt you."

"Lynne, by going there, and buying a charm, you are buying into that whole mind set. On some level you do believe it. That then makes you vulnerable to bad magic done against you."

"Yes that could be true. So, I'll guard against believing. I certainly won't buy any charms. There's one bit of research I want to do. I've heard that sometimes, if the curses and charms don't work to get revenge, you can buy poison."

"Lynne, are you playing detective?"

"No one else seems to be. I want to know just how hard it is to buy tuitui, the hunting poison that killed the Ambassador."

"Okay. I'm game. But, if you touch anything, be sure to wash your hands."

So they went to the fetish market which was in downtown Lome. It was as big a large square city block and full of stalls with rows of ghastly objects, skulls of small animals, lizards, snakes, bits of dried animal fur and snake skin, various unidentifiable repulsive remnants of some living thing. Lynne thought of the witches in Macbeth, eye of newt, toe of frog. The stench of the fetish objects in the heat was disgusting.

The market was crowded with people buying charms to use either for good luck or to hurt their enemies. At one stall, piles of bones, dried lizards, shells and live chameleons were all sold along with incantations, magic formulas, and instructions for making them effective.

Lynne found a stand that sold hunting supplies. She bargained with a man with many decorative scars on his face wearing the northern style striped, flared, handwoven shirt to buy a bow, arrows and a small bag of tuitui leaves for 4,000 CFA. At the last minute, she became uncomfortable about the whole thing and lost interest in having physical evidence of her information. She didn't want to have a deadly poison in her possession. She also realized that after paying for the lock, she was almost out of money. She thought of these things after the deal was all made, and then she did an unforgivable thing. She said she didn't want it after all.

The seller started shouting at her.

She and Dulcie ran away from his stand, rushing, dodging around stalls, looking for an exit, but where ever they ran, the news of their terrible breach of business honor followed them and people yelled, cursed, and complained in many languages. Running as fast as they could they finally came to the front entrance. Just about to leave, Lynne stepped into a puddle of thick mud and skidded. She fell into a counter covered with skulls of snakes of different sizes.

Somehow regaining her balance, she ran out the door, out to the street where traffic was proceeding in its normal, congested, but peaceful way. Dulcie wasn't far behind her.

Once on the safe sidewalk, she drew a long breath and tried to compose herself. She hoped that she hadn't become a believer in voodoo power and according to Dulcie's friend's theory was now vulnerable. She hoped that when she closed her eyes tonight, she wouldn't see that table of voodoo snake skulls.

But, she had learned one thing. Now she knew. There was no problem in buying tuitui. Anyone could buy it for less than 4,000 francs – eight dollars.