

INSTRUMENTS OF SEDUCTION

The name she was unable to remember was torturing her. She kept coming up with Bechamel, which was ridiculously wrong yet somehow close. It was important to her that she remember: a thing in a book by this man lay at the heart of her secret career as a seducer of men, three hundred and twelve of them. She was a seducer, not a seductress. The male form of the term was active. A seductress was merely someone who was seductive and who might or might not be awarded a victory. But a seducer was a professional, a worker, and somehow a record of success was embedded in the term. "Seducer" sounded like a credential. Game was afoot tonight. Remembering the name was part of the preparation. She had always prepared before tests.

Male or female, you couldn't be considered a seducer if you were below a certain age, had great natural beauty, or if you lacked a theory of what you were doing. Her body of theory began with a scene in the book she was feeling the impulse to reread. The book's title was lost in the mists of time. As she remembered the scene, a doctor and perhaps the woman of the house are involved together in some emergency lifesaving operation. The woman has to assist. The setting is an apartment in Europe, in a city. The woman is not attractive. The doctor is. There has been shelling or an accident. The characters are disparate in every way and would never normally be appropriate for one another. The

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operation is described in upsetting detail. It's touch and go. When it's over, the doctor and the woman fall into one another's arms—to their own surprise. Some fierce tropism compels them. Afterward they part, never to follow up. The book was from the French. She removed the Atmos clock from the living room mantel and took it to the pantry to get it out of sight.

The scene had been like a flashbulb going off. She had realized that, in her seductions up to that point, she had been crudely and intuitively using the principle that the scene made explicit. Putting it bluntly, a certain atmosphere of allusion to death, death-fear, death threats, mystery pointing to death was, in the right hands, erotic and could lead to a bingo. Of course, that was hardly all there was to it. The subject of what conditions conduce—that was her word for it—to achieving a bingo was immense. For example, should you strew your conversation with a few petals of French? The answer was not always yes, and depended on age and educational level. For some older types, France meant looseness and Pigalle. But for some it meant you were parading your education or your travel opportunities. One thing, it was never safe to roll your Rs. She thought, Everything counts: chiaroscuro, no giant clocks in evidence and no wristwatches either, music or its absence, what they can assume about privacy and *le futur*. That was critical. You had to help them intuit you were acting from appetite, like a man, and that when it was over you would be yourself and not transformed before their eyes into a love-leech, a limbless tube of longing. You had to convince them that what was to come was, no question about it, a transgression, but that for you it was about at the level of eating between meals.

She was almost fifty. For a woman, she was old to be a seducer. The truth was that she had been on the verge of closing up shop. The corner of Bergen County they had lived

in was scorched earth, pretty much. Then Frank had been offered a contract to advise African governments on dental care systems. They had come to Africa for two years.

In Botswana, where they were based, everything was unbelievably conducive. Frank was off in the bush or advising as far away as Lusaka or Gwelo for days and sometimes weeks at a time. So there was space. She could select. Gaborone was comfortable enough. And it was full of transient men: consultants, contractors, travelers of all kinds, seekers. Embassy men were assigned for two-year tours and knew they were going to be rotated away from the scene of the crime sooner rather than later. Wives were often absent. Either they were slow to arrive or they were incessantly away on rest and recreation in the United States or the Republic of South Africa. For expatriate men, the local women were a question mark. Venereal disease was pandemic, and local attitudes toward birth control came close to being surreal. She had abstained from Botswana men. She knew why. The very attractive ones seemed hard to get at. There was a feeling of danger in the proposition, probably irrational. The surplus of more familiar white types was a simple fact. In any case, there was still time. This place had been designed with her in mind. The furniture the government provided even looked like it came from a bordello. And Botswana was unnerving in some overall way there was only one word for: conducive. The country depended on copper and diamonds. Copper prices were sinking. There were too many diamonds of the wrong kind. Development projects were going badly and making people look bad, which made them nervous and susceptible. What was there to do at night? There was only one movie house in town. The movies came via South Africa and were censored to a fare-thee-well—no nudity, no blue language. She suspected that for American men the kind of heavy-handed dummkopf censorship they sat through at the

Capitol Cinema was in fact stimulating. Frank was getting United States Government money, which made them semi-official. She had to admit there was fun in foiling the eyes and ears of the embassy network. She would hate to leave.

Only one thing was sad. There was no one she could tell about her life. She had managed to have a remarkable life. She was ethical. She never brought Frank up or implied that Frank was the cause in any way of what she chose to do. Nor would she ever seduce a man who could conceivably be a recurrent part of Frank's life or sphere. She assumed feminists would hate her life if they knew. She would like to talk to feminists about vocation, about goal-setting, about using one's mind, about nerve and strength. Frank's ignorance was one of her feats. How many women could do what she had done? She was modestly endowed and now she was even old. She was selective. Sometimes she felt she would like to tell Frank, when it was really over, and see what he said. She would sometimes let herself think he would be proud, in a way, or that he could be convinced he should be. There was no one she could tell. Their daughter was a cow and a Lutheran. Her gentleman was late. She went into the pantry to check the time.

For this evening's adventure she was conceivably a little too high-priestess, but the man she was expecting was not a subtle person. She was wearing a narrowly cut white silk caftan, a seed-pod necklace, and sandals. The symbolism was a little crude: silk, the ultracivilized material, over the primitive straight-off-the-bush necklace. Men liked to feel things through silk. But she wore silk as much for herself as for the gentlemen. Silk energized her. She loved the feeling of silk being slid up the backs of her legs. Her nape hairs rose a little as she thought about it. She had her hair up, in a loose, flat bun. She was ringless. She had put on and then taken off her scarab ring. Tonight she wanted the feeling that

bare hands and bare feet would give. She would ease off her sandals at the right moment. She knew she was giving up a proven piece of business—idly taking off her ring when the occasion reached a certain centigrade. Men saw it subliminally as taking off a wedding ring and as the first act in undressing. She had worked hard on her feet. She had lined her armpits with tissue that would stay just until the doorbell rang. With medical gentlemen, hygiene was a fetish. She was expecting a doctor. Her breath was immaculate. She was proud of her teeth, but then she was married to a dentist. She thought about the Danish surgeon who brought his own boiled-water ice cubes to cocktail parties. She had some bottled water in the refrigerator, just in case it was indicated.

Her gentleman was due and overdue. Everything was optimal. There was a firm crossbreeze. The sight lines were nice. From where they would be sitting they would look out at a little pad of healthy lawn, the blank wall of the inner court, and the foliage of the tree whose blooms still looked to her like scrambled eggs. It would be self-evident that they would be private here. The blinds were drawn. Everything was secure and cool. Off the hall leading to the bathroom, the door to the bedroom stood open. The bedroom was clearly a working bedroom, not taboo, with a nightlight on and an oscillating fan performing on low. He would sit on leather; she would sit half-facing, where she could reach the bar trolley, on sheepskin, her feet on a jennet-skin kaross. He should sit in the leather chair because it was regal but uncomfortable. You would want to lie down. She would be in a slightly more reclining mode. Sunset was on. Where was her gentleman? The light was past its peak.

The doorbell rang. Be superb, she thought.

The doctor looked exhausted. He was gray-faced. Also, he was older than the image of him she had been entertaining.

But he was all right. He had nice hair. He was fit. He might be part Indian, with those cheekbones and being from Vancouver. Flats were never a mistake. He was not tall. He was slim.

She led him in. He was wearing one of the cheaper safari suits, with the *S*-for-something embroidery on the left breast pocket. He had come straight from work, which was in her favor.

When she had him seated, she said, "Two slight catastrophes to report, doctor. One is that you're going to have to eat appetizers from my own hand. As the British say, my help are gone. My cook and my maid are sisters. Their aunt died. For the second time, actually. Tebogo is forgetful. In any case, they're in Mochudi for a few days and I'm alone. Frank won't be home until Sunday. *And*, the Webbers are off for tonight. They can't come. We're on our own. I hope we can cope."

He smiled weakly. The man was exhausted.

She said, "But a cool drink, quick, wouldn't you say? What would you like? I have everything."

He said it should be anything nonalcoholic, any kind of juice would be good. She could see work coming. He went to wash up.

He took his time in the bathroom, which was normally a good sign. He looked almost crisp when he came back, but something was the matter. She would have to extract it.

He accepted iced rooibos tea. She poured Bombay gin over crushed ice for herself. Men noticed what you drank. This man was not strong. She was going to have to underplay.

She presented the appetizers, which were genius. You could get through a week on her collations if you needed to, or you could have a few select tastes and go on to gorge elsewhere with no one the wiser. But you would remember every bite. She said, "You might like these. These chunks

are bream fillet, poached, from Lake Ngami. No bones. Vin-aigrette. They had just started getting these down here on a regular basis on ice about a year ago. AID had a lot of money in the Lake Ngami fishery project. Then the drought struck, and Lake Ngami, pouf, it's a damp spot in the desert. This is real Parma ham. I nearly had to kill someone to get it. The cashews are a little on the tangy side. That's the way they like them in Mozambique, apparently. They're good."

He ate a little, sticking to mainstream items like the gouda cheese cubes, she was sorry to see. Then he brought up the climate, which made her writhe. It was something to be curtailed. It led the mind homeward. It was one of the three deadly Ws: weather, wife, and where to eat—in this country, where not to eat. She feigned sympathy. He was saying he was from British Columbia so it was to be expected that it would take some doing for him to adjust to the dry heat and the dust. He said he had to remind himself that he'd been here only four months and that ultimately his mucous membrane system was supposed to adapt. But he said he was finding it wearing. Lately he was dreaming about rain, a lot, he said.

Good! she thought. "Would you like to see my *tokoloshi*?" she asked, crossing her legs.

He stopped chewing. She warned herself not to be reckless.

"Dream animals!" she said. "Little effigies. I collect them. The Bushmen carve them out of softwood. They use them as symbols of evil in some ceremony they do. They're turning up along with all the other Bushman artifacts, the puberty aprons and so on, in the craft shops. Let me show you."

She got two *tokoloshi* from a cabinet.

"They call these the evil creatures who come to you at night in dreams. There are some interesting features. What

you see when you look casually is this manlike figure with what looks like the head of a fox or rabbit or zebra at first glance. But look at the clothing. Doesn't this look like a clerical jacket? The collar shape? They're all like that. And look closely at the animal. It's actually a spotted jackal, the most despised animal there is because of its taste for carrion. Now look in front at this funny little tablet that looks like a huge belt buckle with these X shapes burned into it. My theory is that it's a Bushman version of the Union Jack. If you notice on this one, the being is wearing a funny belt. It looks like a cartridge belt to me. Some of the *tokoloshi* are smoking these removable pipes. White tourists buy these things and think they're cute. I think each one is a carved insult to the West. And we buy loads of them. I do. The black areas like the jacket are done by charring the wood with hot nails and things."

He handled the carvings dutifully and then gave them back to her. He murmured that they were interesting.

He took more tea. She stood the *tokoloshi* on an end table halfway across the room, facing them. He began contemplating them, sipping his tea minutely. Time was passing. She had various mottoes she used on herself. One was, Inside every suit and tie is a naked man trying to get out. She knew they were stupid, but they helped. He was still in the grip of whatever was bothering him.

"I have something that might interest you," she said. She went to the cabinet again and returned with a jackal-fur wallet, which she set down on the coffee table in front of him. "This is a fortune-telling kit the witch doctors use. It has odd things inside it." He merely looked at it.

"Look inside it," she said.

He picked it up reluctantly and held it in his hand, making a face. He was thinking it was unsanitary. She was in danger of becoming impatient. The wallet actually was

slightly fetid, but so what: it was an organic thing. It was old.

She reached over and guided him to open and empty the wallet, touching his hands. He studied the array of bones and pebbles on the tabletop. Some of the pebbles were painted or stained. The bones were knucklebones, probably opossum, she told him, after he showed no interest in trying to guess what they were. She had made it her business to learn a fair amount about Tswana divination practices, but he wasn't asking. He moved the objects around listlessly.

She lit a candle, though she felt it was technically premature. It would give him something else to stare at if he wanted to, and at least he would be staring in her direction, more or less.

The next segment was going to be taxing. The pace needed to be meditative. She was fighting impatience.

She said, "Africa is so strange. You haven't been here long, but you'll see. We come here as . . . bearers of science, the scientific attitude. Even the dependents do, always telling the help about nutrition and weaning and that kind of thing.

"Science so much defines us. One wants to be scientific, or at least not *unscientific*. Science is our religion, in a way. Or at least you begin to feel it is. I've been here nineteen months . . ."

He said something. Was she losing her hearing or was the man just unable to project? He had said something about noticing that the *tokoloshi* weren't carrying hypodermic needles. He was making the point, she guessed, that the Batswana didn't reject Western medicine. He said something further about their attachment to injections, how they felt you weren't actually treating them unless they could have an injection, how they seemed to love injections. She would have to adapt to a certain lag in this man's responses. I am tiring, she thought.

She tried again, edging her chair closer to his. "Of course, your world is different. You're more insulated at the Ministry, where everyone is a scientist of sorts. You're immersed in science. That world is . . . safer. Are you following me?"

He said that he wasn't sure that he was.

"What I guess I mean is that one gets to want to really *uphold* science. Because the culture here is so much the opposite. So relentlessly so. You resist. But then the first thing you know, very peculiar things start happening to you. Or you talk to some of the old-settler types, whites, educated people from the Protectorate days who decided to stay on as citizens, before the government made that such an obstacle course. The white settlers are worse than your everyday Batswana. They accept everything supernatural, almost. At first you dismiss it as a pose."

She knew it was strictly *pro forma*, but she offered him cigarettes from the caddy. He declined. There was no way she could smoke, then. Nothing tonight was going to be easy. Bechamel was right next door to the name she was trying to remember: Why couldn't she get it?

"But it isn't a pose," she said. "Their experiences have changed them utterly. There is so much witchcraft. It's called *muti*. It's so routine. It wasn't so long ago that if you were going to open a business you'd go to the witch doctor for good luck rites with human body parts as ingredients. A little something to tuck under the cornerstone of your bottle store. People are still being killed for their parts. It might be a windpipe or whatever. It's still going on. Sometimes they dump the body onto the railroad tracks after they've taken what they need, for the train to grind up and disguise. Recently they caught somebody that way. The killers threw this body on the track but the train was late. They try to keep it out of the paper, I know that for a fact. But it's still happening. An undertow."

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She worked her feet out of her sandals. Normally she would do one and let an intriguing gap fall before doing the other. She scratched an instep on an ankle.

She said, "I know a girl who's teaching in the government secondary in Bobonong who tells me what a hard time the matron is having getting the girls to sleep with their heads out of the covers. It seems they're afraid of *bad women* who roam around at night, who'll scratch their faces. These are women called *baloi*, who go around naked, wearing only a little belt made out of human neckbones. Naturally, anyone would say what a fantasy this is. Childish.

"But I really did once see a naked woman dodging around near some rondavels late one night, out near Mosimane. It was only a glimpse. No doubt it was innocent. But she did have something white and shimmering around her waist. We were driving past. You begin to wonder."

She waited. He was silent.

"Something's bothering you," she said.

He denied it.

She said, "At any rate, don't you think it's interesting that there are no women members of the so-called traditional doctors' association? I know a member, what an oaf! I think it's a smoke-screen association. They want you to think they're just a benign bunch of herbalists trying out one thing or another, a lot of which ought to be in the regular pharmacopeia if only white medical people weren't so narrow-minded. They come to seminars all jolly and humble. But if you talk to the Batswana, you know that it's the women, the witches, who are the really potent ones."

Still he was silent.

"Something's happened, hasn't it? To upset you. If it's anything I've said, please tell me." A maternal tone could be death. She was flirting with failure.

He denied that she was responsible in any way. It

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seemed sincere. He was going inward again, right before her eyes. She had a code name for failures. She called them case studies. Her attitude was that every failure could be made to yield something of value for the future. And it was true. Some of her best material, anecdotes, references to things, aphrodisiana of all kinds, had come from case studies. The cave paintings at Gargas, in Spain, of mutilated hands . . . hand prints, not paintings . . . stencils of hundreds of hands with joints and fingers missing. Archaeologists were totally at odds as to what all that meant. One case study had yielded the story of fat women in Durban buying tainted meat from butchers so as to contract tapeworms for weight loss purposes. As a case study, if it came to that, tonight looked unpromising. But you could never tell. She had an image for case studies: a grave robber, weary, exhausted, reaching down into some charnel mass and pulling up a lovely ancient sword somehow miraculously still keen that had been overlooked. She could name case studies that were more precious to her than bingos she could describe.

She had one quiver left. She meant arrow. She hated using it.

She could oppose her silence to his until he broke. It was difficult to get right. It ran counter to being a host, being a woman, and to her own nature. The silence had to be special, not wounded, receptive, with a spine to it, maternal, in fact.

She declared silence. Slow moments passed.

He stirred. His lips stirred. He got up and began pacing.

He said, "You're right." Then for a long time he said nothing, still pacing.

"You read my mind!" he said. "Last night I had an experience . . . I still . . . it's still upsetting. I shouldn't have come, I guess."

She felt sorry for him. He had just the slightest speech defect, which showed up in noticeable hesitations. This was sad.

"Please tell me about it," she said perfectly.

He paced more, then halted near the candle and stared at it.

"I hardly drink," he said. "Last night was an exception. Phoning home to Vancouver started it, domestic nonsense. I won't go into that. They don't understand. No point in going into it. I went out. I went drinking. One of the hotel bars, where Africans go. I began drinking. I was drinking and buying drinks for some of the locals. I drank quite a bit.

"All right. These fellows are clever. Bit by bit I am being taken over by one, this one fellow, George. I can't explain it. I didn't like him. He took me over. That is, I notice I'm paying for drinks but this fellow's passing them on to whomever he chooses, his friends. But I'm buying. But I have no say.

"We're in a corner booth. It's dark and loud, as usual. This fellow, his head was shaved, he was strong-looking. He spoke good English, though. Originally, I'd liked talking to him, I think. They flatter you. He was a combination of rough and smooth. Now he was working me. He was a refugee from South Africa, that always starts up your sympathy. Terrible breath, though. I was getting a feeling of something being off about the ratio between the number of drinks and what I was laying out. I think he was taking something in transit.

"I wanted to do the buying. I took exception. All right. Remember that they have me wedged in. That was stupid, but I was, I allowed it. Then I said I was going to stop buying. George didn't like it. This man had a following. I realized they were forming a cordon, blocking us in. Gradually it got nasty. Why wouldn't I keep buying drinks, didn't

I have money, what was my job, didn't the Ministry pay expatriates enough to buy a few drinks?—so on ad nauseam."

His color was coming back. He picked up a cocktail napkin and touched at his forehead.

He was looking straight at her now. He said, "You don't know what the African bars are like. Pandemonium. I was sealed off. As I say, his friends were all around.

"Then it was all about apartheid. I said I was Canadian. Then it was about Canada the lackey of America the supporter of apartheid. I'm not political. I was scared. All right. When I tell him I'm really through buying drinks he asks me how much money have I got left, exactly. I tell him again that I'm through buying drinks. He says not to worry, he'll sell me something instead. All right. I knew I was down to about ten pula. And I had dug in on buying drinks, the way you will when you've had a few too many. No more buying drinks, that was decided. But he was determined to get my money, I could damned well see that.

"He said he would sell me something I'd be very glad to know. Information. All right. So then comes a long run-around on what kind of information. Remember that he's pretty well three sheets to the wind himself. It was information I would be glad to have as a doctor, he said.

"Well, the upshot here was that this is what I proposed, so as not to seem totally stupid and taken. I would put all my money down on the table in front of me. I took out my wallet and made sure he could see that what I put down was all of it, about ten pula, change and everything. All right. And I would keep the money under the palm of my hand. And he would whisper the information to me and if I thought it was a fair trade I would just lift my hand. Of course, this was all just face-saving on my part so as not to just hand over my money to a thug. And don't think I wasn't well aware

it might be a good idea at this stage of things to be seen getting rid of any cash I had, just to avoid being knocked down on the way to my car."

"This is a wonderful story," she said spontaneously, immediately regretting it.

"It isn't a story," he said.

"You know what I mean," she said. "I mean, since I see you standing here safe and sound I can assume the ending isn't a tragedy. But please continue. Really."

"In any event. There we are. There was more back and forth over what kind of information this was. Finally he says it's not only something a doctor would be glad of. He is going to tell me the secret of how they are going to make the revolution in South Africa, a secret plan. An actual plan.

"God knows I have no brief for white South Africans. I know a few professionally, doctors. Medicine down there is basically about up to 1950, in my opinion, despite all this veneer of the heart transplants. But the doctors I know seem to be decent. Some of them hate the system and will say so.

"I go along. Empty my wallet, cover the money with my hand.

"Here's what he says. They had a sure way to drive out the whites. It was a new plan and was sure to succeed. It would succeed because they, meaning the blacks, could bring it about with only a handful of men. He said that the Boers had won for all time if the revolution meant waiting for small groups to grow into bands and then into units, battalions and so on, into armies that would fight the Boers. The Boers were too intelligent and had too much power. They had corrupted too many of the blacks. The blacks were divided. There were too many spies for the Boers among them. The plan he would tell me would take less than a hundred men.

"Then he asked me, if he could tell me such a plan

would it be worth the ten pula. Would I agree that it would? I said yes."

"This is extraordinary!" she said. *Duhamel!* she thought, triumphant. The name had come back to her: *Georges Duhamel*. She could almost see the print. She was so grateful.

"Exciting!" she said, gratitude in her voice.

He was sweating. "Well, this is what he says. He leans over, whispers. The plan is simple. The plan is to assemble a shock force, he called it. Black people who are willing to give their lives. And this is all they do: *they kill doctors*. That's it! They start off with a large first wave, before the government can do anything to protect doctors. They simply kill doctors, as many as they can. They kill them at home, in their offices, in hospitals, in the street. You can get the name of every doctor in South Africa through the phone book. Whites need doctors, without doctors they think they are already dying, he says. Blacks in South Africa have no doctors to speak of anyway, especially in the homelands where they are all being herded to die in droves. Blacks are dying of the system every day regardless, he says. But whites would scream. They would rush like cattle to the airports, screaming. They would stream out of the country. The planes from Smuts would be jammed full. After the first strike, you would continue, taking them by ones and twos. The doctors would leave, the ones who were still alive. No new ones would come, not even Indians. He said it was like taking away water from people in a desert. The government would capitulate. That was the plan.

"I lifted my hand and let him take the money. He said I was paying the soldiery, and he thanked me in the name of the revolution. Then I was free to go."

He looked around dazedly for something, she wasn't clear what. Her glass was still one third full. Remarkably,

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he picked it up and drained it, eating the remnants of ice.

She stood up. She was content. The story was a brilliant thing, a gem.

He was moving about. It was hard to say, but possibly he was leaving. He could go or stay.

They stood together in the living room archway. Without prelude, he reached for her, awkwardly pulled her side against his chest, kissed her absurdly on the eye, and with his free hand began squeezing her breasts.

OFFICIAL AMERICANS

It was the next day.

Not a moment too soon, Carl thought, exhausted. He watched the corona brighten around the drawn curtains. Hot light was flooding Africa one more time. His days were like nights and his nights were like days, because of the dogs. He got his rest during the day—in increments, in stolen naps at his desk or in the car, or at lunchtime at home. His days were dim, like dreams. His nights were war. The dogs began barking every night at seven, or when he went to bed, whichever came first. There were eleven dogs in the yard next door. The furor kept up until daybreak, except for weekends, when—he'd be willing to swear—it went on even later. When he came home for lunch, the dogs were laid out around Letsamao's yard like slugs or duffel bags, sleeping in the sun—filling up with sleep.

He inched himself up into a sitting position and looked down at his sleeping darling. They had been married less than a year. Sometimes she smiled in her sleep. He loved her teeth, small and white, like mints. He had all his teeth, knock wood. Lois was twenty-eight and he was fifty-six. She was his second wife, and she was perfect. Her skin was perfect for Africa—the way she tanned beautifully. She loved Botswana's dry climate, and in fact that reminded him to remind her to be sensitive about the drought when she was enthusing about the climate in front of people. He loved

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her all the time. She was grateful for everything. He had saved her from Oregon, she liked to say. She meant the climate and what it had done to her sinuses. She meant her job as a cashier in a hotel restaurant in Medford, where they had met when he was on vacation recuperating from his breakup with Elaine. Lois was unmarried when he met her, because she had been waiting for two key things in one: a man she could respect, who was also someone not fated to live in Oregon forever because of his work or family ties. She thought that his job with the Agency for International Development was wonderful, because it kept him in sunny countries and it helped the poor. She thought of AID as something like the Red Cross. She was a wonderful specimen. She was improving his life in so many ways that he couldn't keep up with it. His salt intake was down, due to her tricks with lemon juice and so on. Also, he had always thought of hair spray as effeminate and had preferred to duck out and comb his hair nineteen times a day, with water if need be, rather than use it. But then she had shown him that the hair sprays he had tried were too strong and made his hair look like icing, and she had gotten him one that was the right strength and now his hair was fine all day and could be forgotten about. She was a helpmeet: his first. She could be an ad for health food, she looked so well. She could sleep almost at will, it seemed to him. She invariably slept through the dogs. They couldn't keep her awake. He kept her awake, if he was restless, but not the dogs themselves.

He lowered one foot to the floor. It was amazing to him how much he wanted to be fit, these days. Of course, anyone with a young wife would want to be fit, to some extent. That was why the thing with the dogs had to be brought to an end. But his attitude toward being in shape was a hundred per cent the reverse of what it had been under Elaine, if that was the right way to put it. His attitude toward jogging was a

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case in point. Jogging had been invented while his back was turned—while he was in Malawi or Togo, probably. He could remember that the first time he had seen joggers, when he and Elaine had been back in New York on home leave—in an expensive hotel, naturally, on Central Park South—it was already a mass movement. Elaine had been a genius at choosing the most expensive city or country for rest and recreation. If there were two countries, one where the dollar was high and the other where it was really low, there would always be a compelling reason to go where it was most expensive. It had to be France because the springs under the Fontaine de Vaucluse were drying up, or it had to be Italy because the Villa d'Este was closing down its most unique fountains because a tire factory was polluting the water. So, there he had been, looking out the window down into beautiful, green Central Park and seeing joggers everywhere. Now he saw the point of it—he himself was walking everywhere he could—but at the time he had been able to see the joggers only as something interrupting his pleasure in looking at the park, something agitating, something that marred the beauty of the vegetation, like aphids. Lo had information about health. People were amazed when she proved to them that some salt companies were adding sugar, or some form of it, to salt.

He was up. He felt fragile, because of the dogs. By rights, he should be feeling reborn, almost. He was hardly drinking. There was Lo. He was basically through with smoking. But he felt fragile. Botswana felt dangerous to him. For instance, the floor beneath his feet. The Botswana kept waxing, no matter what was said to them. Lo was too soft. Overwaxing was still going on. At work, the cleaners waxed directly on bare concrete, on stoops, on steps. The floors blazed everywhere. They could kill you. Barefoot was safest. Things were dangerous on these floors.

W H I T E S

There was one other thing that not sleeping was making him irrational on: the geyser. He tried not to be. But the hot water for the tub and shower came from a gigantic cylinder bolted to the wall above the bathtub, with electric coils in a collar at its base. It would crush anyone in the tub if it ever came loose from its moorings. And Lo took baths, exclusively. He was always obsessively inspecting the geyser, pulling at the mountings and feeling at the same time that he might be weakening the thing with all his testing. Hot baths were therapy for Lo. The giant tubs the British had established as normal all over Africa were a revelation to her. The shower stall was separate and safe.

He set the shower to spray just enough to get him rinsed but not enough to bother Lo. He was expert at showering quietly. He was used to the African workday starting when it did—ungodly early. She was still adapting. He liked her to sleep late. Small things about her made him emotional, like lying about her age to make herself older and more appropriate for him when they were courting. That was the kind of thing he loved. Or, recently, when he'd said he felt like Prometheus having his liver torn out every night and regenerating each day so it could be torn out again the next night, and she'd asked who Prometheus was. The hot water directly on his scalp was helping.

Walking was calming, and Carl liked the half-mile walk from his office to the medical unit. The embassy nurse wanted to see him. He knew he was overdue for his gamma globulin, but there was something more she wanted to discuss. He was going to plead with her for a state-of-the-art sleeping pill. He wouldn't get it: she was to the right of medically conservative. The regular pills were no help. They would knock him out but not keep him out. Lo's prescription for him was more exercise, as in jogging. The thought was torture. He was too

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tired for exercise. In any case, the problem wasn't falling asleep, it was getting back to sleep once the Minister of Labor's dogs started their demented crooning and baying and snarling and fighting or mating or tunneling under the fence to come skulking around the house, rifling his trash cans.

In Gaborone, when he walked, he used the network of dirt paths behind the houses—the "people's paths." Africa was humanity walking, or rather Africans walking. Whites rode. He was almost the only white ambulating along with the Batswana. People looked at him. It would be fair to say they stared. They were staring now, a little. He thought, They can't get over my uncanny resemblance to Samuel Beckett. Immediately, he felt guilty. He did look like Beckett, but the thought was bad—the kind of thing Elaine would have broken up over. There were plenty of reasons to stare at him. He was tall and so forth. He remembered about his posture and straightened up. This part of Gaborone was like a university town someplace in the American Southwest, except for the walls and fences around the house plots. He had been in Africa so long that residential neighborhoods in America looked utopian—no property-line fencing to speak of, people's lawns intermingling.

He should enjoy nature more. There were a lot of gum trees on this route. There were other trees whose blooms looked like scrambled eggs. Lo noticed everything. The first time she'd seen him naked she'd noticed that his right arm was permanently darkened by the sun, from the elbow down, from having it out the window as he drove around Africa on site visits. Sometimes Lo said his name in her sleep. It moved him enormously. It was proof of something. He doubted Elaine had ever talked in her sleep. But how would he know, because in those days he slept at night, and Elaine was on her guard to the roots of her being. Lo wanted him to show more interest in the local birdlife. He thought, When

it comes to bird-watching, I say let the birds watch *me*. A colony of Cape vultures had a nesting ground in the cliffs near Ootse. There was supposedly a trail up the cliffs, so that interested parties could get close enough to look directly at the vultures or even interfere with them. Lo wanted to go. He might be able to manage that.

Just ahead, at the edge of the path, was a fruit stand—two upended cartons. The vendor was a Motswana matron wearing a housedress and a blanket over it like an apron. He was going to be irritated, he could tell. He stopped to look over the display of bananas and green apples. The fruit was less than fresh—probably it had been four or five days on the street already. Batswana merchants absolutely would not bargain. This woman needed to clear her stock. She should lower her prices drastically, for the bananas at least. But she had her unit price figured and would stick to it unto death. She knew what the other street vendors were getting and would consider she was being made a fool of if she took less. If he offered a lower price, she would think he was trying to take advantage of her. He had been through this. The fruit came from South Africa and was substandard to begin with—*ondergraad*. The Batswana wholesalers were stuck with long-term contracts for fruit the South Africans wouldn't touch. He knew all about it. It was a scandal.

The vendor waited for him to say something. She decided to eat an apple. He predicted that she would take one of the best ones, not one of the least salable, and she did. Sometimes he thought southern Africa was specially designed to try the souls of small-business experts. He had had his difficulties persuading Africans elsewhere in the continent to be serious about business, but southern Africa was the sharpest thorn in his crown so far. He had to give himself mixed reviews at best for his performance to date—for his career—so he had to succeed in Botswana. This was not the

best subject vis-à-vis his blood pressure. Botswana was probably his last chance to stay overseas. He ought to be able to succeed, because his main project was foolproof: it was all women, very tractable, making school uniforms for a guaranteed market—the state.

The settlement with Elaine had impoverished him. Because of Lois, he had to be overseas to recoup, because the housing and utilities were covered and they could save like bandits. If they demoted him back to Washington, he and Lo would end up living like graduate students—at that level. Lo would have to go out and cashier. It was unthinkable. Since he'd stopped, he had to buy something from this woman. He paid twenty *thebe* for a banana—four *thebe* more than his highest estimate. Still, the woman was looking implacably at him. What had he done? It came to him: he had forgotten to greet her before starting the transaction. That made him a worm, in her eyes. He moved on.

Secretaries and technical personnel tended to live at the embassy compound, a square of apartments around a microscopic swimming pool. One apartment had been turned over to the nurse, for a medical unit. In a previous incarnation he would have been interested in the nurse, Rita. She was single. She was low-forties and Hispanic, and tough. He liked lean women. He looked at the empty pool wrinkling and creasing in the noon sun. There was a woman he had read about, a prodigy, nineteenth century, who could sleep floating in water. It might have been a man. There had been two prodigies, one of them named Fraticoni, and one was the Human Magnet and metal objects stuck to him or her, and the other was the Human Cork, who could sleep floating.

The nurse was steely. This was a lecture. "I'm not giving you any sleeping medication," she said. "I don't trust you around medication. You scared us with your X ray. We don't need

this. You showed four strange round spots in your gastric region which we finally figured out had to be mineral-supplement pills with a lot of iron in them you weren't absorbing. Does anybody at your house know what vitaminosis is? Maybe you can't sleep because you're irritating your nervous system yourself with whatever you're taking. If you want to self-medicate, then self-medicate, but don't come to me looking for sympathy." There was more. Did he know too much niacin could turn his face red? Was he aware that it was natural for the body to require less sleep as it aged? He used to think Rita liked him.

"And *also*, I never want to find you in my office when I walk in," she said. "I don't want to make a big issue. But you sit in the waiting area, period."

"I was looking for you," Carl said. The nurse began writing. Stepping into her office when he saw it was empty had been the latest in a recent line of bright ideas. He was having too many bright ideas. He had foreseen not getting pills. The possibility that he might spot some lying around loose in the empty office had suggested itself. Then there had been a vague idea that he might be able to do something against the dogs with a syringe, if he had a syringe. He had seen disposable hypodermics in Rita's wastebasket more than once. One dog, a big orange bitch, seemed almost like the choirmaster of the pack. Whether dogs could die from an air-injection, he didn't know. Would it have been feasible to creep up on the bitch while she was rooting around near the fence and jab her? Probably not. He had taken a stupid chance. He felt pale.

Rita handed him the appointment card for his next shot. She reminded him to use the stress cassette she had given him, and said maybe he should try earplugs again. He got up, putting on his sunglasses. Lately his eyes were on the reddish side. The whites of Lo's eyes were clear, like station-

ery. There was a problem connected with sunglasses, which he had to keep in mind. Apparently, older Batswana resented sunglass-wearing. A Member of Parliament had criticized young Batswana for wearing sunglasses, because it was disrespectful to conceal your eyes when you were in conversation. It had been in the *Daily News*. There was probably no special dispensation for expatriates.

He left. Rita was dense about earplugs. From his standpoint, there were two things wrong with earplugs. He could hear through them—any that he had tried. And earplugs forced him to listen to his own heartbeat. He had a functional murmur. It was impossible not to listen for irregularities. Listening to his heartbeat was like listening to the drum in a Roman galley. He had explained all this, but she was still pushing earplugs. He forgave her. She still gave the best gamma-globulin shots in the foreign service. She always warmed up the ampule first in her bra and then had you toe-in to loosen up your gluteus muscle. The bruising was always minimal.

He was yanked from sleep. The barking was on.

Someplace he had seen a movie where the hero is dragged into the air on ropes attached to hooks in his flesh. This was similar, except that the movie ordeal had been an initiation for an English lord who wanted to be a Comanche brave for some unknown reason. So there was a point to it.

The moon was full. It would almost be worth it to be a werewolf. After all, he would have his little problem only once a month, like women. Then he could take care of Let-samao's dogs, either all at once or a few per month. But did werewolves eat dogs? He would.

Normally, he would go to mind force now. But he had given up on mind force, permanently. That was clear. Mind force was the only form of warfare that would let him lie

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immobile and not wake Lois up. Unfortunately, it was a delusion and stupid. He had tried hard to give mind force the benefit of the doubt. After all, there was a Russian medium who could make matchsticks hop around under a bell jar, supposedly. Poltergeist cases seemed to reduce to something real—certain adolescents sending out streams of invisible energy able to smash crockery and empty ashtrays on their parents' heads. Freud once made Jung faint through sheer hatred during an argument, according to Jung, and so on.

Doing mind force, he had imagined white fire flowing up from the root of his spine and out between his eyes, where it would take weaponlike forms and destroy the dogs. He had started out with benign visualizations, such as sleep-inducing fog banks. Then he had escalated to winged nooses, blunt instruments, and on to spikes and blades. Sometimes he had accompanied his visualizations with body English, like tensing his neck cords or clenching his teeth.

He was beginning to resent all the slow motion getting in and out of bed. He realized it was making him feel old. This time, he got out of bed normally. Lo murmured, but was asleep again by the time he had frozen. He picked up his bathrobe and went out into the breezeway to sit until day-break.

Diabolically, the barking stopped.

Lois said good morning, startling Carl. She was in the kitchen doorway. There was something in her expression. It was possible he'd been thinking out loud about the breakfast he'd made, because, seeing it all laid out, he realized it was excessive.

"Hey, please don't interrupt me when I'm talking to myself," he said, getting a weak smile out of Lo.

There were poached eggs, four slices of toast, broiled

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tomatoes, kippers, sliced peaches in *maas*, cornflakes, the last of their decent coffee. There was a reason for the extravagance. He had something urgent to get across. He felt that a leisurely breakfast would set up the right mood.

Lo excused herself. She would never come directly from bed to the breakfast table. Even if breakfast was brought to her in bed, she would insist on getting up to rinse her face before eating anything. She was inflexible about it. That was an example of what was worrying him about her. He had a feeling that she'd made up her mind to appeal to the ambassador for a change of housing. Carl had to prevent that. He had already explained why, and she had seemed to be listening. But there was a reservation in her attitude that had him worried. She had a naïve conception of the ambassador and his powers. He sensed she was planning to do something. It wasn't that Lois was aggressive by nature. Lo wasn't even a feminist. But Lois loved him, and because of the dogs she was a potential fanatic on getting assigned to another house.

They sat down together. There was no reference to the extent of the breakfast. She ate a little of everything, praising everything.

Over coffee, he began. "Lo, I need you to promise me something." He reached across the table for her hand. "I need you to swear on my life you won't go to the ambassador about our housing." She was silent. He knew that he had been right.

He explained it all again, watching his tone. There were no alternative houses to be had. The housing shortage in the capital was grave. The Government of Botswana was going so far as to turn down any project that required it to provide housing in the capital for experts. The ambassador was not a god, and he was helpless on this issue. There was no way anyone in his right mind would trade quarters with them, because everyone knew about the dogs. Americans were

doubling up in houses meant for one family. Contract people were stuck in hotels for months.

She came back with her experience in hotel work. Desk clerks might say there was nothing available, but if you were important enough there would always be a room. She reminded Carl that they were official Americans in Botswana, not contract people.

He explained again that the ambassador saw himself as a new broom. Under the previous ambassador, the housing committee had been a circus, an uproar, a black mark for the ambassador when the inspectors came through. As a sign of strength, the new ambassador had killed the whole appeal process in the housing committee. Now it was policy that people took the housing they were assigned and liked it, or they were sent home.

Finally, he had to explain about Elaine and housing—something he had minimized until now. He was under an emotional injunction from Lois against speaking ill of Elaine, which he accepted. But there had to be exceptions. Elaine had made a hobby out of challenging their housing assignments. She had become notorious. It had gotten into his efficiency rating reports. In short, there was a negative history to be lived down. He recognized that Elaine had needed to assert herself as a person, under what she probably saw as difficult overseas conditions. Nevertheless, there had been a difficult result. Lois seemed to be understanding all this. He finished by saying that going to the ambassador, besides being absolutely not in their own interest, would make her look childish—like someone who couldn't appreciate facts. It would look like a tantrum.

She was unhappy, but she promised. He stood up. He was reluctant to go until she released him with some sign of forgiveness for everything.

A hornbill called in the garden. He had a thought. Lo

had no idea that the one bird he could always identify was the hornbill. He remembered the first time he had heard it, years ago in Rwanda. He had stiffened at whatever he was doing, guiltily. He always heard the harsh, drawn-out *aww* as a cry of disapproval, probably maternal. "I think that's a hornbill," he said.

She looked up, pleased. He could go.

Walking home late that evening, Carl made himself contemplate trying to see Letsamao again. He had already spoken to Letsamao, once by phone and once in person, but both times he had been too gingerly. Whether to avoid seeming neurotic or to engage Letsamao's chivalrous side, Carl had put it that it was mainly Lois who was suffering from the dogs. Both times, Letsamao had said the same things—that Carl's wife was oversensitive and would in time adapt; that the dogs were not extreme, as shown by the fact that no one else was complaining; that among the numerous Europeans who had lived in Carl's house previously there were none who had ever complained. Letsamao had as much as said that it was the business of a husband to manage a wife's problems and to avoid intruding on the valuable time of a cabinet minister. Letsamao had reacted in no way to the suggestion that he might take his dogs in at night. It was as though the suggestion hadn't even been made. Now Carl had a better and more moderate idea. It was that someone from among Letsamao's retinue—that was the wrong word and unfair—be appointed to come out and quiet the dogs when they started up. This time when he spoke to Letsamao he would bring himself into it, confessing that he was the one primarily suffering. Letsamao had dominated their earlier conversations, pressing Carl to finish his business quickly. Their second conversation had been short and sharp. When nothing resulted from the exchanges, Carl had gone over

twice more, at times when he knew Letsamao was at home, only to be told each time by the maid that the Minister was not to be disturbed. Trying to relay complaints through Letsamao's domestics was a waste of time.

Letsamao was a rough customer he had a right to be afraid of. The Minister of Labor had oversight of all expatriates working in the country. Letsamao was a power in the ruling party. Moreover, he was a favorite of the AID mission director and the ambassador, largely because of a reputation as a strong administrator. Carl thought of the Batswana as an unusually agreeable people, so long as you remembered to greet them properly with *dumela*. Letsamao was atypical. He was permanently expressionless. He was short, thickly built, hard-looking. He was cicatriced, with three faint scars like cat scratches on each cheek. Carl had never seen Letsamao in casual dress.

He was approaching Letsamao's house. The gates in the high front walls were ajar. Carl had a flash of irritation. Letsamao's front yard, with its oblong of chive-green lawn, was beautifully landscaped and tended, but the backyard, which faced the front of Carl's house through a wire fence, was a wasteland of bare earth, flailing laundry, children, dog life. Servant Theatre was what Elaine had called a similar scene they had lived with briefly, in Blantyre.

The coach lights on either side of the gate came on. That meant Letsamao was expected imminently. On impulse, Carl stopped. He would wait at the gate to intercept Letsamao. He had time. It would be pleasant. Because of the drought, mosquitoes were scarce. The first stars were out, twitching.

Letsamao's silver Peugeot appeared at the bend in Sefhare Road, traveling briskly. Carl waved. The Peugeot swung toward the driveway. Carl stepped into the middle of the drive, one hand up, smiling hard. Letsamao stopped—more abruptly than he had to, Carl felt.

He went around to Letsamao's window and tapped. Letsamao sat looking at him for a moment before lowering the window very slowly halfway. Carl noted that Letsamao was playing the clutch, keeping the car moving slightly forward. Carl was off balance. He did remember to begin with *dumela*, but then he rushed. There was too much to convey. He said he was getting sick. He used the word "insomnia," which he had decided against using. When he said he thought it was time for an *indaba*, he could see Letsamao stiffen. Carl knew the term, meaning "powwow," from reading the *Rand Daily Mail*. The term was Zulu and was supposed to be lingua franca all over southern Africa—but was it? Had he patronized Letsamao?

Letsamao cut him off in a voice that was high-pitched, almost strangled. "Mr. Schmoll, *dumela*, you must not trouble me with this matter time and again! I must have my watchdogs. In fact, my dogs are giving you protection, if you can understand, because they are alert as to your place as well. So, really, you must leave this! Because really my dogs are watching over you, yet I must feed them. Mr. Schmoll, you must consider your position." He drove on. Carl was now on Letsamao's grounds. Two yardmen, anxious, ran up to usher him out. Letsamao's last words had been spoken heavily, meaningfully.

It was dim in the police station. Why was it so damned dark in Africa, indoors, where people had to work? Carl thought of the artisan workshops in Mombasa—coffin-makers and metalsmiths laboring in cavelike slots lit by one light bulb or fluorescent tube. Maybe because people grew up in windowless rondavels, a little light seemed like a lot. The cost of electricity was probably nine-tenths of the explanation. Decent lighting would do wonders for productivity, he would bet. He ought to write something on it when this was over

and he felt less half dead. There was such a thing as his career.

Carl sat down on a bench among silent Batswana. They were the poor. Some of them looked banged-up. There was no conversation. There was nothing to read. He decided that he had never seen a Motswana he would describe as nervous. The room was an oven.

An hour passed. The station commander would see him. Carl had already spoken to the charge officer, whose English was poor. Carl was hoping he had misunderstood the charge officer's advice.

But the station commander only reiterated what the charge officer had said. There were no laws to protect Carl. The barking of watchdogs could never be seen as a nuisance under the law. There was nothing in the law to limit the number of animals a man could keep on his grounds. All Carl could do was slay these dogs when they set foot on his plot. He could shoot them. But the best was to lure them with meat, and poison them—taking care that the poison was given within his plot. And it would be best if the animals, once they were slain, could be found on his plot as well, although that was sometimes difficult and was not essential. The station commander recommended an arsenic compound available from a stockist near the railway station. Carl was assured that this was a thing commonly done.

The skirl of the hot comb ceased. Carl sampled the soup Lois had made for dinner. It was dawning on him that Lois—all her sympathy *re* the dogs to the contrary notwithstanding—felt deep down that his real problem was crabbéd age. The soup was a case in point. It was dense with powdered kelp or lecithin or some other additive she'd looked up in her health library. She was doctoring his soup because he was at the outer limits of what a human being could be

expected to ingest in the form of pills. The soup had a medicinal tang. He would deny it. He served the soup. Lois came in, damp and pink, in her bathrobe. Her eyes looked a little red. His report of the police-station incident had obviously upset her. They sat down.

He still needed to talk about the business with the police. He couldn't believe that poisoning dogs was commonplace. On the other hand, when it came to considering such an extreme proposition, not everybody lived next door to the Minister of Labor.

Lo had nothing to say. Her problem was that she loved animals. He had even caught her patting Letsamao's dogs once or twice, when she'd found them nosing around the house during the day.

Carl said, "And what if you poisoned some meat and it got into the wrong hands, kids picking it up? Kids eat paint and bark—all kinds of things. It's called pica. This soup is delicious."

It was evident Lo wanted to change the subject. He knew he was being compulsive. He said, "And how do you even go about it? Do you marinate the meat in it, or do you sprinkle it on like salt?" Lo was barely eating.

"It's ironic," he said. "Because I like dogs all right. I had dogs as a kid. But these dogs make me physically ill, almost, when I see them. Especially the ringleader bitch, who's pregnant again, by the way. Her nipples stick out like thumbs."

He had to get off the topic, and now. He was an adult who was aware that he couldn't have everything, such as a wife who was both cheerful and depressed on his behalf in the same instant of time. She was still on the verge of tears. He realized that he'd seen Lois really crying only once in Africa, so far—when Letsamao's dogs had gotten into the yard and torn up the parsley she'd planted. The parsley had

been dedicated to Carl, for his clotting-factor needs. She had been horrified to find that weeks could elapse without parsley showing up in the markets. She loved him. He apologized for bringing up the police nonsense again.

"It isn't that," she said, pushing her soup away, definitely crying.

She said, "Oh, Carl. It isn't about that. But, Carl, today I found out that Scott Nearing died." She waited. Her voice was faint. "I just found out that *Scott Nearing* died."

Carl said, "I don't know the name, I don't think."

She was surprised. "Well, he wrote some wonderful books with his wife, about living and diet and so forth, that I really loved. I don't even know why this upsets me and I'm crying like this. Well, he was wonderful and he was really old, about in his nineties. And he had a wonderful life in Maine. I don't know. I guess partly it's because I just found out he died a few months ago, because I'm in Africa. You can't experience your feelings for a person when they make transition at the time they do if you didn't even know about it at the time. But now Helen is all alone." Her tears coursed down.

At midnight, the dogs woke him—a trio. The barking was listless. It was the heat. Tonight it was so hot he knew he'd never get back to sleep, even if the dogs quit. He sat up slowly. Sweat crept down his sides. It was December. High summer had come.

All the windows were open, and an electric fan sent a stream of tepid air across the foot of the bed. There was an air-conditioner, but Lois was opposed to it. She had once worked for six months in an office at a desk directly under an air-conditioner, and that had been the beginning of the sinus problem, which only Botswana had ever helped. At work, he used his air-conditioner, but guiltily. Lo's point was

that man had evolved without air-conditioning, and that using it had to deprive the body of some positive adaptive exercise. Her main dogma seemed to be to preserve the body's flexibility, by any means necessary. Lois fasted for a day every couple of weeks, just to be fasting and just because there had to be something in the body's capacity to adapt that would be triggered by fasting. He wouldn't relish fasting, but he could see it coming, a cloud no larger than a woman's hand. He could deal with it.

Carl got out of bed. He was going to be restless. His unhappiness was too great. He knew what he was going to have to do: because of the dogs, he was going to have to sleep alone from now on.

There had to be a good side to this, somewhere, because the pain of it was too much, and the heaviness coming into him. The only thing was that his night vision was improving, from all his creeping around in total darkness. He could get from room to room, find things, fix snacks, all in pitch blackness. It was a useless skill, unless it was rehearsal for blindness or becoming a cat burglar. Another thing was that if he slept in his study, he could work when he was awake. He could attack his paperwork arrears, which were getting to be significant. He could do anything that didn't involve noise, like typing. Visualizing himself working at night, he felt worse. Working at night was for students, the young.

In his study, Carl lay down on the couch. It was no good: he was sticking to the vinyl surface. He would have to spread towels over the cushions. Being in the study reminded him of an option he'd toyed with early on. He had thought of turning the study into a soundproof chamber, lining the walls with slabs of corkboard gotten from somewhere. That idea had broken up on the reef of ventilation. It would have been like lying in a crypt. There was no way he could have asked Lo to join him there. Now he had to get the towels.

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The hinges on the linen closet needed oil. Lo was awake now. He heard her coming out into the hall, saying his name.

She found him at the closet and embraced him. He put the towels down and held her.

He told her he had decided he had to sleep in the study for the time being because he was destroying her sleep. He patted her. He could feel her nodding yes.

A queue lengthened outside the Ministry of Agriculture stand, where a hermaphrodite calf was on display. I could be an exhibit myself, Carl thought. Heat corrugated the hill view over the metal roofs of the food stalls. People could come and marvel at me for being able to stand up.

His plan for Saturday had been to sleep like the dead. But the deputy chief of mission's wife had struck by phone. Lois had been reminded about what it meant to be an official American. The ambassador wanted total attendance by official Americans at the Red Cross Fête. The D.C.M.'s wife had been blunt. The ambassador was determined that the American exhibit should take second place this year. By custom, first place always went to an African entry. The chief of station said Zambia was looking strong. Second place was between Britain and the United States. Vigorous attendance by an exhibit's nationals counted with the judges.

An unfamiliar American wife handed Carl a red, white, and blue paper shoulder sash and matching boutonniere. He was wearing a T-shirt, so he attached the rosette to a belt loop at his hip, hoping that that would be acceptable. The American pavilion was major—bigger than ever before. But Carl was picking up anxiety—two kinds of it. The Americans were worried, not by the British but by the Swedes and their Southern Cross Coffee House. Apparently, the Swedes were underpricing tortes and pastries worth a fortune in terms of ingredients, let alone labor. The Batswana were

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notorious for their love of sweets. The other anxiety was that a certain number of official Americans had been noticed stocking up on tortes for the freezer, until the ambassador had expressed himself on the subject. The word was that the judges were staying a little longer in the coffee house than was standard. It would be unfair if the Swedes won, because their exhibit had only two elements—the coffee house and a borehole-pump demonstration. Carl knew all about the wood-fired pump, which had a bad image among the American technical people. First of all, there was a famous fuel-wood shortage in Botswana. Secondly, even though the pump could run on low-quality coal, which was cheap in Botswana, the cost of transporting coal out into the Kalahari would be too high. America had gone with diversity—a cartoon-show tent, a used-clothes-and-white-elephant table, a fashion show, a bake table, a palmist. Somebody had traveled to the Republic and come back with sausages that could almost pass for American hot dogs. Carl had to make sure that the ambassador saw he was there. Should he go up and say it might be a good idea to charge the Swedes with dumping? He decided not to. He saluted the ambassador from a distance. Lois was around somewhere. She should be seen, too. He went to find her.

The Anglicans had set up their tombola stand in a grove of dying silver oaks. The trees were shedding: the fallen leaves were crisp, like fish bones underfoot. It was the drought. Improvised shelving, braced against a row of trees, held the tombola prizes: canned goods, sundries, Bibles, cheap plastic toys in blisterpacks, five-kilo sacks of mealie and sorghum. There was a crush around the tombola, with Lois at its heart.

Carl made his way to her side. She was a hit. Poor devils were cheering her on, like extras in a gambling movie cheering the heroine at roulette. He loved her. He touched her

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shoulder. She was damp. He wanted to get her over to the American pavilion, but she was too engrossed. She had won a mountain of things, mostly canned. She hated canned goods, as he recalled. He glanced at a few of the cans. Some of the brands were extinct, he was sure. Storekeepers donated their dead stock to the fête, but some of her prizes looked as though they should have been destroyed instead. That was a merchant for you. But getting rid of old stock was the right thing to do. Lo had won a lifetime supply of pocket combs for him. He let her know that he had to find someplace to sit down. She nodded, preoccupied just then with trying to convey what chutney was to a Herero woman who had won a jar of it. Glum Anglican Auxiliary women were churning up the chances, probably in reaction to Lo's run of luck. He told Lo to come to the American pavilion as soon as she could, and to find a kid to carry her prizes to the car. Carl said he was going to America, and left.

In the American pavilion, the mood was poor. The judges had been cursory. People were saying the ambassador was annoyed. One of the judges was Letsamao. Carl thanked God he had been elsewhere during the judging. He needed to sit down, badly. He considered the cartoon tent. He put his head inside and saw that he would be the only adult. He backed out. There was another tent, smaller, pitched outside the main circuit of stalls and exhibits. The sign above the door flap said "YOUR FATE," the letters formed by handprints in different colors. From a marketing standpoint, the sign was dubious: it was hard to read, because the lighter-colored handprints broke up some of the letters, and there was no price posted. The palmist would be wondering where her trade was. He went in. There was a chair, an armchair.

The interior was candlelit. The atmosphere was dark yellow. The palmist was a woman his age. She was seated behind a table draped with a kaross. He knew who she was: she was the wife of their dental-systems man, Napier. Carl

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knew something about her and tried to remember what it was. There was some kind of feeling against her among the wives, except for Lo as per usual. As he recalled, people said she had something to do with the occult. Her name was Ione, he knew. She had gone all out. Her lean face was masklike with powder, and her eyes were extreme—framed in squared-off black makeup patterns like the eyes of women in Egyptian tomb murals. She was wearing a black turban and a red caftan with mirror chips sewn into embroidered eyelets around the yoke. She was pretty striking. He liked her. He sat down and paid. The chair was perfect. He was going to prolong this. There was some colorless bright stuff on her lips that looked good. He was comfortable. She reminded him that she needed his palm. There was a tremor in his fingers. His hand calmed down right away when she took it. He admired her for staying in character. He could rest. She was value for money, just for her getup.

His mind drifted while the woman studied his palm. Friendship was a problem in the foreign service—having the kind of friend you could go to for comfort and advice. It was only natural to hold back when everybody you met would be moving on to some other country in two years at the outside. On top of that, potential friends were always one of two things—superiors or subordinates, neither of them good categories of people to expose your troubles to. Life was brief, really brief. And, if on top of everything else your wife was your enemy, good luck. He wanted to knock wood about having Lo.

He remembered another thing about Ione. She knew Setswana. But he had heard that when she was learning the language, she had refused every female tutor assigned to her by the Orientation Centre, insisting on having a male. People had carried on about that. Now she was speaking.

She told Carl that she was picking up enormous stress, but she wanted to know if it made sense to say that the source

of this stress was unusual in some way. He said yes. She asked if this stress was from something other than a person presently around him. To Carl, this meant the dogs. This woman was extraordinary. Something was happening to him that was undeserved, she said.

He began about the dogs. She stopped him and said she wanted him to know she had sensed a nonhuman source for his problem, as he could verify in what she had said. He told her more. She said that he was facing a threat but that he could be helped. Either she was a superb actress or she was really concerned and serious. He found her convincing.

He told her everything. She listened intently. When someone tried to come in, she got up and said she was closed. It was only someone reporting that the Brits had won second, anyway. She had him go over his situation again, repeating certain parts. She was intelligent.

Ione said she was going to help him.

That night he was still awake when the dogs began, at two. Things about Ione were agitating him. Why would all their arrangements have to be so sub-rosa? Why did he trust her? She was extreme.

He got up. Now that he was sleeping in the study, he had more freedom for quick, furtive acts of vengeance against the dogs: "venting behavior," Ione had called it, approving of it as a stopgap. He put on his shaving robe and went softly out into the yard. Next to the stoop he had a cache of small stones and fragments of roof tile. He hurled three stones in the direction of the worst noise. Two of his shots struck metal. There was no change in the barking. He felt better, less wound up, when he was back inside.

Also, he had never thought of Lois as tiny until Ione—trying to identify who Lois was—had asked if she was "that tiny blue-eyed person." Lo was small. Maybe she seemed

smaller because of being with someone his height and also because she would never wear heels because of what they did to your spine. Of course, Ione herself was on the tall side, which would also explain what she'd said.

He was smoking again, a little, as a pastime and only at night. He felt it was justified. He lit a cigarillo. There was no inhaling involved. Lois would understand, when she found out. Dutch cigarillos were the best in the world, and they were cheap in southern Africa, for some reason. He would never be able to afford Ritmeester Seniors back in the U.S.

Ione put things in a way that stayed with him. He should imagine everything he'd done about the dogs, so far, as pictures in an album, with everything he had done in a certain category represented by one picture with a caption: a picture called "Lapidation" would show him throwing rocks through the fence at night. And the title of the whole album would be "Things That Didn't Work." And then he should believe that there would be a second album coming, with just one picture in it, and the title of that album would be "The Thing That Worked." But he had to believe in the second album. She had been shocked by his trapezius muscles, the rigidity. She had made him feel them himself.

He was getting more hopeful. The dogs continued. Idly, he began singeing the hairs on his wrist with the tip of his cigarillo.

Ione said, "I learned hypnosis from a fairly sinister woman—a religious charlatan, really. Classes in hypnotism were a sideline for her. Her main business was a little sect she ran in her garage, the Church of the Supreme Master." She was moving her hands in a smoothing pattern above him as he lay in a lounge chair. He was supposed to relax, but her insistence on meeting in the motel was still bothering him. She was sitting to his right, leaning over him. She had

made him take off his shoes. Was it a sign that he was going under that he saw her hands almost as detached things? He asked her.

She said, "You have to try and avoid critiquing each step of the way or you won't go under. You have to let go more. Tell me anything that's still bothering you. I think you understand about confidentiality and so forth. I want to help you. Your situation is pretty severe. Go long enough with low sleep and you can begin seeing things, seriously. So I want you to seal all that up in a mental envelope and lick the flap and visualize it going into a mailbox. Concentrate on your tongue, licking. Good. That's better." She resumed her breaststrokeline movements. "Remember, we have plenty of time and you'll be back in your office by four, tops. I run a tight ship. You can trust me." He concentrated.

She said, "We met in her garage, where she had, I'll never forget it, a picture of Christ on the wall with the eyes coated with clear nail polish—to give you some kind of frisson, I guess. The other students were something. A woman who demonstrated stove polish in ten-cent stores for a living was one. And a man who at the time owned the largest sandblasting concern in New Jersey. He was losing contracts. And an unfortunate type who was in it for one thing only—the power to cloud women's minds. You follow me. She was a wonderful teacher, though."

Today Ione was normally dressed, except that her blouse had unusually deep armholes, if you were interested. She was wearing a tight white skirt and a white sleeveless blouse. She had started off by removing an ivory bracelet and her wedding ring, because they would distract him when he was concentrating on her hands.

She bent closer to him. "Think what I speak but don't move your lips," she said.

"This is sad," Ione said. Carl had the impression she was repeating herself. He had been asleep. "This is too sad, as they say here. You're too exhausted to be hypnotized."

He said, "I thought you were going to try again."

"I did," she said. "You only remember the first two tries, when I woke you up. The third time I just felt like I was torturing you. So I let you sleep."

It's just as well, he thought. His mind felt unusually clear. He hated the motel room. A brown line led down the wall from the air-conditioner to a rank spot in the rug. He felt a little panic. He was in danger. It was nearly four.

Ione was smoking. "We learned something from this," she said, soothingly, letting smoke out as she spoke. "We learned I have to catch you at the right moment—sometime when you've had a good night's sleep. Wait, I totally comprehend that that's exactly the problem, but wait for my plan. It isn't difficult. You need to spend one night away from the dogs and just sleep yourself out before we try this the next time. You have to travel, in your job. You could tell your wife you had some field thing to do. Do you know the Mafeny Tlala Hotel, in Molepolole?" She said this quickly.

Lois was young. She would never understand this. Hypnosis had been a mistake. Ione was saying that she still maintained he was a good subject for it.

He interrupted. "This is it for hypnosis, I think. It's not a good idea for me. I don't like the feeling, to tell you the truth."

She said, "But you haven't really experienced it yet, because you kept falling asleep."

He tied his shoes. He would leave first. She looked penetratingly at him, in a way that made him feel guilty and ungrateful. "I bow to what I hear in your voice," she said.

He said, "I appreciate your efforts."

A sliding door gave directly onto the parking area. The

drapes were drawn. "You can almost go," she said, looking out along the edge of a drape.

But he sat down. The idea of leaving was suddenly intolerable. It felt like a mistake. This was the only person who had tried to help him, except for Lo to the best of her ability.

He began apologizing. He said he'd felt from the beginning that hypnotism was going to be a no go for him. He apologized because he realized what he really wanted from her was probably a fantasy. His fantasy had come about because people said she knew all about the culture, and about witchcraft in particular. Probably witchcraft appealed to him because he was at the end of his rope. But wasn't there something to it? He thought she had been implying that there was, whenever they talked. He had seen birds kept off millet fields through juju, in West Africa. He knew the Batswana used witchcraft on one another. There ought to be some way to use it on dogs. He wanted her to admit that she had implied there was a tool available in witchcraft, the first time they'd talked, unless he had imagined it, which he admitted was possible.

She seemed to be going through some inner conflict, trying to persuade herself to help him. He said that he understood her position. He reminded her that he was desperate.

Finally, he sensed a reluctant decision in his favor. "I understand you," she said, seeming grave and hesitant. "But remember, I only know so much in this field. You could call me a novice. You want me to locate a *sangoma* for you—that's what you're asking." She closed her eyes for a moment. "Carl, you understand we'd have to be even more careful about getting found out than you can imagine. You know what it would mean if it got around that we were involved with witchcraft. And you would have to follow instructions, and I mean to the letter."

"Anything," he said.

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Ione called him at work every couple of days to keep him current on her search for a *sangoma*. He found himself looking forward to her calls, which usually somehow evolved beyond the matter at hand to range over a lot of unlikely issues on which she had opinions he found interesting. His sleepless nights provided him with endless topics for discussion. Also, he liked her voice.

Again she was reporting no luck in finding a *sangoma*.

He said, "Stop looking if you want to. What really started me on this tack was when you said that some university had sent a team out to see if there was anything to the claim that *sangomas* could direct lightning strikes against certain people or places. I don't know. It gave me hope. When in Rome. But what a long shot! Maybe it's not a good idea. I get a lot of good ideas quote unquote at night while I'm memorizing the ceiling."

She said he was sounding defeatist. She went on for a while, trying to buck him up.

He said, "Here's another good idea that came to me, that I actually put some time into. It occurred to me that it would be funny to get up a fake memo saying AID should hereafter stop talking about the poor and instead refer to them as the 'pre-rich.' It was just for the bulletin board. This has to do with some incredible new reporting and nomenclature guidelines we recently got from Washington. I actually started typing this thing up the next day, before I realized what I was doing and tore it up. Close call."

She said she thought calling the poor the "pre-rich" was clever. She said his bright ideas should be thought of as insights.

"I'll give you another example," he said. "Answer this question. Do you like it in Africa?"

She said she did.

"But you can't quite figure out *why* you like it, am I

right?" he asked. "Because, I mean, hell, it's inconvenient. Gaborone is dead at night, the movies are ancient and all mutilated because they have to come through South African censorship because that's where the distributor is located. But still we like it here. Drought, poor people . . . Even when they get a decent movie, they mix up the reels. We want to be here anyway, but we can't figure out why. Except that one night I figured it out. It's because it isn't our country and we can't help what happens. We can offer people advice and we get paid for it. We get good vacations, we eat off the top of the food chain, we get free housing. Hey!, but we're not responsible for what happens if Africa goes to hell, *because we've done our best*. Also, at the same time, we're not responsible for what happens in America, either, really—because, hey!, we weren't home when it happened. Say we get fifteen per cent compliance on birth control here, which is what we do get and which is terrific by Third World standards. O.K., *it's not enough*. But what can we do, we tried. We told them. But *we're too late*. We all know it, but somebody pays us to keep up the good work, so we say fine. Why am I telling you this? I forget."

She said, "What we have here are night thoughts—that kind of thing. We all have them, Carl. You're very intelligent. You're excellent. I enjoy what you say. It's very O.K. to have night thoughts. I find you really thoughtful. One thing, though, is you might want to spare Lois this kind of thing. I know it's important to share night thoughts, but Lois seems so delighted about being here. Why cast a pall, if she's really enjoying herself—do you follow me?"

"I'm not going to be a pall-caster," he said.

"Like broadcaster—oh, wonderful! I enjoy you," she said.

He said, "Here's another example. Lying awake, I figured out the meaning of life one night. Not life in general,

but my life . . . what my life is about. It's about women. Women are the meaning of my life: taking care of them, looking for the right ones, trying to stay on their good side. The meaning of my life is the emotions women have about me. That is a fact. I think it's interesting. I was amazed. When did I enlist for that? I thought I was doing something else."

She said, "I want very much to help you. Let me pursue what I'm doing. Let me find someone, Carl. I'll get back to you."

He said to go ahead.

"Look!" Lois said to Carl, as he came in from work. She was elated about something. She stood there, breathing forcefully.

It was nothing self-evident. Was it a new piece of clothing or something from the sea freight that had just arrived? Her hair was the same as recently. He resented having to guess. He was already fully tasked. Also, there were echoes of Elaine involved—Elaine's fury the times he had failed to notice some crucial purchase or that she'd bleached her lanugo.

"Carl, I can breathe through both nostrils at once! Look, my sinus thing is gone one hundred per cent! It was just about four this afternoon. It's just *gone away*. I feel like I'm just flooded with air." Her eyes were bright and moist. It was important.

She embraced him a little fiercely. He was already elsewhere. His mind was back on his mission. Ione had found a *sangoma* in a village fifteen minutes from Gaborone—a *sangoma* who seemed to know all about how to deal with problems like the dogs. So Carl had been right. Ione was giving him credit for guessing there had to be some ultimate mechanism in the culture for dealing with unbearable situa-

tions—whether it was witchcraft or not. In the United States it would be the Mafia. Ione had been skeptical at first. Now she was excited.

Lois was being grateful, pressing against him. She was easing his shirttails out. He was getting the idea. Lois slipped off a sandal and rubbed her heel against his calf. I can do only one thing at a time, he thought. There was no time for this.

“Don’t be so tired,” Lois said, pleadingly.

But tonight he had to get a dog bowl from Letsamao’s yard, somehow. He needed to plan. The *sangoma* had said to get hold of some object common to all the dogs. Carl needed to reconnoitre.

Lois was hurt. “You could at least put your briefcase down,” she said.

He did. “I don’t think you grasp how tired I am,” he said. He was all apology.

She was badly upset. She was liable to go to the bedroom, which would be perfect if she would stay put there long enough for him to get outside and spot the last locations of the dog bowls before night fell. Then he could recoup with her.

Lo announced that she was going to lie down for a while. She was giving him another chance. The implication was that if he was as tired as he was saying, it would make sense for him to lie down along with her. He acted blank. She left. The bedroom door closed loudly.

In the yard, he wandered along the fence, pausing to pick bits of refuse out of the mesh. The dogs were dining. There was the bowl he needed. It was white enamel. When the dogs were through, the bowl was twenty feet from where he stood. He needed an instrument. He needed an instrument that didn’t exist, except in comic books—a pair of monster accordion tongs. He would have to go over or under

the fence in the dead of night. There was no other choice. It would be safer to go underneath. He could excavate in the guise of filling in tunnels dug by the dogs. A shallow trench would do it, something just deep enough to let him roll under the sharp bottom tips of the fence. Would he ignite the dogs when he got over there? He would have to see. He wasn’t physically afraid of the dogs, except for the two ridgebacks. The dogs were cowards, basically. Pretending to pick up a rock would make them shy off. Even if they did bark, he would be there and back so fast there shouldn’t be any danger. Also, the dogs knew him. And best of all, nobody at Letsamao’s paid any attention to the dogs, whatever they did. It would be safe. He would wear heavy stuff on his arms and legs, and heavy gloves, just in case. He wound a twist tie around the fence wire at the point closest to the dog bowl. He was set.

This would be work. It was manual labor. He wouldn’t mind it. The real beginning of the end with Elaine had been when he overheard her refer to herself as “labor” and to him as “management.” Naturally, he had let her snake out of it, believing her when she claimed she was only calling him “the management”—a different thing. Then, during the divorce, it had turned out that calling him “management” was nothing—it was praise, compared to other things she’d said.

Everything tonight had to be kept from Lo. He was grateful it was Lo that things had to be concealed from, not Elaine. Elaine would have been a participant, because she would have found out what was going on. Elaine was temperamentally a Roman empress. And especially in her tastes—she had worn herself out trying to force her needs through the eye of a needle: himself. Lo wanted less than he could provide. And she was still economizing. He would have to be certain she was asleep when he struck tonight, like a commando.

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In the garage he examined the spade he would use. If Elaine had been a Motswana, she would be the richest woman in the country. More Africans should be like Elaine. It was too bad there had been no way she could go into business for herself—for the wife of a foreign-service officer, that had been impossible. Mostly she had been able to get only trivial jobs, like doing property inventories or managing the commissary, except for the one job she had done everywhere and done magnificently—writing the post-differential-payment report. Her reports were masterpieces. She could prove that any foreign-service post in the world was enough of a hellhole to justify twenty to sixty per cent more income in the form of hardship allowances for all hands. Everywhere they had gone, Elaine had been given the differential report to do. Nothing escaped her: windy seasons so brief that no one else noticed them, cheese shortages, mildew problems, no dry cleaning, obscure local diseases lying in wait. The differential report had spoken to her genius at faultfinding. He could imagine what she would have done with the dog problem: she would have turned it into gold for the entire mission. She could take an earthly paradise like Blantyre and make it sound like Pompeii in its last ten minutes. People confessed things to her, like unreported rapes and embarrassing ailments. When she was in the presence of concealed information, she knew it. In fact, if he had ever missed two staff meetings in a row in Elaine's time, she would have known it and it would have meant cold meals, no sex—the whole works. It was bothering him that there might be some simple means of getting the dog bowl that would have been obvious to Elaine which he was overlooking. It couldn't be helped. Tonight he would be a thief in the night, like the Thief of Baghdad, which he had just realized was the best movie he had ever seen.

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Carl attacked the ground. Botswana was sand. Lo was sound asleep, knock wood. Carl worked hunched over, trying to remain alert for any sign of activity at Letsamao's. His body felt light. The dogs were watching him. It was moonless, knock wood.

He felt partly brilliant and partly absurd. He was wearing war-surplus paratroop boots he had carted all over Africa and never used, a watch cap pulled down to his eyebrows, a black, wet-look windbreaker Elaine had insisted on buying for him in the Marais. He hated it. The only reason for buying it had been to enable her to name-drop the point of purchase. With any luck at all, he'd wreck the jacket in the raid tonight. He had to be careful about Lo's black mittens, though, and get them back unnoticed into her glove drawer. She was frighteningly well organized. In the right-hand pocket of his windbreaker, ruining it, was his secret weapon—lumps of raw beef to throw to the dogs to distract them. He had to get things over with because he was stifling inside his action costume, which was what it was.

The trench was too short. Until this moment in life he had always enjoyed being taller than anybody around. He should have hired someone to do the trench, like the street boys who washed your car behind your back and against your instructions and then demanded money. It hadn't occurred to him. He continued digging. The bottom teeth of the fence went down less than an inch into the soil, he had been happy to discover.

He lay down and rolled under the fence easily. The bowl gleamed at him. He stood up as a wave of dogs, muttering, rolled toward him. He flung the meat in an arc just over their heads, and they wheeled. It was like magic. He had the bowl! The dogs were after the meat, breaking up into vicious knots here and there. This was Letsamao's karma for under-feeding them. Maybe their whole problem was being un-

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derfed. He was back in the trench and rolling home. He stood up, shaking himself. He collapsed the lips of the trench and swept loose earth into the hole, enjoying everything.

He was curious to know why he felt physically light, so light. He felt almost removed from his victory, standing aside. It was amazing. What he had done was amazing. He had forestalled the dogs. He felt fine, he felt amazing. Everyone said forestall this, forestall that, but how many people knew the term came from rebel merchants setting up markets outside the authorized markets run by the barons and bishops and so on, in England? How many people knew it came from the history of marketing? England was conquering the world in the guise of her language. Poor devils here in Botswana had to abandon their own languages in order to get a degree. Suppose he'd had to learn German at a tender age in order to get anywhere? The people we deal with day in and day out are all linguists, he thought. He slipped the bowl inside his jacket, zipped up, and went in.

The phone rang. It was Ione, at last. He had been waiting for days. She got directly to money. It was two hundred pula. At the current rate, that would be about two hundred and fifty dollars. Then she gave him instructions. She was breathless. At the end, she said, "Carl, I want only one thing out of this, and it's fine with the *sangoma*, and that's to be present—be there for it. This is a whole new step for me. So, I'm hoping to God you have no objection. And also you owe me this. And it's a good idea for me to be there, just in general. And he understands absolutely about confidentiality."

He said he wanted her to be there. She was relieved.

The instructions were easy. He was supposed to be "clean in his person" and to wear clean clothes.

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Ione was trying to modulate everything. Let her, he thought. As she drove, she was trying to keep him relaxed and positive. She was driving especially carefully, suppressing her impatience whenever she had to stop and get out to let them through cattle gates. She wouldn't let him help. She wanted him to rest, which was all right with him, because last night the dogs had been straight from hell itself. Ione had even brought a pillow for the small of his back.

There were a lot of mountainous clouds. She had pointed out some odd cloud forms. It was balmy. The little hills above Ramotswa were greener and more normal-looking than the ones he was used to—like the steep hills around Lobatse that looked like piles of rubble or cobblestones. Was she worried that he was going to back out, still? He smiled to himself. On his lap in a paper bag was the dog bowl. He was holding on to it with both hands.

Ione was following directions written neatly on an index card. These back roads were rough. He wasn't sure where they were, at this point. The last landmark he'd paid attention to had been a garage—a panel-beaters place near the main road, a good while back. He liked the way Ione dressed. Today she was wearing a long-sleeved khaki blouse and matching pantslike things whose name would come to him. Lo would look like a Brownie in Ione's outfit, but on Ione it was just right. Sometimes Lo bought clothes in youth-wear. The only thing against Ione was her eyebrows, which were too thin and not in their original location. But that was nothing. He couldn't help admiring her calves as she worked the brake and clutch. She had muscular calves, like a dancer. Culottes, she was wearing.

They arrived. She seemed not to like the looks of the place, and told him to stay in the car while she scouted around. There was a mud-block storage building standing

alone at the edge of a deep ravine. Where was this? They had come down into a valley with bad gully erosion everywhere he looked. The building was windowless. The roofing was motley—boards and sheet metal held down with stones. A line of elephant grass grew around one side and the back of the structure. There were no other buildings anywhere in view.

Now Ione was motioning him to come over. He got out. The entrance was at the back—a hole probably originally intended to receive a doorframe. The void was covered with a tarpaulin, which Ione pushed aside with a stick. Candles burned in several places inside. They entered.

It was difficult to see much. Where was his night vision? Something like a heap of rags in one corner rose up and walked. Ione jumped. Carl was steady. It was the *sangoma* approaching.

How usual was this? The *sangoma* was dressed in an assemblage of light and dark rags, pinned together, and he was masked. Toweling was wound around the top half of his head, ending just below the nose. The eyehole edges were ragged. A headband secured the toweling, and feathers hung down from it on one side. The *sangoma's* arms were bare. There was nothing imposing about him. There was something sad. He looked frail. He seemed to be alone. The place had been neatened up in a rough way, the earth floor raked. There were ramps of earth and debris in two corners. Some penetrating smell hung in the air. There were sacks of something along one wall which could be sat on in a pinch. It was all right. He didn't love the ceiling beams, which were studded with white pods—some of them as big as doorknobs—which he knew were spiders' nests. He could make out a cot and a small table at the head of the room. He was ready anytime.

Carl lay on the cot, waiting. First, Ione had insisted on checking the cot for stability. Then she had insisted on dusting the cot off with some tissues she had. Then it had been O.K. to lie down. And now she had run out to the car to get him the pillow she'd brought. She was taking more of a hand in things than anybody else present liked. There had been trouble over the money, when she made Carl keep half of it until the procedure was over. And that had led to the *sangoma's* first request that she consider waiting outside, which she had resented. Now he had the pillow, and there was a compromise: she would sit on a sack at a reasonable distance from the scene of the crime.

The thing began, at last. He wanted to tell Ione to relax, and to remind her that there were such things as trade secrets and that from his standpoint, the *sangoma* was already being pushed around. This man was an entrepreneur, when you came down to it. Also, it was Carl's money, and so far he felt like he was getting his money's worth—some dance steps and swaying as the *sangoma* circled around him, some business with bones in a pouch, some pouring of liquids into and out of the dog bowl. How could she expect to be allowed to scrutinize everything? They weren't there to make a documentary. It was too dark for that, and this kind of thing was along the lines of a séance. He wanted to tell her that people didn't take flashlights to séances and sit there shining them around. Besides, a good part of the ceremony was going on behind a screen made from sacking. Maybe the *sangoma* hadn't liked Ione explaining at the beginning, over and over and over, in what would have to be called Basic English, what Carl's problem was and what the ritual was supposed to be putting an end to. From what Carl had seen during the money imbroglio, the *sangoma* spoke perfectly good English, although maybe that was strange. Carl was satisfied, was the point. The *sangoma* was humming. For a moment,

Carl felt he knew the tune, from South African radio. But that was impossible. He liked this thing. It went on.

Now the *sangoma* wanted him to turn onto his stomach. He complied. Ione materialized near them, enraging the *sangoma*. The old argument began again. Ione was interfering. This time the *sangoma* was obdurate. Ione would have to wait outside while he completed the ritual, which was almost at an end, and he would absolutely refuse to continue so long as she stayed. He appealed to Carl, saying "Rra, you must command this woman. She must wait some time on the outside, from this moment. She shall destroy my power." He had a hoarse, grating voice. He sounded weak. Maybe this was hard work for him.

Carl asked Ione to wait outside. She was unhappy. He said he would tell her everything that happened—that was a promise. Something was bothering Ione which she wasn't communicating, but there was no time for this. She wouldn't budge.

He was having to keep her face in view from a painful angle. This business couldn't be dragged out forever just because she didn't like some detail or other. She had had her chance to be an observer. The *sangoma* had to be allowed to finish.

She said, "Then are you, yourself, asking me to leave you in here?"

"I think I am," he said.

He had to shout at her, finally. It took his last strength. He tried to point out that they had paid their admission, that this wasn't like going into a restaurant and walking out after you looked at the menu. That had been Elaine's specialty. She loved doing it just a little less than sending food back to the kitchen, which would happen at any point in a meal, so that you were never safe. You were on tenterhooks every time you ate out. He shuddered.

The *sangoma* bent over him. "Thanks, that woman is gone. Now you must set this into your mouth." The *sangoma* handed Carl a piece of cardboard folded in half. Carl didn't like this, and now the *sangoma* was untucking Carl's shirt and pushing it up to expose his back. Carl wanted to say something, but the *sangoma* was chanting again, and the thought of interrupting seemed wrong. The *sangoma* gestured for Carl to bite down on the cardboard, so he did.

The *sangoma* bent down to him again. "Now what I must do is cut you some places, just like this way . . ." He dragged a thumbnail lightly along the canvas near Carl's face. "It is just your skin."

Carl started to get up, but checked himself, overcome by a new sensation. It was the sensation of conviction. The ritual felt real to him for the first time. Someone whose motives were good was going to reach down and cut him while he was wide awake. It was remarkable. He relaxed.

The pain of the first cut startled him. He had to concentrate. He counted the cuts as they came. The first was the worst—the deepest, he guessed. There were six cuts all told, three on each side of his spine, all on his upper back. It was like being burned. He gathered that the instrument was a knife blade, not a razor. He was breathing too fast.

"Rra, I must put you some powders," the *sangoma* said, tenderly. He patted Carl's neck.

The powder made his cuts sting even more. Carl spat out the cardboard. The *sangoma* tamped the powder down. Carl smelled ashes.

The *sangoma* helped Carl sit up. "You must set your shirt right," the *sangoma* said. Carl tried. His back was crawling with pain that had to stop if he was going to walk. The *sangoma* helped him with his shirt and then with finding which pocket the balance of the fee was in.

Carl got to his feet. He was all right. He could walk

decently. The *sangoma* would keep the dog bowl, apparently. The *sangoma* said something about not worrying anymore about the dogs. It was over.

Outside, it was brilliant. He kept walking. The air was sweet, overwhelming. There was Ione, pacing and smoking near the car. Now she saw him. She flicked her cigarette butt into the *donga*, which he wanted to stop her from doing because of veld fires, but it was too late.

The thing now was to get to the car. There might be some bleeding. If Ione noticed something, she would start up again with the *sangoma* and they could never leave. He thought, I have to keep my back behind me.

Once they were moving, she wanted to talk. He put her off, pleading fatigue. A taxi passed them, going in the opposite direction—unusual, because taxis mostly stuck to the paved roads. Ione slowed, craned her head out the window: clearly, she was trying to catch the taxi's plate number, but why? Something is eating her, he thought. He would hear all about it. He promised to be available at the office the next day for a leisurely phone call after lunch. That seemed to pacify her. She was concerned about him. He felt fine. He had done everything he could. There was nothing else. She was driving too fast. The jolts hurt his back. He was nearly faint.

They were still nowhere when Ione stopped. She wanted to know what was wrong. He told her about the cuts. He couldn't help it. She wanted to go back and find the *sangoma*. Her face was set.

He argued. He said the *sangoma* would be gone. He said it was getting too late. He told her she couldn't. He had to get home.

She listened to him, finally, and drove in the right direction.

At certain moments he felt like a genius, or fox: only Ione knew about going to the *sangoma*. But he was sick. He was aware that he was fairly sick. His fever was up and his throat was bad. He was perspiring everywhere. But luck was with him. For months he had been warning Lo that everyone who came to Botswana got tick-bite fever sooner or later, which could actually be what he had, although he doubted it. Anyway, she accepted that tick-bite fever was what he had. His cuts were still his secret. They had to heal. Five of them had. The other part of the game was to keep the nurse from finding anything out.

He was getting sleep. He was taking sick days and sleeping all day. At night, if he heard the dogs they blended in with his fever dreams. They were still there. Lo was the best person to be around right now, because she distrusted doctors and loved taking care of him and would go along that way for time immemorial.

But then he was getting too weak. It was hard to really want to get well, because of the pleasure of sleeping. But he was getting too weak, for sure. So far, Lo was just giving him aspirin, because she was all gung ho for letting nature take his or her course, so naturally she was going along with the proposition that you just take aspirin for a week or so and let the tick-bite fever burn itself out and then you're left immune for time immemorial, instead of going for tetracycline which knocks it out in twenty-four hours but leaves you still susceptible. But now it was time to get well fast, so it was time to go for his secret weapon: Elaine's pharmacopeia. The glands in his armpits were hurting. Elaine always got doctors to give her their free samples of every damned thing. Elaine always had everything she might need for medication because she for one would never stand for being someplace in the Third World and finding herself where some doctor could say yea or nay. Somehow her medicine collection had wound

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up with his effects, not hers, after the split. So now it was his, all the Valium and all the rest. Why did he end up with it? He knew she had dynamite antibiotics in there. Why did he have her medicine? She must have forgotten. If she remembered, she might get a cable out on it. But now it was his.

He was having long dreams. It was always too hot. The walls were sliding up into the ceiling all the time. Lo was scared, he could tell. He was beyond food. Lo wanted the nurse. On the other hand, he would be all right any day because of Elaine. He was only tasting what Lo had given him—broths and so forth. It was too hot for broth. Lo was even letting there be air-conditioning. She loved him. He would be fine because of the neomycin he was taking—plenty of it. Elaine was saving him, Elaine, who got him going the first time they met by saying "Wreck me." Neomycin saved Elaine once. It was the strongest thing there was. He was young when she said "Wreck me." She knew what she was doing. Probably she was still doing it. Lo gave him a Compral to take. Compral was stronger than aspirin, and was from South Africa. He faked taking it. His eyes itched.

Before he could get better the nurse came, and then she was there all the time. She was gone, right now. They knew about the scabs on his back and were asking him about them. His throat was a good excuse not to answer things. He was keeping mum. He was worried about the knitting factory, because he was supposed to remind the women about something about business taxes. It was all right, because it was written down somewhere at work. He felt his hipbones by accident. They were like knives.

He was aware of arguments going on, but not really arguments. One thing he could tell was that Lo had been crying.

Official Americans

It was after the nurse found his neomycin. There was telephoning to Pretoria. Now the nurse was giving him injections. Lo should be strong.

Ione woke him up, bringing him something, money, talking too fast. She was talking so fast that powder was falling out of the lines in her throat. He had a compress on his forehead. She put the money in his nightstand drawer, and she was whispering. She felt it was her fault about the *sangoma*, so that was the why and wherefore of the money. She said she had to talk fast because she had used a trick on Lois to keep her out, so she could apologize—that was why she had to talk fast. Some of it he understood. The *sangoma* was a fake, just an actor jumping ship from a troupe from South Africa putting on plays in churches in Botswana—morality plays. He was an illegal person. She had been duped. She had gotten suspicious when he was speaking English and wouldn't use Setswana. Later on, she had realized he had the same voice as the go-between on the telephone, when she was searching for someone. And also, she found out afterward that he had taken the whole thing out of a book—it was Shona and not Tswana. She wondered if he had felt he had to do the incisions partly because he assumed she knew more about the ritual than she had. She was saying how sorry she was. And then when Lo came, she changed the subject. He felt sorry for Ione. He kept his hands under the covers. He was better, he told her. He was understanding more. She told him he looked like a carving.

Now he could get up all right. The world bounced when he walked, but he could walk. It was going away with the injections. People were watching wherever he went. Lo was sleeping on her exercise mat at the foot of the bed. He almost walked on her.

He woke up with a mystery to solve. It had to do with the night before. The dogs had been active, and he remembered that clearly. But somehow he had slept hard at intervals while—he was sure—they were doing their worst. The answer wasn't sheer fatigue, because he was better. His tremor was fading. His appetite was back. Today he was going to read at least two back issues of *Finance and Development*, cover to cover.

Something told him the nurse was in the wings. He turned onto his side. He would pretend to be asleep, in the hope that she might look in and go away. Lo wouldn't let the nurse wake him up. He closed his eyes.

Bacon was what he wanted, but American bacon. That was one thing to be said about going back. Because it was clear they were going to have to go back. He had to stop fighting it. It was important not to panic over it. At least in America they put the lettuce inside the sandwich, not strewn in shreds all over the outside. Money was going to be the problem. He was afraid. People would tell him to go into business, leave the agency. He was an expert on business. But the idea repelled him. Why was everything in the world for sale, exactly? In fact, he was with the government because selling things seemed repellent to him. The government gave things away.

But nothing could be done. He was leaving Africa to her dogs. Lo would have to forgive him. Lo had worked before. She had been a cashier. She could learn bookkeeping—he would teach her. He had never taken one thing from Africa. This was too much self-pity. He had never touched an African woman, never, even when he could have. And when Elaine wanted to hide jadeite and tiger-eye in their household effects to smuggle back into the United States, he had drawn the line. He was through here. He was being destroyed.

Somebody was coming.

The nurse shook his shoulder. He rolled onto his back. Something was wrong.

"I've been talking to you," she said, but not impatiently. She was being kind. She had an instrument in her hand. Lo was with her.

Making a show of fatigue, he turned back onto his side.

He was beginning to understand something. He lifted and lowered his head slightly, blotting out her voice when he set his head down. He sat up violently, full of hope.

Lo was saying that the nurse had something to tell him. *He knew what it was.* The nurse said he had been septicemic. He had self-medicated and he shouldn't have. He had used something that was ototoxic and had made himself deaf in one ear, and she was sorry. Lo took his hand. She was weeping. The nurse was snapping her fingers to either side of his head, while he smiled. They could stay.