

Chapter Thirty: Mysteries

When Dulcie too had made her escape, they looked at each other, messy and muddy, and collapsed into laughter, partly from fear, partly from amusement. Dulcie invited Lynne to go to the chicken lady with her to get some food and have a good long talk. But, Lynne asked to be excused. Her mind was full of anticipation of her date that evening.

When she got back to her apartment, she planned to take a leisurely shower and wash her hair, use some of the precious skin lotion and cologne she had brought from America and take a nap to be fresh and rested for her big evening. But, when she got to apartment and turned the key to open the new lock she saw an envelope had been pushed under the door. It was typed on Embassy stationery and said:

Lynne,

I'm so sorry, but we'll have to put off our dinner date until another time. Something urgent came up and I will be tied up all evening.

Best,

Everett Knowlton.

Well, write that one off, she thought. Disappointed, she took a quick shower to remove the dirt of the market, made herself a tasteless sandwich, and did some housework she had been putting off for a long time. She wrote about her tuitui discovery in her notebook and the stark sentence, "Everett Knowlton broke the date."

That night she felt secure with the new lock and chain. She didn't feel she had to worry about anyone getting in. No one entered her apartment and threatened her that night, but she had dreams of angry fetishers chasing her, chanting yovo, yovo, in threatening tones.

Sunday, she decided to spend the day lying on her bed, reading the American murder mysteries that Dulcie had brought her. When she opened the first one, a letter addressed to Lynne dropped out. Probably it had somehow been sent to Dulcie and she had forgotten to give it to her. She looked at the return address. It was from Brad. Ideas leapt into her mind, "He's sorry, he's ashamed, he's going to ask me to forgive him." Then she read it.

Dear Lynne,

Your mother tells me that you have a responsible administrative job in Africa and are enjoying your life there. Probably this will give you an opportunity to gain new leadership skills. In the long run, you will probably gain from it. This pleases me because I wish only the best for you.

In our hurry to divide up our things when you packed up to leave I think you took one of my favorite books, The Education of Henry Adams. Will you send this to me by priority mail as soon as possible? I want to use a quotation from it in my acceptance speech when I am made a partner next month.

Allison sends her love. Good luck to you in all your endeavors,

Best,

Brad

How could Brad feel so justified, no matter what he did? Why had she let him get away with it so long?

She went to the bookcase and picked up one of the few books she had brought from the United States. She looked at the inscription inside the front cover, written by Brad when thought of himself as her mentor.

To Lynne. This book always inspired me. When you read it, you will learn some important things about my aspirations.

Your Brad.

Carefully and precisely, she tore out each page and then tore it into four pieces. When she had finished, she put all the pieces in the charcoal stove on the balcony, added the front and back covers, poured kerosene on the pile and lit a match. When it was burning well, she added the letter from Brad to the flame.

She said aloud. "Brad, I'm sick of you and your sanctimonious selfishness. I'm also sick of Africa. It's hot, it's dirty, it's alien, it's dangerous. Even in my own apartment there are strange intruders. I can't bear it here. I wish I could walk this very minute right out of Africa and into one of my books."

She read the first mystery, then, three hours later started the second one and at 11 pm she finished her third mystery. She almost forgot where she was and the things that had distressed her earlier. Unlike the problems of her real life, the puzzles in mystery books always had solutions.

She turned off the light and thought again of Brad. He and Allison would probably have nervous breakdowns if they had to constantly be menaced and, always, as Lynne was now, moist with sweat in the tropical heat. Lynne felt a surge of pride in herself. What was that song, "In the jungle, in the jungle the lion's roaring tonight." She herself was that lion, strong, proud, able to take it. She made a promise to herself. She would be the one to discover the murderer and save all of them from danger.

"Brad, you conceited idiot. You couldn't take this life any better than Allison could. I know something about courage you will never learn."

Chapter Thirty One: Roadkill

Monday morning Lynne was back in the office. She didn't know how to react if she saw Everett. She wasn't sure she believed the cancellation of their date was unavoidable.

She decided just to do her job and let events clarify their relationship. She busied herself with paper work and prepared a stack of forms for Everett's signature.

About ten o'clock, Cindy came to see her. Here at the Embassy where everyone tried to look neat and formal, she especially stood out with her sloppy tee shirt and wrinkled skirt. She asked for a form for a Self Help application. She was clearly both excited and upset. Then she explained why. "Oh, Lynne. Have you heard? Something ghastly happened again."

She had just come from post. She had ridden down in a bush taxi with other volunteers. Everyone was talking about Michael. He had been killed on his motorcycle. Of course he was going fast, like he always did. When the engine all of a sudden gave out, and then the brakes failed, he fell off, hit his head and was gravely wounded. He was wearing his helmet but didn't have the strap buckled. He died before they got him to the doctor.

The talk was that someone had deliberately tampered with his moto. He had just had it repaired at the shop of Pepperoni, as they called him, the young Togolese man who had been set up in business by an education volunteer doing a secondary project. Dudley and Luke had been helpful to him. He had tremendous loyalty to them. Everyone remembered Michael's loud, hostile argument with Dudley at Kara.

Cindy wanted Lynne to leave work and go to Peace Corps to try to get more of the latest information and rumors about Michael's death. But, she explained that she had to work regular hours at this job. They exchanged hugs. "Take care of yourself, Lynne. There aren't so many of us left!"

What a melodramatic statement! But there was some truth in it.

Another violent episode, this time a death.

Lynne felt dreadful. Was there something about being her friend that made people die young? She grieved for Michael. Even though there were a lot of things about him that she did not like, they had been tied together by their common lot. It was tragic for a young man to die before he could ever find himself. She felt bad remembering her revulsion the last time she had seen him alive. She now had no doubt that Ron and also Solomon had been right. This volunteer group was cursed. And she didn't even believe in curses. But maybe it was cursed because there was a remorseless murderer in their midst, masquerading as their wise guide and friend. Was Dudley some kind of homicidal maniac who was determined to kill everyone that threatened him? Maybe the idea was too extreme to take seriously, but it made Lynne shiver. Did he plan to kill everyone who knew the secret that the Ambassador was about to reveal? And, if Ron was right about this secret, was Lynne in danger since she knew it too?

Chapter Thirty Two: I Owe A Cock

This last death was just too much. She must talk to the new security man, Mc Duff, who was supposed to be figuring things out. Someone should be keeping watching Dudley. And she wondered if the authorities had discovered how easy it is to buy tuitui in Lome.

Lynne had promised herself that when she got to work the next morning she would get an appointment with Mc Duff to talk about her strong suspicions.

But, once again, the Embassy and Peace Corps offices were plunged into confusion with another death. Everett was unreachable. Doubtless poor Michael's death was what had made him break the dinner date on Saturday. Everett and Dudley seemed to be in meetings most of the time and when she tried to make an appointment with Mc Duff, she was told that he was meeting with one or the other of them and couldn't talk to her.

The next few days, Lynne dutifully did her work in her office and returned at night to make her simple meal in her apartment. She felt isolated. She couldn't figure out why that intruder had come to room. It added to her general distrust. She was glad that Luke had not visited her lately. She felt ill at ease about him with so many people hinting about his activities and didn't want to face him while she was feeling so suspicious.

At last the authorities completed their formalities and Dudley once more accompanied a body to America by airplane. Once again Dudley had to make a sad announcements to the parents. Wild Michael hadn't had much of a family, a father who was a helpless alcoholic and a rejecting stepmother. According to the grapevine, the father had cried and cursed the Peace Corps. Dudley had accepted it patiently.

It all was ironic, if it was he who had arranged for Michael to be killed. At least Lynne would be safe for a few days while Dudley was in America.

The situation at the Embassy finally calmed down to the point where Lynne could get a hold of the secretary who was handling calls to Mc Duff and could get an appointment for early the next week. Then, Thursday, soon after she arrived for work Lynne was called by Linda for Peace Corps. All volunteers who were in town were asked to come to the Peace Corps office at 9 AM for an emergency meeting. When she said that she was supposed to work, Linda just said, "Don't worry; it's been cleared with Everett. You just come along." She wouldn't give her any idea what the meeting was about. Lynne found a taxi almost immediately in front of the Embassy and took it to the Peace Corps office.

Everyone was jammed into the reception area sitting on folding chairs that had been brought in. She saw about fifty volunteers. As it happened, many of them worked in education and had come from their posts for a training session that had been planned long ago for today. Sally was there, looking bright and cheerful again.

Everett Knowlton, looking attractive and official and accompanied by Dudley who had just returned from America, walked to the front of the room. The noisy chatterers became quiet.

"Good morning everyone. Once again, we are saddened by the death of one of our Peace Corps Volunteers. I join you in grieving for the loss of Michael. And, I have another difficult announcement to make.

About a month ago, the Ambassador started to address you when he was suddenly stricken. He died soon afterwards. At that time, he had been about to tell you some preliminary facts that had come to light that had made it necessary for him to make some staff changes. The changes were not made because of his death and the dislocations that caused. When I took over as Acting Ambassador, I was busy with other problems and also reluctant to do this unpleasant thing that I knew I must do. We continued our investigations and found more, irrefutable evidence. I checked with Washington on policy and it was clear. So, I must announce to you the action that I took yesterday.

"Luke Menatevi has been relieved of his position as Assistant Peace Corps Director, Education.

"It is our principle to demand financial integrity from all employees rather than winking at corruption as the Togolese government does. Information about this matter first came to the Embassy through an informant in the Togolese government. We investigated and consulted with your Peace Corps Director. There is no doubt about it. It is not just one instance, but a pattern over at least the last two years. Luke has been told of the results of the investigation, was asked to clear out his desk and has been told that he will no longer be allowed to enter any Embassy or Peace Corps office or facility."

He said this last sentence with especial official solemnity and let his eyes rove over the assembled volunteers. When his glance rested on Lynne, he gave an almost imperceptible nod of recognition and continued to sweep the group.

"Now, I'll let you talk to your director who has just come back from his sad duty of accompanying Michael's body to the U.S."

Dudley looked miserable. "Volunteers, this is a sad meeting. I just had to tell Michael's parents about his death. We will have a memorial ceremony for him next week.

"And I have to talk to you about this thing with Luke. I think all of you like Luke and benefited from his leadership in our projects. I thought of him as a personal friend. But, I, we, have no choice. Luke has been stealing from the Peace Corps for at least two years. You have heard of the hotel his wife runs for him? You may have even stayed in it. We have learned that he has been regularly using Peace Corps cars to do the shipping for it. Over the years he diverted many shipments of goods bought with Peace Corps Funds for use of volunteers, especially shipments of chickens, for use at his hotel."

Dudley continued. "This is a tragedy. A fine man, brought down by his own bad judgement and his ambition for financial rewards.

"We have made a temporary replacement. William Foli, who has done such a fine job as director of training in many of our training camps, will take over as Acting Assistant Director. We will try to work out a deal with the University to allow him to combine the job with his professorial duties. We will then negotiate to see whether to give him the job permanently." Here, Dudley stopped talking and was handed a sheet of paper by Linda. He and the Acting Ambassador had a hurried huddled discussion.

Lynne remembered something she had read in that book of Plato that had ended up on Michael's floor. Socrates, that honest man, when he knew that death was inevitable said to a friend, "I owe a cock to somebody, be sure the debt is paid." It looked like Luke owed a whole load of cocks to Peace Corps.

Her lover was a thief. Her first reaction was of anger and feelings of betrayal, to think that Luke, a had turned out to be a petty embezzler of Peace Corps goods. But her second wave of feelings involved sorrow and great pity and exasperation. Luke had had it good. He was one of a tiny percentage of Togolese who had a fine job with good pay and medical and retirement benefits. He had prestige not only with the American and expatriate community but among the Togolese. She once went with some education volunteers to his native village with him. He was greeted as a great man, taken immediately to the chief and a big feast was given in his honor.

Now that he was fired for this he would never get another job with Americans or any other government or international agency. And, there were almost no other jobs here.

No matter how they all tried to overcome cultural differences, once again, they were caught in a conflict of standards and expectations. Dipping a little on the side was an expected practice in West African bureaucracies. She had seen the fine big mansion owned by the head of customs. Only a small proportion of taxes due was actually collected; a tip for the tax collector was substituted.

Of course, Luke should know Americans better, and know they take such things seriously.

She turned to Dulcie, looking for someone who might understand her mixed feelings. "Dulcie, you've been a friend of Luke's, haven't you?"

"Yes, indeed. A close friend," she said emphatically.

"Very close?" Lynne found herself asking.

"Yes. I know you have been too. He is a wonderful lover, isn't he?"

"Yes, wonderful." Lynne tried to make her voice casual. But she was dismayed. All the special glory she had felt at being the one chosen for Luke's love fell from her. She was only one of a group who felt he was "a wonderful lover."

"Dulcie, don't you feel terrible? This will ruin his life. How could he risk everything for such small amounts of money?"

"Yes, I do feel bad. The disgrace of being fired will almost kill him. He will be just another jobless man. Without Peace Corps patronage, probably his hotel will fail too. He'll be like thousands of other educated African men, unemployed, somehow making do. But, you know it's almost impossible to get capital to start a business here in any legal way. He dreamed of having a successful hotel that would give him income when he retired and provide work for his sons and nephews. It was no small dream for him. But now, poor, dear, gorgeous, proud man, his dream is dust."

The Acting Ambassador called the group to order again.

"Another matter you are all interested in. Don Mc Duff, the new Security Officer for the American mission is vigorously investigating the death of the Ambassador. He has some recent reports on laboratory findings from America, but I can not announce them at present. This much I can say. As you all suspected, the Ambassador did not die of a heart attack. He was killed by ingestion of tuitui, a local poison used in hunting. If you have any information about how his death came about, please get in touch with Mc Duff. He will want to talk to all of you that sat at the tables near the Ambassador at that fateful luncheon in Kara. Peace Corps is lending him an office to make his work with you more convenient.

"Volunteers, I sympathize with you for serving at a time of so much doubt and fear. But, I have every confidence in your Peace Corps director, Dudley. He is on a daily basis in touch with the Embassy and it is evident that he is solicitous of the needs and rights of volunteers. Please cooperate with him in any measures he takes to safeguard you in a time when we not only have this problem in the American community but threats of disorder and unrest in the country. I have the greatest faith in him."

Trust Dudley? So much for Lynne's theory that Dudley was the bad guy whose terrible secret was prevented from disclosure by the Ambassador's death. Everett was clearly standing behind Dudley, as a pillar of the American presence here.

So the announcement that the Ambassador was about to make was about Luke, not Dudley. Could it have been Luke who killed the Ambassador, trying to keep him from making the announcement? Was her extremely part time lover not only a thief and but a murderer too?

Chapter Thirty Three: Private Investigations

After the meeting at the Peace Corps office, Lynne returned to her office. Shocked at the revelations, she was annoyed at herself for ignoring the many hints about Luke's behavior that had been coming at her from all sides. Now they were confirmed and clarified. How could she have made love with such a man?

Now that it was revealed that the Ambassador did not have an ugly secret about Dudley to reveal, all her suspicions of the Peace Corps Director seemed groundless.

But someone had killed the Ambassador. For once, she had no work waiting to be done in the office, so she took her diary out of her purse and once more looked over the summary of her thinking about the Ambassador's death. Now that she had visited the fetish market, she felt she had something to add. Under Method it said, tuitui poison. Under Source, she wrote fetish market. As she thought more about the situation and the recent revelations made by Everett Knowlton, she felt she should revise her list of suspects. She thought deeply and deleted a star after Dudley's name.

At this point the telephone rang. Oddly enough it was Barbara Dudley's wife. Lynne was surprised to hear from her. She had two little children and was noted for her domesticity. Occasionally, when she did attend a Peace Corps function, she was noted for cornering a luckless volunteer, usually Lynne, and giving an endless account of the latest and most adorable things her children aged five and three had done. As far as anyone knew, she never complained about Dudley's long hours, his many trips up country or any rumors about his enjoyment of Peace Corps parties. If you could get her to stop talking about her children, then the subject was always Dudley, how the Embassy counted on him and how Washington appreciated him.

"Yes, Barbara. How are you? What can I do for you?"

"Lynne, you're a little older than the other volunteers and more responsible. That's why I called you. Dudley's had such a terrible time these last months, with all of the problems in the Peace Corps. I want to give a birthday party for him. I know that you're a lady. Can you give me a list of about five volunteers I can invite that I can count on behaving well? I plan to invite officials from the Embassy and USAID, some people visiting from Washington and a few French people and I don't want any of the rougher element embarrassing me. I'll tell you a little secret. Dudley's being considered for a wonderful job in Washington after he finishes this tour of duty. My little party will help that."

Lynne thought fast. No one would want to attend such a party under such restrictions. "Barbara, I think it would be better not to invite any volunteers right now. Everyone is too upset with all of the deaths and now the problem with Luke. Who knows how they might act."

"Maybe you're right, Lynne. I thought it would be a fine opportunity for some of the better ones to associate with some higher type people. But I'll follow your advice. Dudley is such a fine man and good husband, caring and thoughtful with everyone. I want to do everything I can to show him how much appreciated he is."

Was she talking about the same Dudley that Michael and Ron knew? And she remembered that just a few months ago, she had admired him almost as much as his wife did.

"Yes, Barbara. Goodbye now, and good luck with the party."

She looked at her list again. She knew that Dudley had a hostile, punitive side. But, even if Ron's strange story was true, it didn't sound as if he had ever been in any danger of getting into trouble with the authorities. And no revelation could dent Barbara's blind confidence in her precious husband. She removed the other star after his name and wrote in its place, ok.

Lynne looked at the list of suspects sadly. Two on it, young men who were friends of hers, had met with violence. Ron was still in a hospital in the U.S. Michael was dead. She drew lines across their names. They hadn't killed the Ambassador. Probably they had been attacked because of something they knew. Maybe it had some connection with a big secret that the Ambassador started to talk about.

Now, after the meeting with Everett and Dudley she knew what that painful secret the Ambassador had been about to announce was. There was one obvious prime suspect. She made a star next to Luke's name. She tried to figure out the whole situation with Luke in the role of murderer. It would have been easy for him to buy the tuitui anytime at the fetish market. But how did he administer it to the Ambassador? For that matter, how could any one administer it to the Ambassador? There had been a roomful of people watching just before he died.

And Ron, was Luke responsible for his death? Dudley had said that he and Luke had decided to have Ron look at Cindy's bee project. Was it Luke's preposterous idea that Ron should look at a bee project? Ron had told Lynne he knew a damaging secret about Luke. Had he hinted about it to Luke and threatened to expose him? Ron seemed to know everyone's secrets. Ron was a conniver and black mailer. It was possible.

And poor Michael, she remembered his whispered conversation in the new little library up north with Luke. Probably they had been talking about the accounting books for the training program that his girl friend, Veronica had been logistics manager for. She would have known about the missing chickens. Michael had been there too, a technical trainer. To buy their silence, Luke had let Veronica return home before her release date.

Lynne remembered one strange dinner when they had eaten noodle soup, rice, and the fried yams called colicos, with no meat course. They had all been very new, determined not to complain and to show how willing they were to suffer the necessary privations of Peace Corps. Probably the load of chickens intended for that meal had gone by Peace Corps truck to provide Luke's hotel with a main dish for some banquet they were catering for Togolese officials.

She continued her reconstruction of those past events. Michael had known all of this. And now he was dead. Pepperoni had damaged the motor and brakes of the moto as a favor to Luke who had helped him get the money to start his business. Luke has gone to these cruel lengths to try to keep from being exposed. And all for nothing. Now he was shamed, disgraced, all power stripped from him.

She looked at the chart again. She believed the story she had just told herself. She considered it all again carefully. All her previous loving thoughts about Luke evaporated. Her ex-lover was lover to the multitudes. Now she was sure he was also a cheat, a thief and a murderer.

She put a second star next to his name.

Chapter Thirty Four: Knock Knock

When Lynne returned to her apartment that night she was tired from the emotional stress of the day. And when darkness fell at 6:30, it seemed natural to start thinking of bed early. After her dinner and clean up she took the time to write a few more notes in her diary, mainly about her feelings. When she lay down, she had trouble relaxing and her mind was like hamsters in a wheel toy, going over and over the revelations of that dreadful meeting and her even more dreadful conclusions about Luke's character.

Then she heard a knocking at her door, first hesitant, then firm, then downright loud. Glad she had the new lock and the chain, she went to the door and called, "Who's there?"

"It's Luke. I have to see you."

Luke! Fear swept over her. What did he want? Had he come to kill her too? She said as confidently as she could, "No Luke. I can't see you. Go away."

"Lynne, you are my friend, my sweetheart. It is all a misunderstanding. Let me explain. Let me talk to you. Let me in."

"No. No."

"Lynne, just days ago you held me to you and promised that you would never forget what we meant to each other, no matter what happened."

"That was when I thought we meant something to each other. I was wrong."

"Lynne, let me in. I will show you that I do love you, madly. Now, let me in." His voice became loud and commanding. "Lynne, I demand that you open this door, immediately. I must see you"

"No, No, No, go away."

And he started pushing, banging and applying pressure against the weak old door. The strong new locks would hold. But maybe the old wood would splinter. What could she do? She had thought that she was used to not having a telephone, but right now she longed for a 911 number. Even if she had a phone, she knew there was no number to call that would get her help. The police didn't have transportation and wouldn't come unless a person paid for a taxi for them. What should she try? She started to move her heavy desk towards the door; maybe that would keep him out.

But, then, mercifully, she heard the pleasant voice of her neighbor, saving her once again. He said politely in French, "Sir, I'm sorry, but it appears the lady does not wish to see you now. You must go." She heard Luke argue in an authoritative voice. But when the English teacher insisted, she heard Luke give up and then she could hear his steps going down the stairs. She waited a few minutes and then opened the door cautiously with the chain still in place.

"Komi, you're an angel. Thank you so much."

"You are welcome. A gentleman does not insist when a lady says no."

She started to explain the situation but it seemed so complicated and also nebulous she just agreed.

"Don't worry. I will tell the gardien not to let him visit you again with out asking your permission first."

"Oh, that will be good. Good night now."

"Good night."

She lay awake for hours, trying to decide what she could do. There was no way to get the local police to help in a situation like this. And if she asked Peace Corps or the Embassy to protect her, it would lead to them asking questions about why he might come to visit her and the story of her love affair with him would come out. Right now, above all, she hoped Everett would not hear about that. It might kill their still fragile new relationship. She distrusted Luke now, but really, he had no reason to hurt her. She should not be emotional. Komi's solution was good. The guard would not let him up again.

And she would be careful until she got a chance to talk to the security officer at her appointment next week about her strong suspicion. By now, he too probably suspected Luke of more than embezzlement.

Chapter Thirty Five: An Enchanted Evening

Friday morning, Lynne awoke vowing to tackle her problems vigorously once more. As usual, it was a hot and steamy day, but it was also bright and sunny. She forced herself to hum, "Oh, what a beautiful morning," as she dressed.

She had not had a private conversation with Everett for days and wondered again if a personal relationship was possible in the midst of all these catastrophes.

About mid morning she got a note, nicely typed on Embassy stationery.

Dear Lynne,

I meant to talk to you the first thing this morning to make additional apologies for our missed appointment. It really was unavoidable, and all the things explained at the meeting at Peace Corps yesterday made it impossible even to talk to you. Please understand and give me another chance. I hope things have calmed down. Are you willing to try again Saturday to have our dinner at the beach? If it's all right with you, I'll pick you up at 4:00. I'm dictating this at 7:00 AM because I'll be out of the office most of the day. Will you please tell my secretary that everything is okay if you can go with me?

Everett

She called haughty Claudia immediately and in the most businesslike tone she could muster asked her to tell the Acting Director that she could keep the appointment.

Deciding not to count on the date too much and avoid letting herself in for disappointment, she promised herself she wouldn't make big preparations, even in her mind. Rising late Saturday morning, she washed her hair so that it would be fluffy and clean. She dressed for the day, wearing a backless sundress that a local seamstress had made for her of a beautiful blue, green, violet African print. She knew that many Africans thought a bare back was indecent, and had a jacket made which she wore for ordinary occasions. She fell to musing the contradictions of African life. While older country women cheerfully sat on the streets bare breasted, a foreigner in a mini skirt or with a low cut dress was considered to be a prostitute.

She decided to spend the day catching up on her letter writing and record keeping. All day, she expected to hear the gardien knocking at her door saying someone had left her a message. Everett was really too busy and important for a social life with her. She watched for him on the balcony.

At one minute after four she saw him drive up in his personal car. She called down to him, "Everett, I'm coming." She flew down the steps and to the car which was attracting a more than usual crowd of curious children.

Everett leaned over in the driver's seat to open her door. "Forgive me for not getting out. I didn't know if I could get through this gang."

"Yes, it's a good idea to stay with the car. They might want to find some souvenirs."

He wasn't wearing casual clothes, but was dressed in ambassadorial style, wearing not the functionaire suit that Peace Corps officials and lower Togolese officials wore up north, but a beautifully tailored, navy blue dress suit, diplomat quality. She felt a little awed, but he looked at her in her sun dress appreciatively.

"Lynne, you look lovely, just right for our beach side visit. I'm sorry that I'm overdressed, but, it turned out, I had to go to a meeting at the Togolese ministry and came directly here. I'm so glad you will go with me."

They made the long picturesque drive to Robinson Beach in the daylight, took a short walk near the water, watching the white waves land on the sandy shore. They found a flower decorated table on the veranda and placed their order. They could hear the waves crashing and palm trees rustling in the breeze. It was pleasantly warm with the scent of fish, salt water, and flowers.

It was the kind of tropical romantic evening she had fantasized about before when she came to Africa. The dinner didn't come for two hours so they had plenty of time to talk. They explored their common interests and their dreams. Everett told about his desire to remain a career officer with the foreign service and to visit all the exotic places of the earth. He often was lonely. He had never married and had been careful until now not to fall in love. But now if he could find the right woman, one who shared his goals, he might be ready. He looked deeply into her eyes.

Lynne was strongly attracted to Everett. But, she had been attracted to Luke.

She needed some down time. She had a hunch that sometime in the future they would become very important to each other. But she he wanted to control her life alone for a while first. They watched a typical Togolese sundown. At 6:30 the sun was out but, low on the horizon. For a few minutes it was faintly pink. Then pop, it was gone, and it was dark. When the waiter finally reappeared they ate the meal by the light of the large candle on the table.

They started to talk a little about the near future. The new ambassador would come in a few months and Everett would go back to his old job. He had asked for a third year in Togo.

Amid all this warm, affectionate talk, she realized this was an opportunity to find out something that would help her understand who had a motive to kill the Ambassador

She started, "Everett, can you tell me if ..."

But just then, Everett reached across the table and took her hand in his. She lost her chain of thought.

Across the dimly lit table she sensed a sweet potential. She felt this evening was precious.

She started again, "I have something to ask you about the Ambassador's..." Her words were drowned in the noise of a group of local people who appeared on the beach and started pounding drums. Soon the sand was full of local villagers dancing with abandon underneath the sliver of a moon. They watched their graceful motions following the beat of the traditional drums. Some of the people eating at the restaurant joined them and were welcomed warmly.

It was too noisy to talk, but Lynne and Everett continued to look deeply into each other's eyes.

She was nagged by the feeling that she should be finding out some things only an official like Everett would know. But, later, in a brief pause of the drumming, instead, Lynne, asked, "Did your family really call you Al?"

"Yes they did. Someday you will too!"

The dancing ended and they drank coffee and brandy. The waiter started to yawn and asked them three times if they wanted anything else. Reluctantly they made their way off the crowded veranda and through the interior dining room toward the entrance. In the gloom of a dark corner, Lynne saw Richie, the money changer. He was with man that looked ragged, dirty, and disreputable. Their heads were together, and their conversation intense.

Chapter Thirty Six: When The Lovely Flame Dies

Everett was too busy to meet with her for her Self Help matters on Monday, according to Claudia, so Lynne spent the day preparing documents to present to him when she next saw him. Lynne's desk was crowded with papers when the messenger came in with the mail. There was a letter addressed to her on Embassy stationery.

Dear Lynne,

Can you meet me at Mama Wata tonight at 8 o'clock? I must talk to you. It is important.

Everett

Pleased that he had time to see her again so soon, she still wondered why he chose that restaurant. It was picturesque since it was authentically African, named after a voodoo divinity and had real African food, including agouti stew which was made out of the local bush rat. Perhaps it was because it was near the center of the town and there were secluded individual little straw covered verandas, called paillotes. And what did he want to tell her? If it was business, wouldn't he find time to talk during the work day? But, her heart started to pound. Maybe he wanted to tell her something personal. Maybe he wanted their relationship to move forward. She hoped he didn't want it too get too serious too fast. Then she had the terrible thought that maybe he had somehow heard rumors of her relationship to Luke. Oh, she hoped not. She hoped he wouldn't hear about that now. Would that end their new relationship before it started?

She arrived at exactly eight o'clock. The restaurant was eerie. There were about ten tables, each in its own paillotte. Lighting was from large flickering torches set at widely spaced intervals. The walls were decorated with grotesque African masks. The waiter told her to go in and that he would come and take her order when her friend joined her. She sat nervously for at least ten minutes, seemingly the only person in the room. She could hear the sea thudding beyond. She knew that the beaches of Lome were the most dangerous places in town. There were muggers, even murderers lurking there. Mama Wata was the goddess of the sea. Sometimes she was good and gave fish to eat, sometimes she was bad and swallowed boats and fisherman. The hair on the back of Lynne's neck began to rise. Where was Everett? Why did he choose a place like this for them to meet? Why did she come?

If she left now she would have to look for a taxi in the dark outside on the street which had seemed deserted when she entered.

And then, she saw someone entering the dark room. Was it Everett? He was tall and in a business suit. But something was wrong. There was no flash of light skin contrasting with the suit in the darkness. The man continued to come. It certainly wasn't a waiter. He was dressed too well, too formally. And then he was standing over her.

"Lynne. I had to see you"

"Luke, what're you doing here?"

"I couldn't leave things like that. You refused to see me at your house."

"But, how did you know I'd be here?"

"I was the one who wrote the note. My cousin who works at Robinson Beach told me you know Everett well."

She was suddenly terrified. Luke had murdered at least two people and now he had tricked her into meeting him at this isolated spot. She tried to stand up, prepared to run.

"No, Lynne, wait, don't go. You can't go. I won't let you."

She pushed passed him and ran, but she stumbled on the floor which was made of uneven stone blocks. She found herself cornered and he was coming toward her. She tried to find the exit, but the tables and pailotes were set up in a haphazard pattern, almost like a maze. She tried to find an exit on the ocean side, but there was none.

"Lynne, please, I'm getting angry. You must give me a chance. I need your help. You can't get away, I won't let you. I know you love me, and when a woman loves me, she does not turn against me in time of trouble."

He was close now and reached out for her. She tried to scream, but no sound would come. Would he kill her too?

How could she escape? He had her trapped. He was much bigger and stronger than she was. In the darkness, his suit, hair, and skin were scarcely visible. Only his white shirt, the whites of his eyes, and his teeth stood out distinctly. His teeth seemed as if they were in some ferocious snarl. She tried again to scream, but got out only a sort of choking sound.

And suddenly she heard a voice from the darkness near the entrance, speaking French in the Togolese way, slowly, and carefully enunciated. "Did you change your mind? Didn't you like the table I gave you? Are you ready to order now? We have good dorade tonight and freshly made fufu."

The waiter came slowly into the dark room. Lynne took a long shuddering breath. "I realize that I am not feeling well. I can not eat. Will you help me find a taxi?"

"Of course, Madame. And Monsieur?"

But Luke had disappeared.

Chapter Thirty Seven: Security

Early the next week, the Peace Corps held a simple memorial service for Michael. About half of the volunteers attended. Probably in an attempt to be tactful, since so many volunteers had witnessed that horrendous argument between Dudley and Michael at Kara, William, the new assistant director, rather than Dudley acted as the main official. And of course, Luke had not been allowed to come. The whole service had an atmosphere of being on the surface, with many things left unspoken. The rumors of deliberate sabotage of Michael's moto were strong. Lynne was not the only volunteer who felt frustrated at the authorities' failure to clear up the question of the Ambassador's murder and to investigate the possible connection between it and poor wild Michael's early death.

At last the day arrived when Lynne had an appointment with the security man, Mc Duff. It would be a relief to finally talk to someone in authority who was investigating the murder. She wanted to tell Mc Duff all the bits of evidence she had. She was glad to have a chance to tell him of her strong suspicions of Luke, but she still didn't want to tell him his threatening behavior these last few days. If she did that it would lead immediately to a general knowledge of her affair with Luke. She still hoped that wouldn't come out, at least not right now. Her growing relationship with Everett was precious and precarious at this stage. Soon after she walked into the office at Peace Corp that Mc Duff was using, she began to wonder if she would be able to talk freely about her suspicions.

Mc Duff was a stiff, prissy, cold little man, out of place in the heat and disorder of Africa. Dressed in a brown pin striped suit, he wore an elaborately folded handkerchief in his breast pocket which also held a designer pen. His ginger colored hair was cut short.

He had a supercilious look on his face that changed to something like outright scorn from time to time during the interview.

Somewhat accusingly, he asked her to tell him about the luncheon during which the Ambassador died, where she was sitting and exactly what she saw. She told him to the best of her ability. He had started a diagram, and she showed him where she, Ron, Michael, Sally, and Cindy were sitting. She told him that the Ambassador had started to make an announcement about an unpleasant subject, had begun to cough, and asked for something to drink. Almost immediately after drinking from the bottle of soda water he had collapsed.

He asked her if she knew anything else that might help in the investigation.

She told him about the Michael and Luke's conversation about the books, and also where you can buy tuitui. He listened carefully, taking many notes, but did not comment.

Refusing to be intimidated by his cold manner and determined to learn what was going on, she blurted out, "Mr. Mc Duff, It seems like no one is really investigating the Ambassador's death. It has been so long, and yet there is no official information."

"Where would you expect to receive the information, in the Peace Corps News?", he said scathingly. "We are doing many things and know many things, but we do not make announcements until we are ready to take official action."

Not cowed, she looked him in the eye and pressed on, "What kind of investigations? What are they doing?"

"Washington was given a great deal of physical evidence taken from the scene of the murder. They have analyzed much of it and sent other portions to specialized laboratories. We have some of the results and expect the rest soon." He went on to explain that they were investigating every clue concerning the Ambassador's death, were having official interviews with everyone who had been in the room near the Ambassador when he died and following all leads.

Not impressed by this answer, Lynne explained her theory. "I feel that Luke had a strong motive. He was sitting right next to the Ambassador when he died. He knew that Michael knew about his embezzling. Now Michael is dead."

Mc Duff said they had thought of all this. Concerning Michael's death, they were investigating the rumors about possible sabotage since both the engine and the brakes failed not long after the moto had been allegedly repaired. "Do you have any actual proof, rather than just suspicions and ideas?" he asked coldly.

She thought about many rumors that were too wild and vague to try to express. But, the thing with Ron now. "Ron told me that he knew a terrible secret about Luke. He hinted to me that he was going to reveal it when he thought it would help him. Probably he hinted the same way to Luke. And, the fact that he was sent to Cindy's is suspicious. Why would they send him there? He was a city boy to the core and knew nothing about agronomy or bees."

Mc Duff looked even more scornful. "I'll give you one piece of official information from the records. Ron put on his application for Peace Corps that he had raised bees. At one time they had considered making him an agronomy volunteer since his field was chemistry and not the physics that he would be assigned to teach here."

Astonished, Lynne demanded. "Where did you get that?"

"It's in the files."

"But, Ron always lived in the city, in San Francisco."

"He wrote on his application that he spent summers with his grandmother in the country and belonged to Future Farmers of America."

The thought of Ron in Future Farmers of America made Lynne feel like giggling hysterically. She could imagine his malicious joy in writing such fabrications. He'd probably wanted to make himself sound like an all American boy. But he had many times told her he had never spent a day away from the sounds of the big city before he joined the Peace Corps.

So Ron's prank had almost killed him.

Mac Duff went on. Yes, Luke had been investigated thoroughly and his firing was one of the obvious results of that. He was still being investigated. But, as for a strong motive, that was not obvious. "The Ambassador was Luke's enemy. He had tried hard to find a way to forgive him his embezzlements and was reluctant to fire him. And many people who know Luke best feel that he isn't a violent man."

Then she remembered what she had meant to ask Everett. "Mr. Mc Duff, was the Ambassador the only person who knew about Luke's illegal behavior? Or did Dudley also know? And did Luke know that others knew?"

Mc Duff's continued disdain was majestic, but he answered the question. "Of course many people knew about the problem and the decision to punish him was a group one. It's true that certain information about a banquet the Togolese had that featured chicken that

was packed in Peace Corps cartons and was catered by Luke's hotel was told to the Ambassador, personally. But it only capped an investigation that my predecessor had been making for over six months. He and Dudley both were well aware of the announcement that the Ambassador was about to make and Luke had been warned by Dudley that serious steps would be taken."

Just as he was about to leave, the emotionless, little man leaned toward her and spoke with great intensity." Keep thinking about that luncheon, young lady. On some level you know who did this. You, an eye witness, are important. Try to visualize that room, that table, all the things that happened. It might help if you would write it all out. You were there. I wasn't. You no doubt saw the murderer. It is up to you and the others who were there to remember."

Chapter Thirty Eight: The Wisdom of Solomon

Lynne got two letters at work the next day. One was from Luke. It was formal and in French. It said that he was disappointed that she didn't even have the kindness to talk to him. He had thought that since they had meant a lot to each other, she would be willing to write a letter of recommendation for him. He wanted to try to get a job with the United Nations. He said he was sorry to say that he never wanted to hear from her again. Then he said, "I did not do such an evil thing. Balance it with the good I did, and you must admit I am a good man. I tried to help all of you Americans. Now you turn against me."

After her talk with Mc Duff, Lynne realized Luke hadn't had any motive to kill the Ambassador. And Luke was right, true, she had not acted like a good friend. She had refused to see him and panicked when he insisted. But still, she had lost her earlier faith in him. She hoped she would never see him again.

The second letter was from Bassar. Tears sprung into her eyes when she saw the handwriting. Michael had written and mailed it ten days ago.

Dear Lynne,

I won't be coming down to Lome again for a while and it's too frustrating to even try telephoning, so I'll scribble you a note. I'm writing this while waiting for my moto to be repaired by Pepperoni. Do you know him? He's a Togolese wild guy, a friend of mine. Luke helped put him in business.

By the way, pretty soon everyone will know the trouble Luke is in. I don't know what they'll do about it, but I hope they forgive him. I knew about Luke skimming some cream off the Peace Corps training camps and because of that he was willing to help Veronica and me out when she wanted to leave the country early. She needed an abortion and America's the place to get one. Last week I got a chance to talk to Luke and tell him that the authorities were going to make a big stink about him and that I would do whatever I could to help him. But you know how little influence I have. Now, everyone respects you. Think about it and think of what can be done. Maybe you could get up a petition of respectable volunteers to say how valuable he is.

Okay, they are through here. I'll just finish this letter and mail it while I'm near the post office. The moto is a mess. Pepperoni did the best he could with it, but he had to use old parts cannibalized from some old motos. I hope the thing will hold together until we can get some new parts from Lome. I kept my promise to ask Solomon what he meant in that weird prophesy in Kara. He visited me yesterday and I asked him about it. Solomon is half crazy. You can't get him to talk about a subject reasonably and coherently. But he told me some things. He felt that the Ambassador had done some bad things supporting the dictator of Togo and went from there to a prophecy of his death. But, he said he was really surprised when it came true. He had only been talking of his feelings, his premonition, and of course had not had anything to do with the actual death. He wasn't even there the next day

when the Ambassador was killed. He said it was a judgement on the Ambassador for sins he had committed. He didn't know what his sins were.

Solomon is a gaddo. You know what that is? Twins are supposed to be lucky and magical and the child that comes after the twins is called the gaddo who is especially magic. Solomon has always been a seer and prophesied events. He said "To know who killed the Ambassador, you have to look in the past; the seeds of the murder are old. Something that happened in the Ambassador's life before he came to this country is the reason he was killed."

Sometimes, Solomon is wise. His intuition was right in Kara. Maybe his hunch about the cause is wise too. Solomon said we should look for a woman.

*Buddy love,
Michael*

Chapter Thirty Nine: A Cryptic Puzzle

Michael had kept his word and given Lynne the information she had asked for. It was almost the last thing he ever did. Oh, how Lynne wished that Michael was alive and Lynne could keep her side of the bargain.

Once again, Lynne's clear idea about the identity of the murderer had turned into many fuzzy, vague, and conflicting ideas. Mc Duff said Luke had no motive to kill the Ambassador. And now the letter from Michael showed he had no motive to kill him, either. And Mc Duff's information revealed that it was perfectly reasonable for Luke and Dudley to send Ron to look at the bee project. And Michael's letter also made it seem likely that the motorcycle death was truly an accident, not a murder. But, even if the injury of Ron and the death of Michael were accidents, someone had killed the Ambassador. And that person was one of those that had been near him at that fatal lunch.

She got out her chart of suspects again. She thought about Richie and the boubou man. They were still a possibility. From all she heard, the Ambassador had been trying to help Richie and his death removed a powerful friend. Of course there was the possibility that the murderer had killed the Ambassador by mistake and had meant to kill Dudley. But why? Did they even know each other?

And she really had never seriously considered suspecting either Sally or Dulcie. But, was it possible that Sally was talking about herself when she mentioned childhood mental illness? Could she have killed the Ambassador in a violent, melancholy mood? Or was she hinting about the childhood of Dulcie, and was it likely that Dulcie was really a secretly dangerous person who had poisoned the Ambassador to keep him from giving her a bad reference and keeping her from the job with USAID?

And Cindy really hated Dudley and got crazy when she was drunk. But she hadn't been drunk that day. And a planned murder by poison didn't seem to fit her personality. Lynne really couldn't believe any of the three could have killed the Ambassador. Their grievances against the Ambassador were too slight to murder a man over. But someone did. Who was it? Who killed Corley Harrison?