

## Chapter 1: Crisis at the Checkpoint

Lynne looked anxiously through gaps in the vines and bushes that covered her veranda and gate. It was almost dawn, which in Togo, always came at 6:30. Where was the van? Ordinarily drivers who worked for the American government were prompt, despite the general customary indefiniteness in a country where few people had clocks or watches. She heard some dull explosions that sounded just a few blocks away. It was already extremely hot, but she shivered.

She was glad she had decided to move to the country next door, Benin. Things were too dangerous and unsettled here in Togo. At last, she glimpsed the American Cultural Center van. She rushed across her hibiscus covered front yard to open the metal door on the cement wall.

“Mornin', Lynne.” The word of greeting was both English and Mina.

“Good morning Kwami. I'm happy to see you!” It seemed wonderfully fitting that Kwami, who had been a Peace Corps driver when she first was a volunteer in the North of Togo five years ago, would be the person to deliver her to her new country where she was starting a new job. Kwami helped her load her pile of possessions.

When they passed through the Forever Quarter they heard more shots being fired. What a way to start a week! When there was similar violence last week, the radio said it was exuberant army members, overzealous in their enthusiasm for the president of Togo.

Kwami said he heard soldiers killed a Frenchman and wounded several Togolese democracy advocates the day before. She noticed they were out of the shooting zone now. In a few minutes they were at the border. Getting out of Togo was surprisingly easy. There were few formalities at the checkpoint on the Togolese side. They showed their papers and the Togolese officials waved them on through, to the 200-yard no man's land between the two countries. The van continued until it reached a big red sign with a big picture of a hammer and sickle on it, proclaiming the Popular Republic of Benin.

Kwami told her she should go through formalities for entrance to Benin with the officials for herself. He would take care of permission for himself and the car. She entered a veranda under a tin roof with shabby, rickety benches and a few tables and joined the United Nations assortment of about twenty people waiting to talk to the officials at a row of weather beaten desks. Even though everything had doubtlessly just been swept to start the day, already the cement floor was littered with banana and orange peels and greasy fried food wrappings. She wondered when people here would start using waste baskets.

When it was her turn, a big official in a dull green uniform, his hair shaved so close he almost seemed bald, looked at her passport and other papers. For a while he held them upside down. Then he righted them. He growled in French, “These are no good.”

She searched through her mind for the proper French phrases to rebut this. She had lived for five years in French-speaking Togo, but since she taught in English, she had never attained the leap that made her take speaking French for granted. And she was always ill at ease with African officials, whose actions often seemed arbitrary. She found

some words, "There's a letter from the Director of the American Cultural Center in Togo. I'm traveling to Benin to work at the American Cultural center there."

"No. It is not legal. You do not have a permit," the man said firmly in clearly enunciated French.

She knew what he meant. He wanted a *cadeaux*, a bribe. But she had been told that she shouldn't give one.

Kwami appeared. His uniform had an American flag embroidered over the pocket, and he waved a pass with a gold seal and an American eagle on it. In a firm voice he spoke to the man in Mina, luckily a language that the Beninese official spoke also.

Suddenly, the big hairless man turned friendly and flirtatious. Now he tried a few words in English. "You belle. I visit chez you. I eat dinner. You marry me?"

Lynne forced a smile. "Of course. Come any time. I'm a good cook. We'll talk about the wedding later."

At a table on the other side of the room, another traveler, a young man with light brown skin, and long Rastafari curls presented himself at the table and showed his passport. Lynne wondered where he came from. In Togo, only the wandering madmen called *fous* wore their hair long and in curls. He seemed ill at ease and kept glancing around, even turning to sweep the room behind him with his gaze. The official looked at his passport, shouted something and another official rushed up and started to grab the young rastaferi man. He protested. Lynne couldn't hear what language he was speaking. But he wasn't convincing his hearers. The official spewed out a torrent of words.

At this same moment, a young man with golden skin, wearing an ornately embroidered pajama like suit, with his hair carefully barbered in the Togolese style of a two-inch Afro came running into the area near the passport officials. A car drove up from the Togolese side. Lynne noticed the Rastafari man pulled something out of his trouser pocket and pointed toward the golden skinned man. There were shots. Panic spread. People started running. The Rastafari man, tall and strong, ran toward the walkway that led to the exit of the checkpoint and the entrance to Benin. He joined a group of shabbily dressed Africans, mostly passengers of the crowded taxis or riders who rode on the baggage piled high on trucks and who, according to the Organization of African Unity rules, were allowed to enter with only West African Identity cards. They started pushing their way out, even neglecting to press the usual small bribes into the hand of the startled lone official at the exit.

Some officials dove under the tables. Some waiting wayfarers threw themselves to the ground. Lynne hid behind a pillar. She couldn't see. But she heard another shot and a scream of pain. She could hear a car drive up and someone shouting in French, "I will stop the traitors of Togo or kill them."

"But you are in Benin now," a Beninese soldier replied to them.

Lynne risked another look. The beautifully dressed young man with golden skin and three gold chains around his neck was lying perfectly still on the broken, littered cement. A trail of blood was oozing from his head.

## Chapter 2: A State of Instability

“Is he still alive? Who shot him?” Using French, Lynne asked people nearby what was going on, but they all talked to each other in one of the other international languages or one of the many Togolese and Beninese tongues.

Some of the Beninese officers started shooting, almost at random, as if to express their authority, making a show of looking for the perpetrator. She knew the police were not well trained in shooting: ammunition was scarce and expensive. One soldier used his gun like a stick as if ready to throw it. Anyone still left in full view scrambled for some kind of safety. Several made dives to the floor, and slid under chairs. Others ran to hide behind pillars. The rest made a dash to get out of the area, back either to Togo or forward to the walkway to Benin.

As the customs guards continued their keystone cops routines, Lynne made a quick decision, with all the confusion, to assume that her formalities were completed. She ran to the walkway, almost falling as she skidded on a slimy mango pit and pushed her way through with the others and then joined Kwami who had gotten the car past the blockade. She jumped in. “Let’s get out of here before they shoot us by accident”

Kwami zoomed down the road, rushing to get out of the troubled area. The young man with light brown skin and rastaferi curls was nowhere in sight. She heard more shots.

“Hurry Kwami!”

He did hurry, the car bouncing and skidding in the pot holes and sand. Soon she no longer heard shots.

After their explosive introduction to Benin, Kwami continued to drive as fast as the bumpy, rutty, dusty road would allow him to. Lynne’s map showed they were on the only road connecting these West African countries. It ran along the coast, started in Abidjan in the Ivory Coast, went through Ghana, then through Togo and Benin, and ended in Lagos, Nigeria. It had just two lanes and was unpaved. Most of the time it ran parallel to the sea, about a half mile away.

She tried to make sense of the morning. What had she just witnessed? Why was the golden skinned man killed? And the young man with the rastaferi curls, was he involved? Why did the guards want him?

She asked her driver. “Kwami, what is going on here? What happened? What did you see?”

“Lynne, I am Togolese. I do not trust Beninese. You know the monkeys? See no evil, hear no evil. I speak no evil. Voodoo was borned here. If you insult Beninese, he get the fetisher after you. This also communist country. I have fear. I will soon return to Togo. It is safer there.”

She hoped Kwami was wrong. But this was a bad start for s new life!

She looked out the dusty half open car window. Soon they passed a small local crossroad, three kilometers away at the town of Petit Popo. As they rode Lynne thought about why she was going to Benin.

When, after three years of teaching at the University in Togo, she still wanted to stay in Africa after her nicely paid U.S. government funded Fulbright appointment

ended. She had planned to stay in Togo another year and work at the Togolese salary rate which was not even enough to pay her rent.

But she had hoped she could get by, using the small alimony payment she received each month from her ex-husband. The surprise offer of this well paying job in Cotonou, Benin as Director of the American Cultural Center's English Language Program pleased her. One plus was the fact that Benin was where her off and on lover, Everett Knowlton, had been transferred to. Because of the strong recommendation of the Washington-based Regional English Teaching Officer, she was hired, sight unseen.

She looked with avid interest at the passing scenery. So this was Benin! So far, it seemed much like Togo. The same desolate country, the same shacks and huts, the same litter, the same proud, graceful rubber sandaled people dressed in flamboyant African print cloth. A line of graceful women walked on the side of the road, with bundles on their heads. One had a big metal wash basin filled with chickens.

And also, the oven-like heat was the same. Fortunately, the partially opened window gave her a blessed breeze which cooled her a little even though it brought dust with it. As she looked, she continued to think about the rastaferi man. Had he pulled a gun out of his pocket? Or had he pointed out to the gunmen who should be shot? Was he hiding in the brush? Did he get a ride from a passing car?

She saw littered, sandy soil and scrubby bushes amid tall palm trees. They passed some small square mud brick houses with straw roofs and some clusters of houses with tin roofs. A few of them were obviously stores, with a shelf or two visible showing tiny cans of tomato paste and boxes of mosquito coils.

She saw a few taxis, each crammed with people. Maybe Benin didn't have a law like Togo's limiting passengers in a car to five people. She counted seven in one and eight in another. She noticed many motorcycles, most carrying a passenger behind the driver. She even saw a man balancing on the back of a motorcycle carrying a large pane of glass. After twenty minutes, the suburbs began. There were continuous crowded small huts, shacks, shops, all one story and shabby. The moto traffic increased. As they got closer to town she saw throngs of people walking, and so much congestion on the road their progress was slow. She gazed intently, eager to know her new home, She had been told that Cotonou was a city of 300,000 people, yet there was only one tall building and that was only partially occupied.

Then near a pile of rubble at the side of the road she saw a big weather-beaten sign. "*Bienvenue a Cotonou, Benin, ou pollution est inconnu!*" Welcome to Cotonou, Benin where pollution is unknown!"

### Chapter 3: The President's Representative

As they drew near the American Cultural Center in Cotonou, Lynne saw, mixed in with rubble piles, shacks and unfinished buildings, some palatial residences. Probably as in Togo, they were the homes of officials and economic aid workers from the many nations interested in these West African countries. Close to the luxurious buildings, wherever there was a little piece of land, like a little triangle at a corner, there were stalls made of scraps, with handwritten signs in French announcing tailor shops and auto repair.

She saw a woman bent over, grilling brochettes, skewered chunks of beef on a rack, laid over a pan of coals in an old wash basin. "Kwami, please stop. I'm hungry."

She bought several brochettes for each of them and also some beignets, deep-fried doughnut holes. She munched on them as they drove. She remembered the advice of the Peace Corps nurse, "Don't eat any street food unless it just came off the grill or out of hot oil."

They passed an empty sandy lot with a runty scrubby vegetation across the road from a sandy beach leading to the ocean. They turned onto a little side road and reached a building completely surrounded by a cement wall. A tattered American flag flew high above it. When the car stopped, she opened the door and took a deep breath. She smelled salt water, garbage, and human waste. She closed the door.

The big gates of the American Cultural Center opened for them. They drove past the guards and inside the wall. Lynne entered the building and greeted the short, slim young man with three inch scars emphasizing his high cheekbones, neat and dapper in a khaki uniform, seated at a desk in the entrance to a large marble lobby. She told him she wanted to see the director and he said warmly, "Yes, he expects you. You are welcome, I am Lucien!"

She walked up a large open marble staircase. At the top of the second floor, behind a glass door, she could see a spacious corridor. She heard a buzzer and opened the door and entered.

A plump young woman wearing a tall, elaborate cloth headdress, sitting at a desk covered with papers told her she could go right in. The director's office was large. Near the entrance, standing next to a big mahogany desk, was a tall, lanky, red-haired man wearing cowboy boots and dress pants with a tailored cowboy shirt. He started talking immediately, speaking fast, words spilling over each other.

"I'm Randy Powell, as you know, Director of this center. Call me, Randy. We all use first names here in the Center. You are Lynne Lewis? You're young. And pretty. Or is that sort of thing called sexual harassment nowadays?"

Lynne thought of her disheveled hair, streaked with dust and wind tossed and her probably grimy face and was glad he approved of her looks. She laughed. "Maybe in the States. But the phrase is unknown here. Just don't ask me to be your fourth wife. I already dealt with that once today."

Randy's grin was full of appreciation. "Okay. Whatever. I'm relieved you'll accept the post. You're saving my skin."

"I'm glad to be here, but..." She wanted to get a word in about the border incident. But he kept talking with great speed.

"Good. We need you badly. Having this English Language Program start on time is important to the Ambassador's plan for Benin."

He stopped his flow of talk and looked penetratingly at her. "I hope you're ready for a hardship post. They give us State Department officials extra money for putting up with it. But of course you don't get that."

"I'm glad to have the job. I know what I'm getting into. I'm thirty-five and have been in Africa five years."

"Yes. But you're new to this post. Well, I myself have just been here for six months. When I got here I learned that the guy we were counting on to run the English Language Program dumped us. So, you're it. Now, what do you want to know? Unfortunately, I don't know anything about running the program. Ask your secretary, Lydia about it. And if any of your equipment doesn't work, get Napoleon. Napoleon can fix anything. But..."

He seemed not to know how to finish the sentence. Lynne waited, observing him.

He went on. The English Language Program was one of the few American programs that still functioned through the Marxist years of the country which was only now beginning to welcome foreigners again."

She was swept up in Randy's personality, his intensity, his unthinking confidence in her. She had done a lot of university teaching, but had never administered anything except her household in her life. She hoped he wouldn't notice that. Whatever, she would do it. She kept her voice strong and confident.

"How about authority, approvals? Do you have to sign off on what I do?"

"Well, I represent the President of the United States. It is my job to see that our Center, including your English Program doesn't do anything that will embarrass him or the United States government." He said this in a rather mocking way. But went on seriously, "If you see something happening that might hurt our image, check it out with me. Aside from that, just go ahead and get the job done."

"And the country? I have never crossed the border into Benin before."

"Well, in a quick summary, the country is still run by a communist leader. He has led the country to disaster, driven away all trade and most developmental agencies. Someone stole all the money in the bank. The teachers and civil servants have been on strike for a year..." He added, half laughing, "Always be prepared to duck or run. The country is on the verge of a revolution!"

The telephone rang. "Damn. I never have any peace in this place," He looked to her for sympathy. "Yes. Yes. Yes. No...!" Randy's face was contorted. "I am the director of this Center and your agency cannot use the building without my permission." He slammed down the phone and said to Lynne, "That Courtney Browning! Arrogant!" Then almost immediately he said, "Oh, I shouldn't lose my temper. I got in trouble in China in my last post over that. Almost got shot. But, just because he and US Aid in Development have ten million dollars and we at the United States Information Service have peanuts, they act like we're their servants. Just a minute."

He dialed. "Louis! Do me a favor. I just blew my top with USAID. Call them right back. Get Courtney Browning's secretary. Tell her I will be delighted to offer them the use of the Center for their meeting. And tell them our video equipment is at their disposal." He looked at Lynne, vaguely. "Where was I?"

"Revolution."

"Oh, that probably won't happen. Probably just a few people killed and some statues toppled."

Lynne wanted desperately to talk about the shooting at the checkpoint. But, her main concern was to be certain that she made a good impression on this wild man and there was no hitch in getting this job that she needed.

He went on hurriedly, "Louis, my assistant, is a fine man. He'll help you find a place to live, just tell him what you want. But, in the meantime, you will stay with me. I have lots of room. My wife won't be here until the children finish the fall term at school. We have four, you know."

"Oh, that's kind of you. It sounds like you want me to start work tomorrow."

"Tomorrow? We need you today. Classes start in two days. There are teachers waiting at the English Language Program to be interviewed right now!"

The phone rang again. "Washington?" A concerned look appeared on his face. "Yes, we got the cable. We responded to it. It's impossible. It would completely disrupt us. It isn't necessary." He frowned. "What? He's on his way? Arrives tonight?" He listened to the answer, then hung up the phone. His volatile countenance had a different look now, one of complete dismay. He moaned. "Washington has sent a construction supervisor to install security measures. They'll destroy everything!"

## Chapter 4: The Language of Shakespeare

Lynne stood up. "If you don't mind, I'll go to the English Language Program now."

"Go." Puzzled by the high emotion, Lynne scuttled out and spoke to Randy's secretary. Lynne admired her costume, the dress with leg of mutton sleeves made of African material printed with large brown flowers just the color of her skin. "I didn't get a chance to talk to you when I came in. I guess you know that I am Lynne Lewis, the new ELP director."

"Yes, they told me, Lynne Lewis. You are welcome! I call myself Monique." Her English was slow and heavily accented. "The Embassy called. The new Political Officer, Everett Knowlton, sent a message for you. He said he was detained in America and will call you when he arrives in Benin."

Pleased, Lynne looked as businesslike as possible. "Ah, yes. Thank you. Now, can you tell me how I can find the English Language Program?"

"Yes. Go back to the stairs, but do not go down. Go across the hall and open that other door."

When she opened the door she found herself in a corridor that was really a long, narrow balcony overlooking a large cement courtyard with a raised platform like a stage. A blast of hot outdoor air assaulted her. Straight ahead she saw a door that said, ELP Director. She tried the handle. It was locked. But just to the left was another door. She opened it and was in a large crowded room. There was a photocopier, a large desk, a computer table and chair, a rack with United States Information Agency publications for sale, three people in chairs and five more standing, all in attitudes of waiting. One stared at the floor and looked somehow, sinister. She heard a babble of voices. Some spoke French, some a language that sounded like Moba, some, Mina or Eve. She heard a few words of English, "death" "danger," and "revolution."

On one wall, a picture of a gentleman in Elizabethan garb was looking intently at her. Underneath the picture was the big headline, *English, the Language of Shakespeare*.

## Chapter 5: Assembling The Cast

The English Language Program Office was presided over by a striking woman with the light brown skin called in West Africa, *clair*. Her straightened hair was modishly arranged. She wore bright lipstick and was dressed in a high style costume made of orange and pink African fabric, aglitter with matching jewelry. She was buxom and when she stood up, Lynne noticed she had a figure like a backward capital letter S.

“Hello, I’m Lynne Lewis, the new director.”

“Welcome. I am Lydia Affagnon, the ELP secretary. We are content you are here. We have need of you.” Her smile was warm and gracious, her manner confident, making obvious that this was her office. “I will take you to your office.” She swooped off her desk a bunch of keys, and a pile of papers and pulled from a drawer a large paper bag and carried them with her.

Lydia took her back to the door Lynne had just tried to open and used a big skeleton key on it. It was a tiny room without a window. An air conditioner that sounded like an electric drill made the room deliciously cold. There was just barely enough room for the desk and chair, two file cabinets, a book case, and two chairs for visitors.

“Here is some information about the program.” Lydia had to raise her voice to be heard over the loud machine.

“Thank you. When I get a free moment, I’ll read this and see what’s going on.”

“Yes. But, first, you must help me. I need a raise and I want a contract. I have no security. And that Minerva, that woman from Washington, when she comes she tells lies about me. She says someone else should have my job.”

When Lynne showed no sign of responding, she went on. “I registered the students even though there was no director. I have all the money here. I will give it to you now.”

“But, aren’t there people waiting to see me?”

“Yes, the professors that want to teach.”

“I’ll see the teachers first, then collect the money. And, please, let me get the program going before I talk to you about your problems.”

Lydia’s flashing smile was undiminished. “Yes. You must hire teachers. It is done every semester. Here is the list of last year’s teachers, and the classes we have on the schedule.”

“Lydia, you know the program. Did all the teachers do a good job last year?”

Lydia said they all were all right. But one had left the country.

“Okay. So, that means I need one replacement?”

“Yes. But we are registering many students. We need at least one new teacher.”

“Okay. Now, please send the teacher applicants in, one at a time.”

“Okay.”

She put on her best professional manner and met eight teachers. She hired the four old teachers Lydia had recommended. One was Malik, an attractive westernized man with skin the color of coffee with a lot of cream. He told her he wrote for the BBC and did radio spots for them occasionally. His English was excellent. Obviously he was

highly intelligent. But she felt a slight hint of manipulation in his overly intimate smile, and his too personal praise.

One was Sherry Copeland who looked like a Barbie doll. She said proudly that she was the wife of Gregory Copeland, the new junior state department officer, acting as consular officer. Lynne didn't compete by mentioning that her own boy friend for five years, Everett Knowlton, a rising state department officer, was second in command at the Embassy.

It was obvious that Sherry disliked Lynne, but not obvious why. There was hostility in her beautiful green eyes. Her resume didn't show as much training in teaching methods or experience, but she had several valuable characteristics, she was a graduate, though in art appreciation of an American college, she was an American, and English was her native language. Lynne had noticed that Africans liked American teachers and wanted to learn pronunciation from a real American.

Lynne also met the haughty, Dr. Sylvio Adin. He was tall, with a regal bearing, and a wonderful accent halfway between British and French. He had gotten an M.A. in England and a doctorate in France. He was cool and imperious, but Lynne was immediately drawn to him. Only after she hired him, did he tell her he was Lydia's husband.

"Lydia comes from a fine old family in Benin and likes to use her name of family at work."

She talked to Georges Dossou, the one who looked shy and somehow sinister. He told her he had spent a year in jail in the north of Benin because someone accused him of counter revolutionary behavior. He was tall and very thin, with a haunted look in his eyes. "It was not true. I just reported that the government weigher of the grain was cheating the peasants."

His accent was beautiful, reflecting his years of study in England. Filled with sympathy, she was glad he was on Lydia's list of good past teachers.

She hired William who had not taught the previous year. He was younger than the others and the only one who had not studied in an English-speaking country. But he was bursting with energy, self confidence, and enthusiasm. He told her, "My father was a notorious polygamist. But, I want to become an American. I love to teach. Someday I will be a university professor."

The other applicants were a blur to her but she kept a careful list and wrote notes about each one. she would decide on the new teacher later.

Afterwards, she asked Lydia to come and talk to her. She told her she had hired the recommended teachers from last year and added William. Lydia seemed pleased. Then she said, "I must tell you something. Malik has an interesting background. Do you know it?"

"I know he is charming and from an important local family. He has spent time in Europe and America."

"Yes. We have learned he is a man often in trouble, with strong resentments. There is a story that he stole a typewriter in Texas and that kept him from getting a fine Voice of America Job. Also, one day he pushed into the library and took a magazine

without signing it out. The librarian, Dora, hates him. But that is all right. She never liked the English Language Program. He is a very good teacher, anyway.”

Lynne tried to decide what to make of all this. But she just said, “Now I am almost ready to take the money. But before we get started, I need your help with a couple of things. I hope to move into my own house within a week. Do you know someone that would like to work for me cleaning my house and doing my washing? I want someone that can work fast and efficiently without supervision. I need someone who is honest, someone I can trust to buy household supplies and give me back the correct change.”

“I know someone just like that. I will ask her tonight.”

“And do you know anyone that will rent me a car? I see taxis aren’t convenient.”

“That is more difficult, but I will work on it.”

“Good. And, my air conditioner, listen to it. I have to shout.” She shouted as she said it.

Lydia looked troubled. “Maybe Napoleon can fix it.”

“Good. Now, the money.”

Lydia pulled out of her bag a big pile of African CFA notes. Most of them were 1000 franc denomination, each worth about two dollars. She had the total amount written down, five million CFA.

“Thanks. What do I do with it?”

“First you must count it in front of me. Then you take it to Louis and count it in front of him.”

“Really?”

“Really.”

“Then what does he do with it?”

“He takes it to the Embassy cashier. He counts it, then sends it to Washington.”

Lynne counted the soiled, ragged bills. Lydia had used the customary method, made piles of nine with a tenth bill folded over. Lynne found no errors. Lynne put the money back in the brown paper.

“I will go back to my office now, but, at twelve o’clock I always go home for dinner and return at three. I will tell Lucien to send anyone that wants to see you up the front way during that time.” Just before Lydia reached the door to leave her she turned and said, “Someday, I will tell you some things you must know. There are bad forces here. Evil eyes watch you!”

## Chapter 6: A Man without a Country

Oh, Africa. After six years here she was still startled by unexpected things. How could Lydia change from an efficient secretary to a soothsayer of evil in a split second?

Lynne was just about to leave for Louis's office when Randy called her on the phone. "I'm sending a young man to see you right away. He works for USAID now, but would like some extra work. Maybe you can hire him for some part time teaching. His father is an important man, he was one of the candidates for president in one of those mock elections they have held during this communist period. At least talk to him and make him feel respected"

Soon there was a tap on her door, and when she asked him to come in. Gerald Tangevi entered quickly She had seen pictures of his famous father in the newspaper in Togo. Gerald had his characteristic thin lips and aquiline nose, besides his exceptionally long, narrow head. Its shape was emphasized by his closely shaven head. Most men in Benin wore their hair about on half inch long. He had an unusual appearance but, Lynne thought, over all, a likeable one. He was tall with skin the color of golden oak. There was a sweet smile on his face as he told her he had a Ph.D. from Princeton, but the Beninese university system had no job for him.

"Although I have a job with the US Agency in Development, they said I could teach part time in your program if you want me. I would really like to. There are rumors that Washington is going to lay off some of us. I was very lucky to get the job. Courtney Browning pulled strings to get me in. I have had trouble finding work in this country because of my father's politics."

"Tell me more about yourself."

"I have an unusual handicap, My father was a diplomat when I was a child. I attended school in Switzerland, London, and Paris, wherever my father had a diplomatic post." His English was impeccable. He had almost an Oxford English accent and his voice was soft and pleasing "I speak French well. But I do not know my own local African language, Hausa, which is spoken in my parents' native village." He said to Lynne with a wan smile, "In many ways, I am a man without a country."

Lynne hired him immediately to teach the level six class. What luck to find such a highly qualified person! As he was about to leave, she said, "You work with Courtney Browning. I would like to know more about him."

He suddenly became stiff and solemn. "Madam Director, I can not talk about him. He is my employer!" And he quickly left the room, shutting the door gently, but firmly.

After he left, she was finally free to take the money to Louis. As she left the room, nervously looking around to see who was in the hall, she thought about the sad fact that people who made 20,000, CFA a month, about forty American dollars, were often the richest in their extended family. And she had five million CFA in a brown paper bag in her hand.

She went back to the offices behind the glass door and knocked on the door that said on it, Louis Pogbe Administrative Assistant.

Louis was like many of the southern Beninese rather short. Like Lucian, he had the typical triangular shaped face and high cheekbones of the southern people,

bittersweet chocolate skin and attractive long lashed dark eyes. He was meticulously dressed in American type clothes, with pants made of dark fabric and a starched grey striped short sleeved dress shirt and a grey and blue satin tie. His shoes were so polished, they reflected the light.

After they had once more counted the bag full of money, Louis put it in his desk drawer and gave her a receipt.

Lynne then said, "Please, Randy said you can help me to find a house."

"Yes. What are you looking for?"

"I want something near the Center, in a section with African neighbors. All I ask is that it has a yard with a wall around it and running water. And of course, it has to be something I can afford."

"I will look for that."

Just before she left, a call came to Louis' office. He answered and soon had a look of anger on his face.

"It's for you. Long distance."

He handed the phone to Lynne. The voice was a screech, like chalk on a blackboard. It was also both hostile and rudely bossy.

"So you have arrived. They did not pay attention to me when I told them to wait until I came before hiring you. You probably are not complying with the regulations. I will see you tomorrow."

"Who is this?" Lynne asked.

"This is Minerva Jones. I have been sent from Washington to see if you are doing your work correctly." Lynne was searching for a reply when the phone crashed in her ear.

Louis said. "She is a terrible woman. She accused me of stealing in front of people from ten countries. I cried then. But, if she embarrasses me again I will deal with her another way!"

## Chapter 7: Interagency Cooperation?

About six o'clock, Randy called to tell her to meet him at his office so they could go home for the day. Once in the car, Lynne tried again to tell her boss about the shooting she had witnessed, "Randy, when I crossed into the Benin frontier..."

"Don't chatter now, Lynne. I'm thinking." She didn't press it, knowing how easily he flew into a rage. Maybe at dinner he would be more approachable.

The Placide, the driver took them to Randy's dramatically big house surrounded by a beautifully landscaped tropical garden. A khaki uniformed State Department guard greeted them.

Randy said, "I'll show you your room." He told her, half embarrassed, half amused, that there were seven bedrooms and nine bathrooms. She didn't mention that she had some familiarity with state department palaces since she had been very close to Everett Knowlton. They entered a huge living room, furnished with luxurious rugs, draperies, and overstuffed couches and period furniture. It seemed oddly inappropriate here in the tropics. Strong air conditioners had done their work and it was deliciously cool.

Randy led her to a little room on the main floor, off from the kitchen. "Lynne, we'll put you here."

She looked around. It was clean, well furnished, and air conditioned, with its own bathroom. By any standard, it was pleasant. By African standards it was amazing and luxurious.

"Refresh yourself, then we have to go to a party."

"Party? And have to? Aren't those words contradictory?"

"Yes, but many things in the Foreign Service are. Courtney Browning, director of United States Aid for International Development is having a dinner party for people from his own agency, USAID, and also Embassy State department officers and us, representing the Cultural Center, which as you know, is run by the United States Information Agency.

"But, isn't Browning the man...?"

"Yes, the man that rudely demanded to use American Cultural Center rooms as if we are all his serfs. He's powerful, close to the Ambassador. That's why I so quickly took back my justified, but hasty words over the phone."

This erratic cowboy of a diplomat looked like an appealing small boy. Good heavens! She had met some extremely undiplomatic diplomats in her expatriate career. Here was another of them.

It was a sumptuous party. It seemed to be only for Americans working for official American agencies. Lynne took a plate and filled it from the magnificent spread on a buffet table. A huge fish poached and covered in white sauce on a platter, garnished with slices of papaya, pineapple, tomatoes, and lemons, was surrounded by other gourmet delicacies. Lynne hadn't eaten since the brochettes at the side of the road hours ago in this long day.

The chill of powerful air conditioners was welcome. . The room was so big that the fifty or so people fit nicely. Some guests sat on couches and soft chairs scattered around

in conversation groups. Others, plate in hand, wandered from person to person, intent on making contacts and chatting. They all knew that these parties were intended to build ties to facilitate interagency cooperation

She noticed Sherry Copeland, pretty young woman she had hired a few hours before. Now she looked like a dressed up version of a Barbie doll. She sat in a brocade chair, near a young man who was probably her husband, the consular officer. Four other men had moved near them and they all seemed delighted by beautifully groomed young woman. Sherry studiously avoided looking at Lynne. Lynne joined a group of standing, energetically talking women. She listened silently for a while. When there finally was a pause, she said, "I'm Lynne Lewis. I just came from Togo this morning to start work here as Director of the English Language Program." All except Sherry welcomed her and introduced themselves. One was Nicole Duchamps the Fulbright professor. Thin and lively with silky black hair and a pale pixie face, she said she was here not only to teach at the university, but also to write a book about Benin. So far, she was overwhelmed with the many conflicting cultures and viewpoints. She had an apartment near the Cultural Center that Louis had found it for her. She chattered on, saying that she had been a French teacher in Maine and was tired of trying to reach unmotivated and spoiled American students. She came from a French speaking American family and had studied at the Sorbonne in Paris. She was eager for adventure. Her vivaciousness was only a hair breath from nervous frenzy. Lynne wondered if she would have trouble with sunburn in this place where the sun always blasted like a blow torch.

Sherry said that the Fulbright professor the year before had never been able to teach because the university was on strike the whole year. And, so far, the universities were still closed.

Sybil Sanford, the Peace Corps Director's wife, was pleasant and mousy looking, but was obviously a good observer and seemed to know everyone in the room. She said in a low voice to Lynne. "You'll be working for Randy. I pity you. He can be delightful and amusing. But, he's an absolute monster in the office. He explodes at everyone."

Sherry frowned and abruptly left the group.

"Including you? How could that be? He just came to town six months ago." Lynne asked.

"I knew him when we were all stationed in Beijing. My husband worked for a non governmental organization in China. I worked for Randy at the cultural center. You just wait, by this by the evening's end, he will show his mean side. The facade slips soon. What a temper he has! He almost got himself killed."

Lynne asked the women to point out their host.

"He's the one who knows that he is a star," Nicole said, indicating with a jerk of her chin an attractive man, speaking with force and many gestures. She said that he was intelligent, cosmopolitan, witty, even gallant. He would make a good catch in the matrimonial scene. "He is forty and not married. He went to an Ivy League college. He's on his way to a big promotion, tenure as a higher State Department Official."

Sybil agreed, but added, "I know he can be a real pill. He insulted Randy in public last week, in front of a high Beninese official."

Nicole's expression changed. "If we are being frank, I know some things about Courtney. But, I won't tell them here."

"Yes. Later. Oh, there's the Ambassador. Let me introduce Lynne to her."

Ambassador Eleanor Ramsden was about fifty with wrinkled skin and a hawk nose. She had a blonde Farrah Fawcett style polyester wig cascading down her broad shoulders. Each corn silk blond strand was translucent. She wore a white pinafored dress, something like Alice in Wonderland might wear. She occasionally nibbled from a small plate that had on it just a piece of the poached fish. She went from person to person, having brief, friendly contacts with many of them.

Despite her startling appearance, Lynne found herself liking her. The Ambassador sounded sincere when she said, "We are glad you are here. The English Language Program is important to all of us."

Deciding to take advantage of this moment of the Ambassador's attention. Lynne said, "I saw a disturbing thing at the frontier when I came through. There was this good looking young man with golden skin, and a Togolese Afro wearing lots of gold chains..."

The Ambassador interrupted. Her tone was icy. "Why do you think I would possibly be interested?" She moved away abruptly, walked quickly and started talking to a group of people on the other side of the room.

Not long after that, a newcomer entered the room, a messenger from the Embassy. He came directly to the Ambassador and told her something in a low voice. When the Ambassador heard what he said, her already alabaster white skin seemed to lose color. She made gasping sounds, as if choking, or covering up sobs.

Lynne studied her. What was going on? What was that look in her eyes? Fear? Or sorrow?"

Regaining a little composure, the Ambassador announced to the room at large, "I am sorry, I must go. There's an emergency!" And dashed out of the room.

Randy, near Lynne at that moment said under his breath, "And Alice scuttled down the rabbit hole." Randy was a peripatetic guest. He stayed with one person only a few moments at a time. Then he moved on, chattering and beaming.

Courtney was another one of the standers and wanderers. Randy and he each had a circle of people who gathered around them and followed them when they moved, sometimes listening as if to sages, sometimes laughing at witticisms. Then, the awesome thing occurred. The two groups merged. There was a small gap in the groups, like a huge crescent, partly closed. The people in chairs stopped talking, listening to the dramatic events before them. It was almost a duel of cleverness and masked malice, when the two talked to each other. This entertainment was interrupted by the arrival of a tall, thin stylish woman with olive toned skin. She was dressed in a spectacular Nigerian style dress, all black and gold with a towering head dress, and loaded with gold jewelry. She burst into the circle. Someone said, "Minerva, Randy was just telling us some wonderful stories about his adventures in Beijing, his last post. He is an ingenious man. He always finds a way to do things, no matter what the circumstances."

There was a group chuckle over the wiliness of Randy. But Minerva said, "Yes he is ingenious. But he forgets there are laws written by congress that dictate our

procedures. I'm trying to tell him the right way to do things. Unless I get more cooperation, I will tell Washington. The penalty for non compliance can be jail."

Randy's protest was a sort of moan or howl of rage. He started rebutting her, speaking machine gun fast. Lynne didn't know enough about the rules they were talking about to understand whether Randy really was doing something wrong or this was Minerva's nit picking. Minerva listened scornfully, then repeatedly. "Yes, I'll tell Washington" and swept out of the circle. Courtney Browning followed her and had an animated conversation with her, his face brimming with smiles.

Randy looked like he was going to explode, literally. His face was purplish and looked swollen. Lynne decided to leave. By the time she got out the door, she saw Randy being escorted, led, persuaded down the street toward his house. Lynne lagged behind. Randy was ranting. He cursed, he shouted.

At the end of all this, Randy said, his angry voice ringing in the moonlit street, "She doesn't deserve to live. I'd like to liquidate that wicked witch of the West!"

Lynne walked slowly to give herself a few minutes away from the maelstrom of his emotions. It was almost cool now, and the flower-lined street was beautiful in the moonlight. She was enjoying the walk when she sensed some movement in a dark nook between two giant embassy row houses.

It was the rastaferi man! He lunged toward her, but immediately changed his direction and disappeared back in the darkness. What was he doing here? Did he remember that she had seen him at the checkpoint, that she knew he was a wanted man, perhaps the murderer of the man with the golden skin?

## Chapter 8: Thoughts And Threats

Just in case the Rastafari man came back Lynne moved a little closer to the group with Randy. She could see them ahead. They could probably hear her if she called for help.

She took a chance, glad to have a little distance from her out of control boss. She used the three block walk in the moonlight, through the dusty streets lined with cement walls covered with tropical flowers and trees, smelling of the frangipani and jasmine, to think about her situation. When her husband left her five years ago, breaking up her life as a suburban wife and college instructor in Farmington , Michigan, she immediately joined the Peace Corps and had lived in Africa ever since.

Somehow, in Africa, there was always trouble. In the Peace Corps she had encountered murder and danger. Then, as a Fulbright professor, shocking things continued. In both situations, she had had to help solve the crimes. Where small groups of Americans lived in West Africa, it was a little like the Wild West. Benin was in a state of instability. It was no doubt like Togo, with an army that kept some sort of order, but an underfunded police department. The police didn't even have cars to get to crimes, but had to catch taxis if they were available and someone would pay the fare. Most police stations didn't have electricity or running water, much less crime labs or careful evidence rooms.

An insecure place to live. Some of her friends thought she stayed in West Africa despite the risk because of her relationship with Everett. But that wasn't the whole reason. Her feelings for him waxed and waned. Even if he wasn't in her life, she still wanted to be here. Obviously she was among the third of Peace Corps Volunteers who didn't want to leave after their original two year stretch of duty was finished, who got Africa in their blood and thrived on the privation , danger, and opportunities to help exotic people. But whatever, when she realized Togo was too dangerous for her taste, she had not thought of going home to Michigan. Immediately she looked for work in Africa and had the luck to find that just then Benin needed an English Program Director. Some people might not think it was lucky.

What a tense, traumatic day it had been, with prospects for more in the future. After the horrendous introduction to the internecine warfare of the American governmental agencies in Cotonou, Lynne realized that her time here would be even more complicated than she had expected. And was she in danger because she had witnessed the scene at the check point? Was the death of the golden skinned young man related to American concerns? Now that she thought of it, she realized that she had seen him before, in Togo. The memory teased her. Maybe at some large inter-organizational party there, maybe he was friend of an American? But who? To add to the mix of the agencies, in each country there was a Catholic Relief Service office closely tied to the US government and also an American School.

She threw herself into the neat bed in Randy's government mansion, gratefully She was too tired to write in her journal. But she thought of her host Randy, the eccentric Director of the Cultural Center. He had an incandescent personality, full of

passion, of extremes. Her first instinct was to like him, but be wary. She could enjoy a friend like him to liven up parties. But as a boss?

## Chapter 9: In the Interest of Security

The next morning, Lynne enjoyed her breakfast served in Randy's formal dining room by a white coated cook. The fresh French bread, marmalade, sliced papaya, and coffee were served on fine china that had an American eagle on the border. Randy was preoccupied but smiling. Lynne pasted a smile on her face too. Maybe today would go better than yesterday. Randy asked Lynne if she had made any progress in starting her program. But he didn't seem to expect an answer. He seemed completely taken up with his own thoughts. He didn't mention the fuss with Minerva at the party.

Lynne started again to ask him what he knew about the events at the border. Halfway through her question, the cook interrupted to say Randy had a call from Washington. As Randy left the room he said, "We'll talk about that later."

As she was finishing her coffee, the cook spoke to her in French. "The director says the driver will take you to the Center immediately, then come back to take him to see the Ambassador. She wants to see him at her house."

Lynne grabbed her purse and notes and ran to the car. She didn't want to delay Randy and was eager to start her first full day in her new position. Entering the American Cultural Center building she reached the reception desk and greeted Lucien. His white teeth flashed in a welcoming smile. "*Bien Arrive*. Welcome. Please Lynne, Louis wants to speak to you right away." She walked up the marble staircase, dialed the code, 222, given her by Lydia to open the glass door, and went directly to Louis' office.

"Lynne, I have good news. I found a notice about a house on the bulletin board at Le Petit Coin, the little food store. I went to the proprietor's office and got the key."

"Oh great. Can we look at it?"

"Yes, let us go right now."

The house was a ten minute drive away, in the adjoining quarter called Haie Vive, meaning live hedges. The house was behind a wall covered with blooming pink and orange bougainvillea. A man with the diagonally slashed ethnic scars of the northern people, the Barbara, immediately opened the gate. He seemed ill at ease and looked at his bare feet and then past her right ear and welcomed her. "*Bienvenue, Madame!*"

"*Bon Jour. Tu est Mamadou?*" Louis greeted him by name and explained to Lynne that the landlord had hired him to act as *gardien*, that is guard and janitor for a month. The house was dilapidated, with fading and peeling paint, but it had a large covered veranda. She entered. There was a tiny kitchen space with cold running water and a sink. There was no refrigerator and no room for a modern stove, but some counter space and open shelves. Even though the floor and walls were of dank and moldy cement, the bathroom had a flush toilet and a shower, luxuries she would have loved in her two years in the Peace Corps in Dapaong.

Louis said, "It needs some work-- the wiring and pipe in the bathroom sink and also the back fence. But the landlord says he can have it repaired soon." He looked at her doubtfully, as if trying to judge whether an American would consider this house a find.

Lynne told him she was enchanted with the house. "But what is the rent?"

"The rent is 60,000 CFA each month."

That was about \$120 a month. She could afford it with the salary her new job paid.

“Oh, Louis, thank you so much! Can you tell him it’s a deal? I can give him the money right away. And ask him if I can move in on a day or so, even before all the repairs are done. I don’t want to presume on Randy’s generosity by staying with him.” She also did not want to continue taking the chance of being the target of his mercurial angers.

Afterwards, Lynne went back to the center to start her day of work. Tomorrow, classes would start. She walked up the marble stairs and heard a loud crash.

Randy was back from his meeting with the Ambassador. The construction crew had arrived. Randy called her over and they both watched the workers. The American security construction specialist sent by Washington obviously knew nothing of Africa. A local contractor was providing the actual labor. The American spoke only in English. Observing them, Lynne noticed that the local contractor’s foreman spoke a little English, adequate French, and one of the African languages, probably Fon. His three helpers looked about fifteen years old and spoke an African language, a few words of French and no English. Probably no one but the American knew how to read a blue print. Nevertheless, the American gave instructions in English waving his hands and pointing to a set of blue prints. The local crew nodded, and said, *oui*, yes, okay. The American went on to explain to them some elaborate security specifications requiring metal underpinnings, warning signals and reinforced windows. As Randy listened, his eyes glazed over.

“Did you see the hole in the wall Louis turned into a makeshift office for me? It will be weeks before I get back into mine,” he complained to Lynne. He left, but Lynne continued to watch the three stooges performance before her.

One young man took a sharpened bar of iron and tore down the big picture window in Randy’s office that overlooked the driveway. The couch and rug were immediately covered with a coating of cement dust. The crew tore out piles of plaster and wood partitions, smashed things in a nook near the secretary’s desk in the hall, almost demolished the inner walls of the photocopy room and shattered the wall near the mail boxes. Plaster and cement dust floated everywhere and made a gray-white coating on everything nearby. Randy appeared again, distraught. “Go to your office. You will get hurt here. You can see that here, they are destroying everything. And the Ambassador is very ill. She thinks it might be from the food at the party last night!”