

Project 324624

**The China-Africa Parallax:
A Ryan and Gillian Mystery**

by Larry Andrews

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For Ruthie, author of Beautiful Life.

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“Have you noticed the woman in the navy blue Mac?”

Gillian asked Ryan as they made their way toward the exit at Dr. Samuel Johnson’s house.

“Which woman?” Ryan returned her question with another, turning a 1-80 to better see the people behind them.

“Oh Ryan, stop turning and gawking like a tourist from the US. Sometimes you’re simply way too cool and excessively too urbane.”

“I prefer ‘too cool,’” Ryan echoed.

She gave him a mock jab to his ribs and both of them laughed.

They left the building and stood off to one side on Gough Street, enjoying the architectural sights. “Look,” Gillian said, poking Ryan, “See? There she is.”

“So,” Ryan replied, “there’s a woman in a navy blue raincoat. I assume you want me to make something of that fact? Is this in either your ‘too cool’ or the ‘too urbane’ category?”

“One more thing,” Ryan added with a smirk, “your spotting this mysterious woman in a dark raincoat is something out of a Class B movie in the US. I expect better from you.”

“Well, in case you hadn’t noticed, she was behind us this morning on our walk toward the East Putney tube stop.”

“Dear,” Ryan answered, “as a London native you should know the London Regional Transport exists to move some of the city’s 25 million people from one place to another place. Some of the riders could very likely be headed in similar directions.”

“Yes. Yes. This I know, Ryan. I simply find it rather odd that she’s following us. That’s all.”

“She’s not necessarily *following* us, you know; could be it’s merely a coincidence the three of us are headed in the same general direction,” Ryan replied, “she could be a tourist from the States who directs a media center in the high school in Lander, Wyoming, visiting the house in London where Samuel Johnson wrote his famous dictionary.”

“Perhaps. Perhaps. Just never mind. How about some lunch? My breakfast of tea, toast and jam is failing me.”

They walked the 20 yards to 17 Gough Street for lunch at Ye Olde Chesire Cheese, reputed to be London's oldest pub, dating back to the 1500's or 1600's, depending on whose history of London pubs seems more persuasive.

After entering the pub a host seated them at a harvest-style table with benches. Four people were already seated at the table.

"Reminds me of the communal seating at Durgin Park in Boston," Ryan said.

"Having never visited Boston," Gillian said, "about all I can add to that observation is 'Hmmm.'"

At that, a server emerged, asking, "Drinks?"

"Two lagers, please," Ryan answered. "That okay with you, Gill?"

Gillian was staring over Ryan's shoulder, her brow furrowed. She didn't hear his question.

"Gillian," Ryan began, "is a lager okay for you? Harp Irish lager?"

Gillian dismissed Ryan's question with a semi-regal wave of her hand. "Whatever."

Ryan turned to the server. “I guess we’ll have two Harp Irish lagers.”

“Very good. I’ll take your lunch orders when I return with your beers,” the server said as he turned and left.

Gillian sat more upright in her chair, craning to see over Ryan shoulder. “Don’t turn around, Ryan, but Lady Blue Coat is sitting two tables behind you.”

“Gillian, this game of Clue is getting tiresome,” Ryan said. He reached across the table and gave Gillian’s hand a squeeze. “I love you very much, you know. But I’d rather be your Romeo than your Dr. Watson. Would that be acceptable to you?”

“Despite Romeo’s fate?” Gillian chuckled.

“Everything I do, I do for you, Gillian,” Ryan offered. “I’d even drink hemlock.”

“Oh Ryan, give us break. You’ve used the wrong character! Romeo didn’t drink hemlock. He was Italian. I think he preferred Amadeo Chianti as his drink of choice.”

Gillian laughed at her joke while underneath the table she rubbed the toe of her boot flirtatiously against the inside of Ryan’s thigh.

“Back to The Lady In Blue, Ryan, her recurring appearances during today’s sight-seeing bothers me to no small degree. Her presence can’t be that circumstantial. One sighting might go unnoticed, two sightings are coincidental, but three sightings make one wonder what’s going on. At least, that’s how I fancy it.”

Ryan smiled one of his *I give up* smiles. “Gilly, the number of her appearances tallied alongside the sites we’ve visited this morning couldn’t be statistically significant.”

“I married a statistician?” she asked aloud.

Before Ryan could reply, the server returned with their Harp beers. In accord with Ryan and Gillian’s post-nuptial agreement, each ordered something basic to their new partner’s food traditions and heritage, So, Ryan ordered the Steak and Kidney Pie. Gillian had a Steak Burger, chips, Guinness onion comfit, and horseradish crème fraiche.

After ten minutes of eating, they traded lunches.

Two months earlier . . .

Gillian and Ryan were married in the Putney Methodist Church at the intersection of Gwendolyn Avenue and Upper Richmond Road, not more than a five minute walk from Gillian's detached house.

The church has a fully operable pipe organ that survived WWII, which is more than can be said for the roof. A nearby bomb blast lifted the roof, leaving it some 4-degrees off-kilter. A repair to the Gothic structure would cost astronomical values in British Pounds Sterling, so repairing the roof had been on the Trustees' agenda through many generations.

At coffee and tea following a Sunday service, a long-time congregant pointed out some water-stained pews to Ryan, "If you're sittin' there when it's raining, move yer arse cheeks. It's simply better wisdom not to sit there."

A typical British Occam's Razor! Ryan stifled a chuckle.

The newlyweds spent a four-day weekend in the south, mostly in and around Winchester, then they returned to Gillian's house, which had been renamed with a possessive pronoun: *our* house.

Gillian resumed her duties in the Wandsworth University's Department of Linguistics; Ryan still had six months remaining on his academic-year sabbatical and spent his time working on his research.

Late Friday afternoon Ryan closed the book he was reading, rubbed his eyes and then looked at his watch. It was 5:30. He went to the kitchen cabinet where their liquor supply was kept. He took down a bottle of Booths gin, the dry vermouth, and made a four-finger martini.

"Can you make that two?" Gillian asked as she came through the front door. She put her coat and scarf in the closet.

She went into the kitchen; Ryan handed her drink.

They touched glasses and took their first sips. "The martini is well done, Professor Mixologist, but I can't understand why you add the dry vermouth. You Yanks just don't want to admit you drink gin, do you?" Gillian took another sip.

She continued: "Turning to another topic, if you don't mind, have you given thought to what we're going to do at the end of this academic term? I don't want us living an ocean apart."

“No, Gillian, neither do I, of course. We’ll go to the States when your current term is over; I can find a visiting professorship somewhere, I think. Then, I’m obliged to return to my regular position in Columbus in the fall. Now it’s my turn to change the subject. How about some dinner?”

“We haven’t a thing in the fridge, I’m afraid. Take out?” Gillian asked.

“Something like that.”

They drained their glasses, went to the closet and pulled on their coats, walked to Upper Richmond Road and waved down a taxi.

Ryan held the right rear passenger door open for Gillian. After she sat in the backseat Ryan got in, pulled the door closed, and sat beside Gillian. She snuggled closer and linked her right arm with his left.

“The Telegraph Country Pub, on Telegraph Road,” Ryan told the cabbie.

“Yes, sir. The Telegraph it is. And just where else might The Telegraph Pub be, sir, if not in Telegraph Road? Have you ever wondered?”

The cabbie laughed as if he had just been anointed the best Christmas Pantomime Comic south of the Thames.

In the back seat, Ryan and Gillian gave each other an unvoiced *God have mercy* roll of their eyes and a shrug of their shoulders.

The Telegraph Country Pub is a lavishly refurbished pub set in the middle of Putney Heath, near Roehampton. The menu is a culinary adventure. The wines and beers are equal to the menu.

“What goes here? The Telegraph Country Pub? I thought we’d get something simple tonight,” Gillian said quietly as they stepped out of the cab. She didn’t want the cabbie to hear her.

“It’s not that fancy, you know. Remember, The Telegraph Country Pub is a *pub*. It isn’t Claridge’s five-star restaurant with Gordon Ramsay in the kitchen. But, neither is it Mike’s Fish & Chips in Paddington. I’m not apt tonight to take out my bride for either shepherd’s pie or for fish and chips,” Ryan said as he paid the cabbie.

“How long will I be your *bride*, Ryan? When do I become your *wife*?”

“Rich Dr. Graves, he has a new life, when can he call his bride his wife.” Ryan sang an improvised melody.

“It takes 12 months I hear,” Ryan replied with a chuckle. “The first year of marriage you’re a *bride*. After one year, the bride becomes a *wife*. By the way, new bride of mine, I have a marvelous conjugal idea; let’s eat, afterwards go home and then we can . . .

Gillian finished his sentence and whispered, “. . . Yes, we can, but only if you’re nice and behave like a gentleman at dinner,” She leaned her head against Ryan’s breast.

“That sounds like an offer I can’t refuse. Do I have to behave like a gentleman when we’re home?”

“Ryan, you’re hopeless. Yes, I believe you’re also handsome, desirable, smart, somewhat famous, and I love you very much. But still . . . you’re hopeless,” Gillian giggled.

A woman was standing farther back in the taxi rank. She was wearing a dark blue raincoat and watched Ryan and Gillian walk from their cab to The Telegraph Country Pub entry. She flicked a cigarette into the circle drive’s gravel.

Gillian's end-of-course student evaluations were excellent, as usual. There were of course some anonymous scatological comments about weekend marriages. She shared these with Ryan.

"See what you've done to my reputation?" she asked him.

"Yes, I see. I'm guilty and I regret nothing. I love you."

As soon as she turned in her students' marks and they had time to pack, Gillian and Ryan left for the States right away so that Ryan could complete his AASS research and then look for a temporary job until the fall when they'd return to Columbus. If they were fortunate, in the interim Gillian might find employment as well.

Present day . . .

After Ryan and Gillian landed at Boston's Logan International Airport they took a taxi to downtown Boston and checked in at the Copley Square Hotel, During the next couple of days Ryan made a few telephone calls to US colleagues inquiring about their possible interests in Ryan's developing symposia on several current linguistic interests,

Ryan received a return call from MIT.

“Hello Ryan; George Summerville here,” the voice on the other end said. “I hear you’ve been abroad and have brought home a wife.”

“George, it’s good to hear from you and yes, I’m a married man again, happily so I should add,” Ryan said, a smile sneaking into his voice. “What can I do for you, George? Or, rather, what can you do for me?”

“I need a one-semester faculty member, Ryan, replacing Professor Abdel Ryad who’ll be away on urgent family affairs,” George explained. “For someone of your stature, funding is no problem. I have an endowment sufficient to cover visiting distinguished professors. Even in these economic times MIT remains financially stable.”

“That sounds intriguing, George; what do you want me to teach?” Ryan asked.

“Teach them about your research, get them involved in it,” George replied. “Hell, Ryan, at this level students aren’t as interested in the courses they take as they are the professors they take, the professors they work with.”

George continued, “We’ll put a couple of place-holders in the schedule of courses, something like Pro-seminar A: Linguistics and Pro-seminar B: Linguistics, both with your name given as the instructor of record. You’ll have 6-7 doctoral students in your two courses, mainly those PhD students or their mentors who are already familiar with your scholarship.”

Meanwhile, Professor Abdel Ryad was at Logan International airport, waiting for stand-by space for the 8:44a flight to San Francisco. He had left for the airport directly from his spending the night in his Cambridge office. Consequently he had neither shaved nor changed clothes. He looked disheveled, but his urgency to get on the 8:44a flight was palpable, not requiring him to freshen up.

He checked and double-checked his carry-on bag; satisfying himself that the only identifiers were his passport and a copy of a highly technical speech he was, ostensibly, to deliver at Stanford.

Everyone with boarding passes walked through the jet way. Then, the man at the gate announced, “Pauls? Stand-by passenger Pauls?”

A young woman wearing worn jeans and an oversized tweed sweater approached the gate. She took her ticket from the ubiquitous book bag, showed her ticket and took the boarding pass from the agent.

The agent made a similar announcement, “Ryad? Stand-by passenger Ryad?”

Professor Ryad picked up his attaché case, walked to the agent and received his boarding pass. Ryad couldn’t hide his pleasure; he smiled to himself, knowing that Step #1 had been satisfactorily taken care of.

Jennifer Maley traveled to the US several years ago with two friends. All three had visited France and Sweden but were obsessed with seeing New York City.

As a security measure, all three had applied for and had received work permits from the US Immigration Service, everything completed on-line, months before they left London Heathrow for New York LaGuardia.

They had stayed at the Lattam Hotel in New York City, a low-scale hotel, but right off 5th Avenue, and a 10-minute walk to the Empire State Building, The Lattam has good travel connections, being near Penn Station, Grand Central Station and the city bus lines.

The girls did more walking, gawking, and talking than buying, but they were having a grand tour and a grander time; New York City didn't disappoint.

When their money ran out it was time either to get jobs or to return to the UK. Jennifer decided to remain in the States and took the bus to the Boston area instead returning to the UK. She had decided to redefine herself as a young American. Moreover,

someone had told her that Boston was a lot like London.

After she settled in a small, two-room apartment in Cambridge, she went to the Human Resources Office at MIT and, as fortune would have it, she was offered a position as a Secretary II in the Department of Economics. It was a low-paying position, but it was a steady job.

Her first morning in the Department of Economics was uneventful. She straightened and rearranged her desk several times, not knowing what tasks to prepare for. She had a copy of the department office and e-mail directory and was scanning through it when the office door opened.

“So, you’re the newbie in the department office?” It was David Thorson, a first year doctoral student from the Midwest.

“Yes, I suppose that would be me,” Jennifer replied, and with a smile she stood, extending her hand to his. “Hello, I’m Jennifer Maley.”

“Whoa! Is that British accent for real? It always makes the speaker sound so smart.”

Jennifer rolled her eyes. “You Yanks,” she said with a smile as she sat in her chair.

David looked in his department mailbox and seeing nothing there, he left with a wave and a “So long for now, Jennifer.” She waved in reply thinking how handsome he is.

At 4:55 that afternoon David returned. “Do you have time for a drink, or a cup of coffee, or a ‘welcome to Boston’ conversation with me?” he asked.

Jennifer cocked her head as if she were completing a mental inventory of her evening’s activities, knowing she had zero schedule conflicts.

“Sure, but just one, thanks,” she answered, looking at her wristwatch implying she had something on her agenda that evening.

Finding a corner or mid-street bar in Cambridge is not a big challenge. The only businesses in Cambridge more ever-present than bars are Starbucks and local coffee shops.

They chose a quiet looking bar and sat at a small, round black table. David ordered a merlot; Jennifer asked for a white zinfandel.

“Have another, please,” David asked as Jennifer drained her wine glass of its remnants. David waved to their server, holding up two fingers.

“I’m famished, David,” Jennifer said. “Could we get something to eat?”

“Sure. Have you had a Boston style lobster roll?”

“Not actually,” Jennifer replied, “but I’m thinking you’re about to change that gap in my eating history.” They both laughed, enjoying each other’s company, happy to be with someone friendly.

They finished their second drinks, and then went looking for a Cambridge diner featuring Boston style lobster rolls.

Life in Cambridge seemed to be turning into an America fantasy come true for Jennifer. David’s charms and attention were making her happy and somewhat off-balance.

She had taken a room at the Archstone Square apartment building in central Cambridge. David spent the night with her.

While Ryan was occupied with his reading, writing and teaching two seminars, Gillian had taken a part-time position in the School of Sciences helping to coordinate luncheons and brown bag presentations with both visiting scholars as well as resident faculty and graduate students.

Her staff appointment wasn't a challenging one for a London University College PhD in linguistics, but Gillian took pleasure getting out of the small apartment they had rented and mixing with smart people. Her schedule was usually only 3 or 4 days a week.

Ryan was sitting in their only recliner thumbing through the *Atlantic Monthly* when Gillian came through the door and provided her own announcement: "Whew! What a day this was!"

"What was on the menu today; fancy food or common grub? Shrimp bisque or salami on rye with a kosher dill?" Ryan asked.

"Whatever it was, we had more in attendance than on the RSVP list," Gillian moaned as she sat on the couch, removing her shoes and rubbing her calves. "People these days seem not to know what RSVP means."

“Who was the star attraction?” Ryan asked.

“All in-house faculty. Four new Fellows elected to the American Assembly of Arts and Sciences and two new Nobel Laureates,” Gillian replied.

“I see. Brains for lunch, huh?” Ryan asked.

“We drafted a secretary from Econ to help with the food service. Nice girl,” Gillian added, “a Brit.”

“Of course she’s a nice girl. Was she nice for being a Brit, or was she nice despite being British?” Ryan poked.

“Quit it Ryan. I felt sorry for her; Jennifer Something-or-other. She was eager to help with the luncheon; she seemed to enjoy the company. I think she’s lonely,” Gillian said, “her boyfriend is in California leaving her here in Cambridge in a small apartment and little money.”

“Stop by her office when it’s convenient,” Ryan offered.

“Since she’s your fellow Brit, I imagine she would love a Sunday leg of lamb, potatoes, carrots and conversation in RP English.”

“No, please think about that nice gesture Ryan, I have an alternative suggestion. Let’s take her out to dinner. I’m guessing that eating in a nice restaurant isn’t enjoying a high roost on her budget.”

“Eating at a more elite trough is an even better idea,” Ryan said. “Gillian, you’re a genius.”

“Not really, dear,” Gillian corrected him, “you ought to know by now I don’t fancy cooking meals for you and me, and certainly not for guests. Moreover, we’ll let the restaurant staff do the clean-up and I’ll enjoy watching them do it.”

“Yes, I’m sure you will. Your domesticity has its perfectly set parameters.”

“Only in the kitchen, mind you,” Gillian said, with a suggestive upturn of her eyebrows. “Only in the kitchen.”

Ryan and Gillian drove their rental car to Jennifer's apartment building, and then drove back to Cambridge Street and the Court House Seafood Restaurant. Gillian and Jennifer shared stories about their adjustments to living in the US: the sorry state of US television, their fears of irradiated food, and why Americans drive on the wrong side of the road.

They arrived at the restaurant, gave their server their menu choices. They asked for two starters, which they shared, and all three ordered seafood platters. Ryan drank two bottles of Yorkshire Bitters ale. The women were not as ethnically focused as Ryan and asked for tea.

When they finished their after-dinner coffee and teas the three of them left the restaurant. The women remained standing in front of the restaurant, holding hands, waiting for Ryan to bring the car around and pick them up.

"I am so grateful to the both of you," Jennifer said. "It's been ever so much fun spending time with friendly and kindred souls. And, I'm as stuffed as the Cratchitt family's Christmas goose!"

"Our pleasure," Ryan said.

“We’ll do this again,” Gillian added. “And, since I know where you’re officed, I can drop by and we’ll have afternoon tea.”

Ryan drove through the traffic and stopped the car as close as possible to the curb in front of the Archstone Square apartment building. Jennifer got out of the car and walked happily to the entrance of the apartment building, and then she turned for a final farewell wave.

The Graves returned her wave and drove away.

“You did a good thing tonight, Mrs. Graves,” Ryan said. “You reminded a young woman how nice it is to laugh and have fun.”

“And, I should add,” Gillian said, “she remembered how to enjoy scrumbloodyumptious seafood.”

“Yes, that too.”

The next day Ryan lingered over his morning coffee, rereading a letter he’d left on the table from his former in-laws, the Kennedys.

“The Kennedys are still family to me, you know,” Ryan said to Gillian.

“From everything you’ve told me, they’re the salt of the earth,” Gillian replied. “When we return to Columbus we’ll pay them a visit. They’ve certainly suffered, as have you, because of the behavior of their daughter, your ex- wife.”

“I can’t disagree with anything you’ve said,” Ryan answered. “I just hope she’s is getting the professional help she needs. She’s not a bad person; she’s a good person with serious issues.”

As if on cue, the telephone rang as Ryan was finishing his sentence.

“7485,” Gillian answered, using the last four digits of their telephone number, a British speech convention hard for her to break in the US.

“Yes, surely I can,” Gillian was saying. “11:00 a.m., sharp.”

“I’m working today,” she announced. “Econ is hosting a luncheon for a couple of representatives of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund and, oddly enough, Jennifer didn’t show this morning.”

“That is strange,” Ryan said. “She’s a bit flighty, but she’s young. I thought responsible, too.”

Gillian busied herself getting dressed for her trip to campus

to help with the luncheon; Ryan folded the Kennedy's letter and put it under his coffee cup for later reference.

“I'm off to the library this morning,” Ryan explained. “I should be home by 2:00 or 2:30.”

“Fine, dear. I'll see you later in the day.” Gillian kissed Ryan and he patted her backside. “I love you, Gillian.”

“Call me ‘the lucky Dame Gillian Davies.’ I'm lucky because you love me. By the by, think about something for dinner, okay?”

Ryan was later returning to the apartment than he'd estimated; the automobiles throughout the Boston area scurry about bumper to bumper like nervous bunnies trying to escape from a Byzantine rabbit warren.

He parked the car in their building's underground parking garage and took the elevator to their floor. He looked at his watch: 5:00. Damn traffic, he muttered as he put down his attaché case beside his desk.

Ryan thought as he walked to the liquor cabinet in the kitchen: not only is it 5:00 o'clock somewhere, as thirsty drinkers say, it's 5:00 o'clock right here where I'm standing.

He reached up to the liquor shelf and took down an unopened bottle of Johnny Walker Blue, a scotch he'd bought to celebrate something. Why did I buy this, he asked himself? What was the celebration? My sabbatical? My marriage to Gillian? My temporary position at MIT? Ryan wasn't sure what he was celebrating, but he'd do it in style.

He poured four fingers of scotch into the glass, and then dropped his habitual five ice cubes into it. Never four, never six.

Ryan put a CD in the player. It was a Woody Herman reunion concert, recorded live, complete with all-star sidemen like Flip Phillips, Jimmy Giuffre, Al Cohn, trombonist Phil Wilson, Zoot Simms, the Condoli brothers, Stan Getz, and vocalist Mary Ann McCall.

He went to the recliner and sat. The music made him teary.

What a group, he thought, what a group, assembled on *one* stage at the *same time*.

Ellington, Basie and Kenton had identity issues along the various routes their music took them. Not Herman. Not Woody Herman. His Thundering Herds maintained their drive and focus for 40 years! An astonishing musical achievement!

He closed his eyes, swirling a sip of scotch around his mouth.

He leaned his head back. He was thinking of the high school band he sang with. He remembered singing with Sine Nomine; it was the high point of his high school days. Without opening his eyes, he lifted his glass to his lips and let the scotch flow into his mouth.

“Ryan, are you awake?” Gillian asked as she entered the

apartment. “You haven’t drunk yourself stupid, have you?”

“No, just resting my eyes in a jazz fan’s paradise,” he replied snapping his fingers in tempo with his rhyme.

“My Garden of Eden is listening to Woody Herman arrangements, drinking Johnny Walker Blue scotch, and seeing the love of my life enter the room. Care to join me?”

“Brilliant! Yes, I will. Make mine a double, fast and please.”

“A double? Rough day, I take it?” Ryan asked as he rose from his chair to go fix Gillian’s drink.

“I should say so. Jennifer’s in hospital; the acute care floor.”

“What? What are you saying?” Ryan asked, handing Gillian her scotch. She took a large unladylike swallow, not a sip, from the glass.

“The office manager in Economics became more and more worried today,” Gillian started to explain, “when Jennifer didn’t come to work or call in sick.”

“So? What did she do?”

“She went to Jennifer’s flat. She heard a noise, likely a television she thought, so she got the building super to open the door. She knew, intuitively, she said, something was wrong.”

“And . . .? When the building superintendent opened the door to her apartment . . . ?

“They found Jennifer, savagely beaten up and all-over bloody,” Gillian replied. “Now she’s at Mount Auburn Hospital, struggling to hang on to her life.”

“What happened? Do they have any ideas?”

“Apparently the apartment was a scrambled mess.” Gillian said. “Books strewn all over the place; kitchen cabinets standing open; clothes all over the bedroom floor; even the door on the fridge was left open.”

“Sounds like a burglary, or at least an attempted one,” Ryan observed. “Why would anyone beat up on someone like Jennifer?”

“Think, Ryan,” Gillian said, taking another swig from her glass. “Jennifer’s beaten, horribly beaten; her apartment is a wreck; someone, somebody, or somebody’s maybe, were looking for something they obviously thought Jennifer had in her possession.”

“Should we go to the hospital to see her?”

“Of course we should. Yes. She’s a Brit, a lonely and seriously wounded Brit. I have to do what I can to help.” Gillian said. “I suppose you Yanks would call it a *sister* thing.”

“Understood. And, I agree; we need to be with her, especially you. You are a trooper, Gillian. Will the Queen and all of the other Royals pardon me for bringing you to the States turning you into an expatriate?”

Let’s go,” she said, rolling her eyes, “it isn’t all that far to Mount Auburn but we’ll not get there by standing here. Mind the traffic, as well.”

Ryan pushed open the left half of the double door leading to the acute floor of Mount Auburn Hospital. Gillian walked through the door, Ryan stepping in close behind her. Her took her hand.

“Jennifer Maley?” Gillian asked the attending nurse in her most pronounced British English accent. Then she added, “We’re family, you know.”

“Gillian, “Ryan whispered, “what in God’s name are you doing? Jennifer is a white European girl and the content of your blood is at least 50% Nigerian! This doesn’t take into account the color of your skin or the nap in your hair! How can we possibly pose as Jennifer’s ‘family?’”

Gillian whispered back, “You Yanks are always impressed with British accents; it’s a part of your linguistic inferiority complex. Not to worry, the nurse won’t challenge us. I have a proper accent.”

As if to confirm Gillian’s observations, the nurse didn’t question the use of *family* and motioned toward a small room, “Over there. Follow me. Five minutes, no more please.”

The nurse pulled away the privacy curtain screening a view of Jennifer’s room from the outer reception area. There was Jennifer.

Rather, the body in the bed appeared to be Jennifer.

Jennifer's immobilized head was covered with bandages; there was a ventilator tube down her throat helping her inhale and exhale. She had IV's in both arms. The IV infusers were humming. Her left leg had been splinted and was in traction.

"My God, Ryan, what has happened to the poor dear?"

Gillian asked.

"She was obviously in the wrong place at the worst possible time," Ryan answered. "At least in her comatose condition she isn't feeling much pain."

"It was her own apartment, Ryan. How can one's living space --- usually a reliably safe haven --- be a *wrong* place?"

"Gillian, the person or persons who did this to Jennifer don't recognize common social values. For whatever reason, they burst into Jennifer's apartment and they did this to her. It's demonic."

The nurse appeared at the door. "I'm sorry folks, but you'll need to leave now."

"When will the physicians bring her out of the coma?" Ryan asked.

"I suspect they'll end the coma," the nurse answered, "when

it's clear to them that she can manage her breathing on her own.”

“How long will that be?” Gillian asked.

“Miss, I don't know; that's the doctors' decision.”

“Well, thank you, nurse; thank you very much, indeed,”

Gillian said, smiling at the nurse. “We'll be going now.”

Gillian took Ryan's left hand as he steered them toward the exit through the double door. On the outer side of the door Gillian stopped and hugged Ryan.

“Ryan, this makes me so sad.”

“I know dear,” Ryan said, trying to console his wife. “What makes Jennifer's attack so awful, so terrible, is our suspicion that it was not a *random act of violence*.”

“But who, Ryan? And why? Why poor Jennifer?” Gillian asked, tears rolling down her cheeks.

“I'm sure those questions will have to wait for replies, “Ryan answered, “until Jennifer regains consciousness and she can talk to the police.”

Abdel Ryad and David Thorson were having a drink in the Elephant Bar Restaurant near the San Francisco airport.

“Where the hell’s Li?” Ryad asked to no one in particular.

Thorson looked over Ryad’s shoulder at the steady stream of automobile traffic coming from and going to San Francisco International airport.

“Maybe his flight was delayed,” Thorson said, offering a weak and predictable reply.

“That’s always a possibility,” Ryad yawned. “Nothing new about that, David.” Ryad was getting edgy. “He and Njakatu were due an hour ago.”

Thorson looked at the watch on his wrist. “I’m calling Jennifer,” he commented to Ryad. “I haven’t talked to her for two days; I don’t want her to worry about my whereabouts.”

“Just don’t tell her too much.”

“Don’t tell me what to do or how to behave Ryad; you’re neither my father nor my boss, you know,” Thorson said. “I can handle myself.”

He slid off the bar stool and sat at a table by himself where he’d have more privacy.

Ryad caught the eye of the bartender: “Another orange juice and seltzer.”

Thorson returned to his bar stool. “Well?” Ryad asked.

“No answer. Strange, no answer. She never works on Saturdays; department offices are closed. Maybe she’s out shopping,” Thorson said with a chuckle. “Not buying, just shopping. We don’t have much money, yet that is.”

“You’re already spending money on a promise?” Ryad asked. “A person can go penniless fast with that kind of budget. Don’t spend dollars when you’re only earning dimes”

“Let me remind you I’m cautious,” Thorson said. “I assume that’s why you invited me to go in with the three of you. From the small amount I know about this job, you need someone like me who never lets anyone see him sweat.”

Like most hospitals, Mount Auburn's exterior looks organized and serene; cars and SUV's are parked in an orderly manner in the adjoining lots, the foot traffic is ordered and purposeful.

However, inside the hospital the activity is more hectic.

A pregnant teenager, a baby having a baby, might be on an ER exam table with contractions three months premature. A custodian could be cleaning up the puked mess created by a first year student who was downing tequila shots faster than his system could assimilate them.

In acute care, Sara Williams, a new RN, was swabbing Jennifer Maley's forehead with a damp cloth. The infusers were still humming. All of the tubes were still in their correct positions.

There aren't many 15- to 20-year veteran nurses in acute. Patients in acute are in seriously bad circumstances. The pressures to preserve life are intense. People die in acute. Only the younger nurses can handle the non-stop intense pressures because they have had little experience in acute. Their lack of experience results in minimally troubled happiness. They have no idea.

As she was swabbing Jennifer's forehead, she spoke to her patient.

"Come on you little scamp," Sara said to the body in the bed. "Don't give up. Hang in there, kid. Let's find the bastards who did this to you. Public castration of these assholes wouldn't be severe enough to satisfy me."

Hearing the rustle of the privacy drape, Sara turned and saw Ryan and Gillian entering the room.

She extended her hand toward Gillian. "I'm Sara Williams."

Gillian took her hand, "We're the Graves, Ryan and Gillian."

"Hi folks; how are you two today?" Sara asked them.

"Hello Sara Williams. We're doing fine, thank you," Gillian replied.

"How's the patient today?" Ryan asked.

"Stable," Sara said in a short, one-word reply. "That's the good news, I guess. The bad report is that whoever beat up Jennifer to within an inch of her life is still walking around out there somewhere, probably without so much as a headache or a hangnail."

Ryan put his left arm around Gillian's shoulder. "Sara," he said, "we admire your training and talents and we appreciate

everything you're doing to make Jennifer comfortable.”

Sara smiled at Ryan and Gillian and then left the room.

“Gill, when we first met in Philadelphia did you ever think we'd be caring for a young woman we barely know, standing in a hospital in Cambridge, Massachusetts, puzzled by what motivates one human being to bring such pain and anguish on another?” Ryan asked.

“Back then in Philadelphia I was pretty green,” Gillian answered with a hint of a smile. “I had no idea at all. Sure, I knew you were a big shot in linguistics, but I didn't know how bollixed up your personal life was. Of course, I didn't imagine you and I would be *something* or *anything* after our casual meeting in Philadelphia.”

“Aren't you happy you carried your tea cup heater in your luggage?” Ryan asked. “If not for that cup of tea after what passed as our dinner, our relationship would have ended too soon.”

“The best idea I've had since finishing my PhD was to invite you to Wandsworth University,” Gillian said. “I'm rather proud of that accomplishment, and how it helped boost our department's productivity, and funding I should add.”

“Well, my best idea since you received your PhD was to ask

you to marry me,” Ryan said with a broad smile. “I hope you’re as happy as I am.”

“Probably more, but let’s not debate . . .“

There was another rustle of the privacy drape created by two men in white lab coats, most likely physicians.

The physicians looked very young to Ryan. I wonder, Ryan thought to himself, if they’re old enough to have hair on their legs.

“Folks, if you’ll excuse us please, we’re ready for Jennifer to wake up,” the younger White Lab Coat said to Ryan and Gillian.

“Have a seat in the waiting area if you like.”

The other physician was focused on the patient, rubbing the port on Jennifer’s IV tube with an alcohol prep, sanitizing the site for an injection.

Ryan and Gillian went to the cafeteria for coffee. They sat at one end of one of the long dining room tables, sipping what they both agreed was a bitter vetch masquerading as coffee.

“Within a one-hour drive in any direction from where we’re sitting,” Ryan said, “we can find some of the smartest, brightest, most intelligent people in the US. And this is the coffee we get? I can’t really say I *dislike* it; I genuinely *hate* it.”

“Ryan, please stop grouching,” Gillian chided him. “Not many people, except for my wonderful husband of course, come to Mount Auburn Hospital looking for Ethiopia’s finest blend.”

Ryan smiled back at Gillian, giving her a ‘What the hell, what did you expect from me?’ shrug of his shoulders.

Before he or Gillian could say another word, Sara bounced through the door. “Her eyes are open,” she almost shouted.

Sara turned around to return upstairs to her station; Ryan and Gillian stood immediately, smiled happily, then they hugged each other. They hustled to follow Sara back to Jennifer’s room.

Sara was standing beside the door to Jennifer’s room, looking like an anxious usher waiting to greet Ryan and Gillian. Looking into the room, Gillian saw Jennifer in the bed; Ryan was peering over Gillian’s shoulder.

Jennifer lifted her right arm and gave them a wooden side-to-side wave.

Gillian rushed to Jennifer and, dodging the vital sign monitors, embraced her gently. Ryan noticed that Jennifer was no longer intubated; the ventilator had been replaced by a tracheotomy.

“Oh Jennifer, this is wonderful” Gillian exclaimed,

”welcome back!”

“She can’t talk, Gill,” Ryan explained. “Look, she’s had a tracheotomy.”

“That’s all right,” Gillian replied, “we’ll have lots of time to talk, later. Jennifer, do you know who did this to you? Do you know what they were after?”

Jennifer gave a hesitant nod up and down.

“Look Ryan,” Gillian said excitedly, “she knows something!”

“I’ll bet she does,” Ryan said, “when something like this happens to a person, I’d expect them to know about the beating they took. Or, like, who did it, possibly. Or, maybe even why.”

Sara stepped forward. “Mr. and Mrs. Graves, I think it’ll be best if you let Jennifer rest a while. You can come back for a visit this evening.”

“Of course. Sure.” They spoke in unison, then one patted Jennifer on her elbow and the other patted her shoulder. “We’ll see you later,” Gillian told Jennifer.

Ryan and Gillian were tired and didn’t talk much during their drive home. Both of them were thinking about a nap and rest of their

own, Gillian stretched her arms over her head.

“Ryan, I’ll not speak for you, but I intend to have a quick nap before we return to hospital to see Jennifer.”

“As usual, Professor Davies, your grasp of the moment is faultless,” Ryan answered. “Count me in for a nap, too. Besides, the best feature of naps is that they’re free.”

When they arrived at their apartment they both lay across the bed without turning down the covers.

“ Brilliant,” Gillian replied, “I know you need a little sleep. What time do you want me to . . .”?

Before she could finish her sentence she heard Ryan inhaling in the deeply satisfying breaths he took when he slept. She touched his right cheek with the tips of the fingers on her left hand and smiled at her husband.

The Elephant Bar Restaurant near San Francisco

International airport has enjoyed profitable traffic ever since it opened. It's a convenient watering hole for a quick drink before a departure or a similarly quick drink after an arrival.

Ryad and Thorson were still in the bar, but they had moved to a table for four, anticipating that Li and Njakatu would eventually show up, already later than sooner.

Nervously stirring his orange juice and seltzer with a plastic swizzle stick shaped like a tusk of ivory, Ryad looked up and saw the two late arrivals.

When Ryad stood, Thorson did the same and turned his eyes in order to match Ryad's focus.

"Mr. Li, Mr. Njakatu, welcome, welcome," Ryad said, a little too effusively for Thorson.

Extending his hand first to Li, then to Njakatu, Thorson introduced himself: "Good afternoon, I'm David Thorson."

Li gave Thorson a small but serviceable nod of his head; Njakatu waived to a server as he plopped down in his chair.

When the server came Njakatu asked for a Carona beer, a

very cold Carona to be exact. Li asked for a plain seltzer with lime.

“We’re late, I know; we were detained in Ann Arbor,” Li explained, “but I think everything is in place.”

He continued, “We haven’t heard from the Boston team, and that concerns me. They had a simple assignment, a practice or a rehearsal, if you prefer. I will be extremely agitated, to put it mildly, if they’ve screwed up this little assignment.”

“We’ve heard nothing from them, either.” Ryad added.

“What’s going in Ann Arbor and Boston?” Thorson asked. “And how am I involved with whatever it is you’re putting, as you say Mr. Li, ‘in place?’”

“Mr. Thorson, we selected you because, first of all, you’re a bright young man,” Li replied. “You’re also a young Mr. Everyman from Altoona, Iowa, as it turns out. You’re a graduate of Simpson College, an excellent college. Got your Masters Degree at the University of Iowa, another quality school. But you’re also very vanilla; you’re an average-looking graduate student. You’re not excitable. You’re not likely to draw attention to yourself unless you do something stupid or careless.”

“Thanks for the confidence booster,” Thorson said

sarcastically, “but what is it I’ll actually do?”

“You’ll be prepared and trained at the appropriate time,” Njakatu said. “What I can tell you now is this: Indirectly you’ll be helping the Chinese government as it invests in many of the African nations north of the Union of South Africa. You’re going to be one of the instrumental people in the largest, how shall I say it, *acquisition* and *application* of research and development data that will make China the overwhelming economic and military power on earth. China will be the tipping point for everything that matters to the rest of the world.”

“African people will have a louder and more powerful voice on the world stage,” Njakatu continued. “The US and the UK will look back some day and wonder why their international positions of leadership, actually domination in some cases, were diminished and how and why it happened so fast.”

“Sounds like science fiction to me,” Thorson replied, “tell me, please,” he said to both Li and Njakatu, “how you propose to pull this off?”

“As it has already been explained to you, Mr. Thorson,” Li said with a hint of condescension, “in due time, all in due time.”

“All right, all right,” Thorson said defensively, “I just don’t see what’s in this China and Africa business for me. I have another life, you know.”

Ryad joined the conversation. “I don’t want to press the matter farther than you two want, but there’s money involved. Isn’t there, Li? Good money you told me.”

Ryad looked at Thorson to make sure his comment was understood.

“For the moment,” Li said, “I can confirm your statement Dr. Ryad. You, Thorson, and the others will be paid; and, I want to emphasize, you’ll be paid fairly. However, even after paying you and others like you in the US, in the long run China be saving and making money.”

Li continued, “If we waited until the data were published, securing the rights could cost us millions. Getting the research results from doctoral dissertations immediately will be infinitely cheaper. Instead of millions for the thoughts in the dissertations, we’ll be paying, metaphorically, pennies.”

Ryad looked at Thorson. Their eyes made contact and Ryad nodded affirmatively. Thorson shrugged his shoulders as if to say, so

what more can I say or do?

Ryan and Gillian were deciding where they might have Friday night dinner. “How about Mexican?” Gillian asked, “we haven’t had Mexican in ages.”

“Fine with me,” Ryan said. “Does Boca Grande sound good? We’ve been there before but it was weeks ago.”

“It sounds exactly what I’m hungry for,” Gillian answered. “As I remember their margaritas and puerco tamales are excellent. Let’s leave now and stop by the hospital to check in with Jennifer.”

The drive to Mount Auburn took more time than they had anticipated; traffic in Cambridge is usually bumper-to-bumper. It’s only worse over the weekend.

Ryan let Gillian out at the main entrance to the hospital. She would wait for him inside the hospital while he parked the car.

“Parking lot full?” Gillian asked as Ryan came in the main entrance.

“Actually, no,” Ryan answered, as they stepped into an elevator. “It was the traffic. Most people seem to be going somewhere other than a hospital on Friday night.”

They arrived at Jennifer's floor, left the elevator, and walked to her room.

"Well, well," Gillian said loudly while she clapped her hands once, "Look who's sitting up eating a fancy Friday night dinner."

Jennifer looked up from her Jell-O, yoghurt, and hot tea.

"Gillian, you're the word nerd," Jennifer groaned. "If you want to name this pallid mess on my plate a 'fancy Friday night dinner,' you go right ahead . . . but, you'll do so without my approval or cooperation." Both Gillian and Jennifer giggled.

Jennifer pushed the nurse's call button and the remains of her dinner were taken away.

"How did it go today?" Ryan asked.

"I'm feeling better," Jennifer answered, "a whole lot better, indeed."

"Brilliant! Have you been able to remember anything from the night you were assaulted?" Gillian asked.

"Yes, I'm glad you asked," Jennifer said. "After I left the two of you and went up to my flat, two men came out of nowhere and followed me inside. One held my hands behind my back while the other one slapped me and said something like 'Where's the data?'"

Where's the research?'

"I had no notion which data or research they were talking about," Jennifer said. "The guy in front started yelling at me, punching me all over with his fists; the guy behind me let my hands go free, then he hit me on my head with something hard. They both kicked me when I was on the floor."

"Good lord," Ryan said with disgust. "What did they look like?"

Jennifer answered in a slow, measured voice: "Two men . . . black pants . . . dark shirts . . . nylon stockings over their heads."

"Did they say anything, other than *research* and *data*, that you can remember?" Ryan asked.

"They did, in fact. I can remember their saying something about David, my boyfriend . . . David Thorson," Jennifer said. "I'm pretty tired now," she said weakly.

"Of course you are, poor thing," Gillian said as she bent down to kiss Jennifer on the cheek.

"We've stayed too long," Ryan said, taking Gillian's right arm and steering her toward the door.

Gillian and Ryan spoke in unison: "Ta ta, Jennifer. Yes, and

bye for now,” They were walking toward the elevators when one of Jennifer’s physicians came out of an exam room.

“Hello, doctor,” Ryan said, extending his left arm for a handshake, “I’m Ryan Graves; you remember my wife Gillian?”

“Of course I remember you both,” the doctor replied. “You’re Jennifer’s ‘family,’ right?” he said with a wink and a knowing smirk.

“Uh, yes, uh, sort of,” Gillian said in carefully measured words.

“You aren’t required by me to say more,” the physician said, still smiling. “It’s been important for the two of you to be here supporting Jennifer throughout what must be one of the most difficult periods in her young life. You’ve been a big part of her healing process actually.”

Gillian hugged the young physician while Ryan was shaking his hand.

“Thank you, doctor,” Ryan said. The physician smiled at both of them, then turned and resumed his walk to another room. Ryan and Gillian walked toward the exit.

“Still hungry for Mexican at Boca Grande?” Ryan asked

Gillian.

“Ask me again after my second margarita,” Gillian laughed.

“Or maybe my third.”

10

“Good morning, Gillian; coffee’s ready,” Ryan called through their bedroom door.

“What?” Gillian, asked, peeking her head from under the covers. Her hair was tousled and her eyes were squinted.

“The coffee, sweetheart. It’s ready,” Ryan said. “Last night you asked me to call you as soon as I made the coffee.”

“I did? Silly moi,” Gillian said. She sat up, on the side of the bed. “What in the world possessed me to ask you to do that?” she asked rhetorically, shaking her head from side to side.

“Do you have anything on your agenda this morning?” she said, gaining her focus.

“No I don’t. It’s Sunday, Gillian, remember?” Ryan answered. “Since this is Sunday, I’m ready for a day with no *To Do’s* to do on my *To Do* list.

“Ah, yes, it is Sunday. Hmmm. Well, in that case, how would you like to come back to bed for a while?” Gillian asked as she patted Ryan’s pillow.

“LetmethinkaboutitOkayI’dlikethat,” Ryan answered as fast

as he could form the words, following them with a mock villain's laugh. "Yeh, heh, heh, heh, heh!"

"That was a remarkably short thinking time," Gillian said, the left corner of her mouth uplifted in a suggestive smile.

"Some invitations are so attractive they don't require a whole lot of consideration," Ryan said, grinning at Gillian as he stepped out of his slippers.

He took off his robe and pajamas, put them in a bedside chair, and then eased into the bed beside Gillian.

"What about brunch somewhere?" Ryan asked later.

"Excellent idea," Gillian said, as she took the last sip of morning coffee. "Any place special in mind?"

"I've heard Ryles Jazz Club has a Sunday jazz brunch that's first rate," Ryan replied. "Like to try it?"

"Sure. Sounds good to me," Gillian answered. "Give me 45 minutes to ready myself. Okay?"

The word of mouth endorsements Ryan had heard on campus about Ryles' Sunday brunch proved to be understated.

"These are the best Eggs Benedict I think I've ever eaten,"

Gillian said,” the asparagus garnish makes me want more sautéed asparagus. And this hollandaise! It’s unique, heaven-sent.”

“I’m glad you’re enjoying everything,” Ryan said, “this place is certainly matching the reports I’ve heard in the department. I’ve had lots of practice tasting Bloody Marys, but this one is the best I’ve ever had.”

“Maybe we should make today’s routine our usual practice every Sunday,” Gillian said with an impish smile.

“Lady, you won’t get a dissenting vote from me,” Ryan said with a wide grin. He reached across the table to squeeze Gillian’s hand.

“I love you, Gill,” Ryan said softly.

“And, I love you, too, Ryan,” Gillian replied. “Would it ruin the moment if I asked about the remainder of the day?”

“Of course not,” Ryan said, “and I’ll wager I know what you’re about to suggest.”

“Okay, Professor Smarty-pants,” Gillian said, very business like, “let’s see how good your psychic powers are working today; go ahead and tell me what I’m thinking?”

“You’re thinking when we leave Ryles we should drop by

Mount Auburn Hospital,” Ryan replied, “and see how Jennifer’s doing.”

“I yield! I yield,” Gillian laughed, “that’s exactly where my mind is. Score one for America’s most distinguished linguistics professor.”

Professor Abdel Ryad had immigrated with his parents to the US when he was 10 years old. He was raised in a home that valued schooling and regarded education as a means of upward social mobility. He was a studious child who excelled in the academic world.

He received a full-ride Curators Scholarship to the state university, graduating with a Bachelors Degree and all A's on his grade transcript. He received his Masters Degree at age 21, and his PhD when he was 25 years old. He was a *wunderkind* at 25 with a national presence, given the research presented in his doctoral dissertation.

Professor Ryad had a big problem, though: he needed money.

His appointment at MIT carried with it an annual salary most academicians would be more than happy to receive. But, Ryad sent half of his monthly salary to the mid-east to his uncles, aunts and cousins in order to support their eventual immigration to the US.

His virtuous generosity to his extended family not only left him living at a lower comfort level than his colleagues, it also, made

him easy prey for Li and Njakatu to lure him into their enterprise.

They offered him money and he accepted their proposal.

Ryad was at the San Francisco Airport Marriot to work out the details.

The secretary Ryad shared with two other faculty members had made his flight reservations and had booked rooms for him and Thorson at the SFO Marriot hotel. The Marriot is a mile from SFO, making it a convenient place for him and David Thorson to meet with Li and Njakatu.

The four of them were seated around a small table in room 611 in the hotel drinking coffee ordered from the Marriot's room service.

"I assume before I leave here today I'll understand why I'm here, what you think I can do for you, and how much you're going to pay me." David said.

"Yes, Mr. Thorson, we will explain to you everything you'll need to know in order to be successful," Li explained.

"So?" Thorson asked. "Which one of you goes first?"

"It's my money," Li answered, "I'll go first."

He continued. "Mr. Thorson, there are numerous

entrepreneurs in China who are interested in Africa and its growth.

We are interested in helping Africa develop infrastructure:

geopolitically, socio-economically, militarily, its transportation needs. . . you name it.”

“With the exception of South Africa,” Li continued to explain, “which has fewer needs for foreign assistance, the continent is a potential gold mine for entrepreneurs . . . more entrepreneurs will come from China if our project is successful.”

“Why China? Why Africa?” Ryad asked. “What’s the relationship?”

“You academics,” Njakatu answered with frown, “you can’t see beyond what you’ve written on the screens of your computers.”

“The western world, especially the US, sends missionaries, politicians, or corporate big-wigs who want African nations to be just like the US,” Njakatu went on. “African nations are expected to adopt US culture, religion, cars, political structures, and, most important of all, African countries be a democracy shaped in the image of the US.”

“The US wants our oil, ores, precious metals and our food-producing farms,” Njakatu explained, “but they don’t help us with

the infrastructure we need. “Instead of helping us build roads and railways, for example, what we hear from the US comes in the forms of glorious and rotarian speeches about our democratic destiny.”

“Who has signed the most lucrative contracts with African nations like Nigeria, the Sudan, and Angola?” Li asked rhetorically.

“The Chinese. Why are there so many Chinese restaurants throughout Africa? Because already there are so many resident Chinese families.”

“The creation of a few new railway systems by the Chinese,” Njakatu explained, “has given China greater access to African oil, and it has enabled China to sign contracts with mining companies as well as the larger agribusiness firms.”

“Like the people in the US,” Li added, “we Chinese also need food, oil, copper, iron ore, and the like, but we’re doing more than preaching in high-minded voices to the Africans. China has become a *financial partner* with Africa; the US, for the most part, has remained self-aggrandizing and superior to Africa if not downright haughty, trying to rebuke African people to imitate the US model. The US is very good at issuing moral prohibitions but not so good at creating contracts that make African businesses their

partners.”

“Fine and dandy,” Thorson said, “but where and how do Prof. Ryad and I fit into this picture? We have zero influence with US policy makers.”

“You don’t need access to them,” Li answered, “and neither do we,” he said, looking at Njakatu.

Njakatu nodded his head up and down. “Your so-called ‘policy makers’ strike us as self-serving toadies who are more interested in raising campaign funds and establishing a voting record pandering to voters who will re-elect them. They don’t care that much about public policy.”

“I find your assessment very cynical,” Ryad said.

“Oh, is that so?” Li asked.

“Tell us, please,” Njakatu said, “where Mr. Li’s evaluation fails?”

“What I want to know . . .” Thorson began.

“ . . . Yes, I think we know what you want to know Mr. Thorson,” Li interrupted.

“It’s simple, Thorson,” Njakatu said. “We need to broaden our R & D foundation, our research and development base, and

that's what will drive the Africa-China national developments. Our agenda is to have access to the thoughts of doctoral students at major research universities, for pennies on the comparative cost scale. Pennies for their thoughts, you might say."

"I don't get it," Ryad said. "How do you expect this plan to work? Surely, David and I can't be expected to know what kinds of data you're looking for

"At every graduation," Li answered, "PhD recipients are listed alphabetically in the printed program distributed at commencement ceremonies. The title of their PhD dissertation research and the name of their adviser follows the name of the recipient."

"All you do is e-mail to us the titles of dissertations from chemistry, chemical engineering, agriculture, mining engineering and some other departments. We'll give you a list of the appropriate academic departments. That's all you need to do. Our own computer team can access the data since almost all post-graduate theses and dissertation are posted on the Internet.

"We have teams on 11 campuses," Njakatu added. "MIT, Harvard, Columbia, Stanford, Pennsylvania, Duke, UC-Berkeley,

Michigan, Princeton, Yale, and USC. We have a faculty member and a graduate student on each team. We'll have access to research reports from various disciplines; when we synthesize these findings with our own research, Africa and China will be months ahead of the west. We'll get an edge by having access to important data that won't be available in the US. China and Africa will be in the driver's seat; we'll set the international agendas."

"You want us to steal intellectual property?" Ryad asked derisively.

"No. Not at all. Think about it another way," Li replied. "You're helping the novice researchers in the US disseminate their findings before they're published in a journal or in a monograph. We're simply using data before they're published in a traditional journal."

"I can't be a party to this," Thorson said. "First, you're stealing intellectual property and then I suspect you're damaging the data in the original dissertation."

"Mr. Thorson," Njakatu replied, "you make \$12,000 a year as a research assistant in Economics; we'll pay you \$20,000 a year to be a 'research assistant' for us. Ryad your \$20,000 is similar to a

stipend you'd receive if you were named a Curators Professor.”

David and Professor Ryad looked at each other. They didn't smile but their arched eyebrows and pursed lips indicated their interest in the money.

They needed the money and cursed themselves because of what they had to do to earn it; they were, consequently, resigned to an indisputable fact: they'd been bought.

David Thorson was consumed with one thought: how can I get out of this?

David Thorson and Professor Abdel Ryad parted ways at SFO because they were leaving from different gates on separate flights to Boston's Logan International Airport.

Ryad was looking forward to arriving at his one-bedroom apartment and his own teapot.

Thorson was eager to see Jennifer, having had no luck in reaching her on his cell phone.

Ryad took a taxi from BOS to his apartment in Cambridge. A taxi was pricier than a bus, but the taxi afforded him more privacy. He didn't want to see or to talk with anyone; he had just put a price on his academic integrity and was ashamed to have sold it, and to have sold it so cheaply.

Thorson rode the airport shuttle to Whitman House B & B, the hotel closest to Jennifer's apartment building. The walk to her Archstone Square apartment was less than a mile; Thorson had an easy walk, having packed only a Cabella's carry-on bag for his trip to San Francisco.

He used his key to open the door to Jennifer's apartment. When Thorson saw everything in disarray he dropped his carry-on;

his mouth opened in disbelief.

When he saw the dried blood on the floor, tears came to his eyes.

Thorson stood in the doorway, paralyzed.

“What the hell . . . ?” he asked himself.

He stepped around the clutter on the floor and sat on the couch. He reached into the pocket of his jacket and entered the number for the Department of Economics.

“Yes, and good afternoon to you, too,” he replied. “This is David Thorson . . . “

The receptionist interrupted him.

“I’m well thank you; I’m flattered you’d remember me. I’ve tried calling Jennifer Maley and I can’t . . .

The receptionist interrupted him for the second time and told him about Jennifer and told him she was at Mount Auburn Hospital.

Thorson stood, put his cell phone back in his pocket, left his carry-on bag on the sofa, and sped to the door on his way to Mount Auburn.

Gillian was shopping in Trader Joe’s for wines, cheeses, and

crackers and crisps she and Ryan were going to serve at a small social in the Linguistics Department faculty/staff lounge. Ryan was thanking everyone, as he put it, “for accepting a jobless professor” into their community

“Hi Sweetheart,” Gillian said into her cell phone. “I’m at Trader Joe’s picking up provisions for Friday afternoon’s party and I need your advice.”

“Fire away with your questions, my dear,” Ryan replied.

“Just don’t forget the Stilton.”

“Not bloody likely,” Gillian said with a laugh. “Do you think I want to watch you pout like a disappointed school boy because I failed to pick up your favorite blue cheese?”

“I’m grateful for your tender mercies,” Ryan quipped.

“What’s this Charles Shaw wine I’m looking at?” Gillian asked.

“Buy several bottles,” Ryan answered. “No. Buy a case! Don’t be misled by the price; it may look cheap, but the chardonnay is great. It wins every blind taste test. Californians familiar with Charles Shaw wine called it Two Buck Chuck’ when it cost \$2.00 a bottle. I suspect it’s probably ‘Three Buck Chuck’ by now.”

“That’s all the advice I need,” Gillian said. “Thanks sweetie.”

“No problem,” Ryan said. “Remember the Stilton. By the way, I’m glad you called. I’ve been thinking, we haven’t seen Jennifer for a couple of days; we should visit her this afternoon.”

“You’re right, Gillian said, “I’m not buying anything that needs immediate refrigeration. I’ll meet you at Mount Auburn in, what, say 30 minutes?”

“That sounds doable,” Ryan said, “since you have the car I’ll be riding the “T” underground, but I can do this trip on the “T” in 20-25 minutes.

Unknown to all four of them, Gillian, Ryan and David Thorson were about to intersect at Jennifer’s bedside.

“Hello Jennifer,” Sara greeted the much-improved patient.

“How are you feeling? Have you had a good day so far?”

“Hi, Sara,” Jennifer replied from her bed. “So, you’re on the night shift?”

“Looks like,” Sara answered. “I really don’t mind, though. I have neither husband nor little ones to watch over. My colleagues with families need the daytime shifts.”

“That’s typically thoughtful of you. I’m certainly happy you’re here to take care of me,” Jennifer said with a large smile. “You’re not listed on my records as one of the medications I need to take on a daily basis, but you ought to be. I appreciate ever so much all you do.”

There was a tap at the door. Jennifer looked in the direction of the door and Sara turned around. “May I help you?” Sara said.

“Oh, it’s David!” Jennifer said in a happy voice.

“Hello, I’m David Thorson,” he said, walking toward Sara with his hand extended to her for a handshake.

“Hello, David, I’m Sara Williams, one of Jennifer’s nurses.”

After shaking Sara’s hand, David went to Jennifer in her bed,

gave her a gentle hug, and then kissed her two times on the mouth, three times on her forehead.

“Jennifer, what has happened?” David asked. “How did this happen to you?”

“You’re asking me?” Jennifer replied. “I haven’t a clue why they beat me up like this. Perhaps you might know; they used your name. They said something about David Thorson, my boy friend.”

David grimaced.

Suddenly: “Hello, what’s this?” It was Gillian at the door to Jennifer’s room. Ryan was at her side.

“What’s going on here?” Ryan asked Sara, then turned to Jennifer.

“Dr. Graves, this is my partner, David Thorson,” Jennifer answered. “He’s a graduate student at MIT . . . Economics.”

“Thorson is it?” Ryan greeted him warily. “Did I hear Jennifer correctly? She told us the men who gave her this beating used your name.”

David stood beside Jennifer’s bed, switching his eyes back and forth from Sara to Gillian, then to Ryan. Then he repeated shifting his eyes at the three of them again.

“Thorson,” Ryan said sternly, “I asked you a question.”

David said nothing.

He rushed from the room as fast as he could without bumping into anyone.

“Should I call security?” Sara asked no one in particular.

“Yes, right away and . . .” Ryan was answering.

“Absolutely, by all means . . .” Gillian said simultaneously.

“No. No, please. Please don’t,” Sara interrupted. She began to cry.

Ryad grasped the handle of the small, whistling teakettle and poured the hot water into a cup with a tea bag. He set the timer on the stove for six minutes. He glanced through one of the copies of the *Boston Globe* he found at the door to his apartment when he returned from California.

When the timer’s buzzer interrupted his reading he removed the tea bag and added two sugar cubes and some milk to the cup. He carried the cup to his reading chair, sat down, and then pulled his cell phone from his pocket. He entered a number. The number he was calling rang three times.

“Hello, Thorson, Abdel Ryad here.” Ryad replied to David:

“No, no problems. I don’t have any problems.

“I called simply to see if you’re still in the project.”

“You are? Good. I don’t want to be responsible for everything at MIT.”

“What? Who are they and what’s their relationship to your girlfriend?”

“I know about Graves’ work; he’s a very prominent linguist in the US. And, I know he’s a visiting professor at MIT this semester. I’ve not met his wife.”

“HMMMMM. HMMMMM. What?”

“Your girlfriend said the intruders used your name? Did Graves hear her say that?”

“He did? I see. I can imagine how that bit of information that Graves has could be a real bump in the road for Li and Njakatu’s venture.”

“We need to talk, Thorson, and soon. How long will it take you to be here in my apartment?”

“It will? Okay. I’ll see you in 20 minutes or so.”

At the other end of the conversation, David Thorson stood

up, put his phone in his pocket, went to the bathroom, and he washed his face and hands. He had been sweating profusely.

Jennifer had been beat up by at least two men who mentioned David's name during their kicking and slugfest. The Graves learned about David's relationship with the men, but the degree or type of relationship was not clear.

Furthermore, David knew he acted like a fool when he ran away from Jennifer's room at Mount Auburn.

How do I get my sorry butt out of this, he questioned himself.

“I don’t see how anyone could continue to diagnose Jennifer’s beating as ‘a random act of violence by two or more persons,’” Gillian said to Ryan as they were driving home from Mount Auburn.

“I agree 100%, Gillian,” Ryan said. “They, and we’re assuming it’s *they*, knew the name of --- What did Jennifer call him? Her *partner*? --- David Thorson?”

“When you were visiting with Sara,” Gillian added, “Jennifer told me the thugs mentioned *research* and *data*. Those aren’t words people off the street use very often in daily conversations.”

“The only way we can determine how David Thorson is a part of this picture is to talk to him, I guess,” Ryan said.

“I rather suspect you’re right,” Gillian replied. “Jennifer can’t add to what she’s already told us. She’s mentioned everything she remembers, which, granted, isn’t a whole lot.”

“He’ll be listed in the university directory,” Ryan explained. “I can get his street address, telephone number and e-mail address.. I can also get his campus address, if he has one, as well as his office telephone number, but, again, only if he has one.”

The next morning Ryan went to his office and the first book he touched was the MIT Faculty & Staff Directory. He thumbed his way to the T's, where he found

Thorson, David M. thorsondm@mitecon.edu.
515-886-8241
Sovereign Apartments,
Framingham, MA 01701
MIT: Sloan Hall 435

The 515 area code for Thorson's cell phone was easy to identify with help from Google. A big chunk of central Iowa, including Des Moines; well, Ryan thought, I know he's likely from central Iowa, possibly Des Moines or one of the many small municipalities in central Iowa. Ryan dialed the number. After hearing seven rings, a voice from nowhere invited the caller to leave a message after the tone: "Hello Mr. Thorson, Ryan Graves here. My wife and I met you at Mount Auburn Hospital. Please call me at 913-555-4616. I want to discuss Jennifer Maley with you." Ryan sent the same message to Thorson's e-mail address.

After two days Ryan had not received reply from Thorson. This irked him at first, and then he became worried.

What is Thorson's relationship with the guys who beat

Jennifer, he wondered? How is Jennifer a part of whatever business Thorson has with the two men? Or, how is Jennifer a part of the business with someone else whose identity is not known at this time? Is Thorson a major or a minor player?

Ryan became more and more anxious, nervous and perplexed as he considered the worst-case scenarios involving Jennifer, the two intruders, and David Thorson. He scolded himself for imagining worst-case scenarios that left Jennifer with untreatable and permanent injuries.

Try as I might, he told himself, I can't imagine any best-case scenarios. A best-case scenario would be fantasy.

He completed his day in his office, packed his attaché case, then went to the parking lot to get his car and drove home. The Cambridge traffic wasn't as frantic as usual so Ryan made good time.

"Hi, honey, I'm home," Ryan called to Gillian as he entered the door to their apartment. "Gilly, do I sound like William Macy's character George Parker in that movie we saw . . . *Pleasantville*?"

Ryan thought his movie allusion was funny so he laughed, proud of his wit.

There was no answer. I wonder where Gillian's off to? He asked himself.

He filled the teakettle and put it on the stove. Shortly its whistle sounded and Ryan poured the hot water into his cup with its teabag. He set the timer for five minutes, and then went to the computer to scan the *Boston Globe* on-line.

After his tea had steeped for five minutes, Ryan added some sugar substitute and went back to the computer to scan the *New York Times*. Going straight to the sports section, Ryan smiled when he saw the St. Louis Cardinals were leading the NL Central division by 7.5 games!

Maybe we could plan a trip to St. Louis on our return to Columbus. It's totally out of our way, but I'd love to see the Cardinals and the new stadium.

When we return to Columbus we need to see the Kennedys, too. They should meet Gillian.

"Hello there, Professor Graves," Gillian said, entering their apartment.

"Hi, honey, I'm home," Ryan called back to her. "Quick. Who said that?"

“You just said it; it sounds a tad too formulaic for your idiolect,” Gillian replied.

“Why,” Ryan moaned, looking heavenward, “oh, why did I marry a linguist?”

Gillian walked to Ryan and put her arms around Ryan in a big hug.

“Because you love her, I hope,” she said.

“Indeed, I do,” Ryan affirmed, “I love her a great deal, more and more every day.”

“I took the bus to Mount Auburn this afternoon to see Jennifer,” Gillian explained. “She’s being discharged tomorrow. Can she stay with us for a couple of weeks of recuperation?”

“Absolutely,” Ryan answered, “but you knew I’d agree with your offer of our spare bedroom to Jennifer. Admit it.”

“Actually, my dear, I did know it. That’s why I’ve already invited her. I invited Jennifer to stay with us when I was visiting her this afternoon,” Gillian laughed.

“You rascally . . . what’s the Brit word? . . . bampot!” Ryan chuckled.

“As a matter of fact,” he continued, “I’m eager to have her

stay with us. Until we know more about David Thorson, and until we know more about who it was who beat up Jennifer and why they did it, we'll both be more content having her safely under our roof."

"Can you go with me tomorrow to get her?" Gillian asked.

"Sure. There's nothing on my calendar tomorrow," Ryan answered. "I've been planning to use tomorrow for reading, but I'll be more than happy to take the time to help you with Jennifer."

"Have you thought about our first child?" Gillian asked.

"What? I don't understand where you're going with this,"

Ryan replied. "Are you . . .?"

"No, no, I'm not. Our first child, Jennifer, is 25 years old,"

Gillian explained, "most parents begin with babies, you know."

Ryan was glad he'd brought along the latest issue of the *New Yorker* when he and Gillian went to Mount Auburn to get Jennifer. It always takes more time to discharge a patient than most people anticipate. The discharge papers are tedious. So, Ryan would read his magazine while the three of them endured the 60-minute wait.

Jennifer and Gillian were talking quietly; Ryan looked up from his *New Yorker* from time to time, with an "Uh-hu," "sure," "yes," and other conversational space fillers.

Finally, the charge nurse entered Jennifer's room with the discharge papers listing several medications she'd need to pick up at a pharmacy, some home exercises prescribed by the physical therapist, and a follow-up appointment with the hospital doctor in one week.

Ryan left to get his car so that he could meet Jennifer and Gillian at the main door of the hospital. He only waited about five minutes when he saw Gillian and Jennifer exit the door, a hospital tech pushing her wheelchair.

Gillian and Jennifer sat in the back set and chattered all the way home. Ryan smiled privately, knowing how much the two

women in the back seat were enjoying each other. He couldn't decide the nature of their relationship. Mother-daughter? Sister-sister? Friend-friend?

Whatever their relationship might be, he thought, do their lips, tongues, and teeth --- the articulators of spoken language --- ever get tired?

Jennifer stayed with the Graves for six weeks, growing stronger each day until she announced that she was ready to return to her apartment. The owner reserved Jennifer's apartment at no cost, assuming Jennifer would reciprocate by not suing him owing to a lack of building security.

Ryan and Gillian spent two days at Jennifer's apartment helping her get everything back in reasonable order. At the end of the second day's work, Ryan offered to make a beer and pizza run to celebrate Jennifer's homecoming.

"I can't speak for you sweetheart," Ryan said after lunch as they were driving home, "but the last two days of physical labor have taught me how important it is for me to get back to my exercise

routine.”

“That’s a good idea for the both of us,” Gillian agreed. “We can go to the ‘Y’ together, if you like.”

“I’ll let you do that,” Ryan answered, “you enjoyed their yoga and jazzercise classes. I’ll go to the gym on campus instead of having lunch.”

They arrived at their apartment complex, parked the car in the underground garage, and then entered the door of their building’s elevator.

“You go on up,” Gillian said, “and I’ll go to the main entrance and get our mail from our mailbox.”

“Fine. See you upstairs,” Ryan replied.

Ryan arrived at their apartment 10 minutes before Gillian; it was enough time to pour a snifter of Sempe` Napoleon Armagnac. He sat in his recliner, letting the armagnac wash pleasantly over his tongue.

“Who’s Kevin Harmon?” Gillian asked as she entered the apartment holding up a letter.

“He’s one of the more insightful phoneticians in the US,” Ryan answered. “Additionally, he’s the chair of my department. He probably wants to know when I’ll return from my sabbatical.”

Gillian handed the letter to Ryan, kissed him on his forehead, and went to their bedroom.

“I’m bushed, Ryan,” she called back over her shoulder. “I’m dressing for bed.” There was no reply.

“Ryan, did you hear me?”

“Sorry, Gill. I was concentrating on Kevin’s letter,” he explained.

“No problem; all I said was I’m tired and I’m getting ready for bed,” Gillian repeated her message.

“Excellent idea,” Ryan said, tossing the remainder of the armagnac into his mouth. He joined Gillian in the bedroom and began to undress.

“Kevin and his wife will be in Vermont, next week,” Ryan said, sharing the contents of his letter. “He’s teaching a four-week course at the Breadloaf School of English. ‘The Sounds of Shakespeare,’ or some such.”

“How far is that from Cambridge?” Gillian asked.

“Depending on the traffic, of course,” Ryan answered, “we can make the drive in five hours, possibly a bit more.”

“How about turning this Vermont trip into a four- or five-day vacation?” Gillian asked. “We’ve had a stressful summer so far.”

“I love watching that steel-trap mind of yours at work,” Ryan said with a smile. “We’ll do it.”

“The Harmons want to meet us for dinner at the Dogteam Tavern next Wednesday,” Ryan explained. “It’s about a 30-minute drive north of Brandon.”

“Is this a business dinner?” Gillian asked.

“Yes, as a matter of fact, it is,” Ryan answered. “Kevin says he wants to talk about some ‘national academic issues,’ as he called them. They’ll have another person with them, too.” Ryan added. “He said in his letter it’s no one I know, but someone I should get to know and someone who wants to meet me.”

Gillian observed, “Jennifer has recovered enough that we don’t need to hover over her now. I’m sure she would encourage us to go.”

“I’m glad you feel that way,” Ryan replied, “because I sense some urgency in Kevin’s letter. I’m of the opinion we must go. Or, I,

at least, must go; and if it's that urgent, I'd like you to be with me."

"Ryan, I said *let's* go," Gillian replied. "I thought you understood the *let's* included both of us; *let us*, you and me."

"You're right," Ryan replied. "We can leave next Tuesday morning; and reach Brandon, Vermont, in a day. The Dogteam Tavern, as I said, is an easy 30- to 40-minute drive north from Brandon. The food at the Dogteam, I'm told, is equal to any five-star restaurant; and, they grow their own vegetables and herbs in a garden behind the Tavern."

Daybreak on Tuesday morning foreshadowed clear and sunny driving through some of New England's most beautiful scenery. Only two hours north out of Boston Gillian *ooed* and *ahhed* at every change in the scenic vistas.

“Ryan, this is so beautiful” Gillian exclaimed. “Remember, my previous travel in the US was limited to a three-day convention in Philadelphia.”

“Yes, I remember your trip to Philadelphia. That trip was a first of sorts for both of us.,” Ryan chuckled. “Just hang on, though; this drive gets even prettier as we continue northwards.”

“Ryan, I'm sorry this drive is finished,” Gillian said as they parked in front of the Old Mill Inn Bed & Breakfast in Brandon. “The scenery has been gorgeous! I'm happy we'll be here for several days.”

“Let's get the luggage from the trunk and check-in” Ryan suggested. “Then we can think about a drink and dinner.”

Ryan introduced himself to the clerk at a small, roll-top reception desk explaining he had reservations for two. Then he

took care of the credit card paper work. The clerk gave Ryan plastic cards that had replaced hotel room keys used in earlier years, then he and Gillian made their way to room 3 on the first floor.

“These damn plastic room ‘keys’ are an abomination,” Ryan growled as he opened the door to their room. “A place like this tries to be authentically ‘wickedly down home New England,’ and then we use these god-awful plastic things.”

“Someone’s become a cross-patch,” Gillian said in an overly emoted mother’s voice. “Do we need a nap?”

“Sorry, Gill,” Ryan apologized. “I reacted stronger than necessary. I’ll keep my notions about New England *authenticity* to myself.”

After entering their room, Ryan opened his suitcase; Gillian walked across the room and kissed him. “It’s okay with me if you share your notions,” she said. “We’re in this B&B for some R&R, which we both need. Say anything you like.”

“Voilà,” Ryan said, as he lifted from his suitcase a bottle of Auchentoshan, a 16-year-old single malt scotch. “If drinking this doesn’t make you and me smile, we’re hopelessly pessimistic.”

“Ryan! What did you pay for that?”

“Gilly, I said *drinking* this scotch will make us smile,” Ryan answered. “*Pricing* it, on the other hand, has the opposite effect.”

“Well, give us a drink then,” Gillian said, joining Ryan’s laugh, “and we’ll smile and think about dinner.”

Ryan took two of the four glasses on top of a bureau, opened the bottle of Auchentoshan, and then poured three fingers into each glass. He handed Gillian her drink, they touched glasses and took a sip.

“This is excellent scotch, Professor Graves,” Gillian said, enjoying another sip. What do you think?”

“What I think is this: I think much better and, without a doubt quite a bit smarter, when I’m in bed with no clothes,” Ryan smiled.

“Fancy that. I as well,” Gillian giggled, putting her glass on top of the bureau.

She kicked off her shoes.

“I am so hungry, I could eat an elephant,” Gillian said as they drove from the Old Mill B&B to Café Provence, a 15-minute drive.

What happened to the proverbial horse?” Ryan asked. “In the

US, we usually say, 'I'm so hungry I could eat a horse.'"

"We Brits have always been more ambitious," Gillian laughed.

"Tell me, my dear," Ryan asked, "If you're hungry enough to eat an elephant, exactly how does one go about eating an elephant?"

"It's simple," Gillian grinned, "one bite at a time."

"Why was it ordained that I marry a Brit?" Ryan asked rhetorically, rolling his eyes.

Ryan parked the car in front of Café Provence. They got out of the car and went in the door marked ENTRANCE,

"There's no other door," Gillian laughed, pointing at the sign. "Where else might we enter this place?"

The hostess was standing behind the bar, talking to the bartender. When Ryan and Gillian entered the café, she strolled toward the entrance to greet them. "Table for two? Follow me." she said, without waiting for a reply. She ushered Gillian and Ryan to a table for two in the corner by the unlighted fireplace.

She left a menu at each place setting and announced, "Freda will be your server."

"What's with Miss Personality?" Gillian asked after they

were both seated.

In a quick second, Freda The Server came to their table.

“Evening, folks. I’m Freda and I’ll be your server tonight. Can I get you something to drink?”

“We’ll have a bottle of the Bernier chardonnay, please,”

Ryan told her as he looked up from the wine list.

“Very good, I’ll be right back with your wine.

“Shall we tell Freda about the restaurant’s grammatical error in its name, *Café Provence*?” Gillian asked. “They’ve omitted the *de*. It should be *Café de Provence*.”

“We’re not on duty at the moment dear; let’s just enjoy our vacation and the meal. We, at least I, can ignore ungrammatical expressions for the moment.”

“Well, if your standards are that loose, how do you feel about polka-dot neckties with plaid shirts?”

Ryan looked at the table, studying the marble salt and peppers, shaking his head from side to side. Then he looked heavenward and quoted Kris Kristofferson: “Why me Lord?”

In five minutes Freda presented the chardonnay in an ice bucket, and then asked if Ryan and Gillian were ready to order.

“Yes,” Gillian answered. “I’d like the grilled sirloin steak, rare, with garlic mashed potatoes and asparagus with hollandaise.”

“And you sir?” the server asked Ryan.

“I’ll have the marinated lamb shanks,” Ryan began, “on rutabaga puree, with fingerling Yukon potatoes and wilted spinach.” The server left to give their orders to the chef.

“Why does driving make me so hungry?” Ryan asked with a grin.

Gillian reached across the table and held Ryan’s left hand. “I’ll wager it was more than the driving,” she said with a knowing smile, “perhaps it was our afternoon recreation.”

Wednesday morning Ryan and Gillian slept late, missing the second “B” in B&B. After showering and getting dressed, they went to the Old Mill Inn’s 7-stall parking area to get their car.

“There’s a Starbucks one or two blocks south from here,” Ryan said. “Let’s stop there for coffee and a bagel.”

“Are we going someplace in particular this morning?” Gillian asked.

“Yes,” Ryan answered, “I just said . . . to Starbucks for coffee and a bagel.”

“Smart ass,” Gillian laughed, giving Ryan a gentle poke on his right shoulder. “I mean, *after* coffee and bagels, are we just going to drive aimlessly around central Vermont or do you have a destination in mind?”

“Here’s Starbuck’s,” Ryan said.

“It doesn’t take long to arrive at a destination in most Vermont towns,” Gillian observed.

They gave the barista their orders, took them from her, then sat at a small, round table for two.

“Would you be interested in going to see the Proctor Marble exhibit after coffee?” Ryan asked.

“Will one of us need a headstone soon?” Gillian asked.

“I certainly hope not. Two years ago one of my students was from Rutland,” Ryan explained. “That’s about five miles from Proctor; he’s the one who gave me the marble paperweight with the gold “G” etched on it. He said a visit to The Vermont Marble museum is well worth the time. The museum has some fantastic hand-carved marble pieces; there’s also a gift shop with paperweights, as you already know, and a bunch of marble curios you can buy for one of your relatives in the UK who’s hard to buy for at Christmas. Candle sticks, book ends, small busts of famous musicians, ash trays, and the like.”

“A marble factory, eh? Gillian said dryly. “I’mwhelmed.”

“Over- or under- ?” Ryan asked.

“Undeclared at the moment.”

Ryan and Gillian drove through exceptional scenery south on route 7 from Brandon to Rutland, and then a short five miles west to Proctor. After the tour of the Proctor marble works and a short visit to the gift shop, they walked to their car.

“Where now?” Gillian asked.

“Some more of Vermont’s scenery?” Ryan answered with another question.

“Absolutely,” Gillian said.

“It’s a short drive to Woodstock,” Ryan suggested, “and a scenic one, too. Let’s stop in a Woodstock shop while we’re there and buy a remembrance, okay?”

“Sounds fine to me, being one of Vermont’s newest visitors,” Gillian said, “I’m happy to see more scenery.”

In Woodstock they bought a Vermont woolen vest for Gillian and a coffee mug thrown by a local potter for Ryan to take to his office in Columbus. Both Gillian and Ryan enjoyed the drive to Woodstock and the leisurely return to Brandon.

“I like your new coffee cup, primarily because it’s refreshing to know you’re planning to return to campus one of these days,” Gillian said. “Having a paid sabbatical, no agendas, and no ‘to do’ lists is a wonderful life, but at the end of the sabbatical the pay isn’t very good unless you have a job.”

“Another 6-7 weeks,” Ryan said, “I promise we’ll be back in Columbus and I’ll be preparing for the fall semester.”

Gillian stretched and yawned. "Are we close to Brandon?"

"About 15 minutes more."

Arriving in Brandon they parked their car in the Old Mill Inn's parking area, returned to their room and replayed yesterday afternoon's recreation.

"The nap helped," Gillian said, "I'm ready to meet your department chair for a splendid dinner at the Dogteam Tavern. Since the two of you are talking business, my conversational contributions won't be germane; that being the case, I'm also looking forward to the driest vodka martini --- most likely *two* of the driest vodka martinis --- the Dogteam's barman has ever mixed."

"You can drink Vermont moonshine if you like, as long as you're wide awake and alert when we get ready for bed," Ryan warned her with a smile,

"Can you help with the top hook on my dress?" Gillian said, walking across the room to Ryan.

"I marvel at the things you learned to do with one hand," Gillian said after Ryan put the hook in the eyelet. "And, yes, I'll be awake and alert at bedtime, too," she added, smiling and kissing

Ryan lightly on the lips.

“I love you, Sugar,” Ryan said. “Now, let’s hit the Dogteam trail and go meet the Harmons for dinner.”

They went downstairs and were greeted by the owner/manager of the Old Mill Inn.

“Hello Mr. and Mrs. Graves,” he said, “I have some bad news for you; a man by the name of Kevin Harmon has left several callbacks for you. The Dogteam Tavern where you were to meet tonight, no longer exists. It was razed by a fire some years ago and was burned to the ground. There’s no reason you folks could’ve or should’ve known that sad bit of Vermont history.”

Referring to the notes in his hand, the manager said, “Mr. Harmon says he and Mrs. Harmon and their guest will meet you here in Brandon at Café Provence at 7:00 tonight.

Gillian worked over in her head the man’s message. She wanted to tell him: You ought to say *Café de Provence*.”

She asked the manager, “What’s the name of that restaurant again?”

Ryan took her hand, gave it a squeeze, and seized the ownership of the conversation.

“Well,” Ryan said to the manager, “this is a disappointment, but the meal we had at Café *de* Provence (Ryan slightly stressed the *de*.) was remarkably good. Gill, you’ll have to settle for a vodka martini in a French restaurant.”

Gillian was proud of Ryan’s indirect correction of the restaurant’s name. Ryan feared Gillian, on the other hand, was becoming a prescriptivist.

They went back to their room to wait until 7:00, time to meet the Harmons for dinner.

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Ryan looked out the window of their room and saw rain. The streetlights were reflected on the wet pavement below.

“Gill, it’s time for us to go,” Ryan said, “and you’ll need your raincoat and rain hat. I know what happens to your hair when it gets wet.”

“Thanks for the weather update sweetheart,” Gillian answered, “I’m ready.” She put the magazine she was reading on the bed and took her Burberry coat and matching Burberry plaid rain hat from the closet.

The drive to Café Provence was short and barely worth the gas their car consumed getting to the café, but it was a dry, short drive. Ryan parked as close as he could to the door with the ENTRANCE sign.

Ryan and Gillian got out of their car and hurried to the entrance. Ryan opened the door and held it for Gillian; he followed her in to the restaurant.

“Ryan, over here,” a man standing at a table by a rain-streaked window called out and waved.

Ryan waved back, helped Gillian out of her raincoat and hung it and her hat at a coat rack by the door; he put his coat and hat beside hers, then they walked toward the man standing by his table.

“Hello, Kevin, it’s good to see you,” Ryan said, shaking Kevin’s hand. “This is my wife Gillian.” Gillian took Kevin’s hand and said, “It’s good to meet you Kevin.”

“And this is my wife, Carolyn,” Kevin said, turning to his wife.

Everyone shook hands again and sat in their chairs while Kevin tried to get the attention of a server.

“I hope you won’t mind that we started without you,” Kevin said as he took a sip of his drink. “This Old Overholt is a rye whiskey I can recommend, enthusiastically.” “Of course we don’t mind,” Ryan replied. “Look, Kevin, it’s a wet night, you and Carolyn are on vacation and we’re about to talk academic business, some serious, national academic business as I remember. You don’t need any more justifications for a drink.”

The server, responding to Kevin’s wave, came to their table. She gave Ryan and Gillian menu and then did a double take when she recognized them.

“Hello again, folks,” she said, friendlier this time. “Another bottle of the Bernier chardonnay?”

“You know these two?” Kevin asked the server.

“Sure. They were just here last night. They had chardonnay.”

“I am very sorry, Gillian and Ryan,” Kevin apologized.

“Some of the faculty at Breadloaf said this was a wonderful place to eat. I just assumed . . .”

“Please, Kevin, it’s not a problem,” Gillian said.

“The food here is excellent,” Ryan said, reinforcing Gillian’s attempt to allay Kevin’s embarrassment.

“Well,” the patient server said, “ what would you like from the bar tonight?”

“Ask the bar man to make me the driest Skyy martini in Vermont.”

“Sir?” she looked at Ryan.

“A double Glenfiddich on the rocks,” Ryan replied. “Gillian and I are on vacation, too,” he said to Kevin and Carolyn, as if it was his turn to justify his drink.

“When do you expect your guest to arrive?” Ryan asked Kevin as he nodded toward the fifth chair at their table.

“I think she’s here,” Carolyn interjected, gesturing with her head toward the entrance.

“My God, Ryan, look!” Gillian exclaimed, transfixed by the sight of the woman who had just entered the café.

“I don’t believe this,” Ryan said. “Who in bloody hell is this person?”

They looked at each other with puzzled expressions.

It was the woman in the blue raincoat!

Closer to her this time, Ryan and Gillian saw an imposing woman step inside the entrance and shake her umbrella. She leaned it against the wall, then she took off her blue raincoat and hung it on the coat rack. With confident and intentional strides, she joined the foursome at Kevin’s table.

Kevin stood, “Ryan and Gillian Graves,” he said, “I want you to meet Connie . . . er . . . Consuelo Martinez.” The Graves stood. Connie reached for Gillian’s hand, and after their introductory handshake, she turned toward Ryan and shook his hand as well.

“Please, everyone, please,” Kevin said, “let’s sit.”

The server returned with Ryan and Gillian’s drinks, only to see the fifth chair was filled.

“Ma’am,” she said to Connie, “something from the bar?”

“I’ll have a Dubonnet rouge, please,” Connie replied.

“Du . . .dub . . .what is that?” the server asked. “That’s a new one on me.”

“Forget it,” Connie said, “just bring me a double Maker’s Mark on the rocks.”

After the server left Connie laughingly asked her tablemates, “Do you suppose she expected me to order can of cerveza Tecate with a shot of Patron on the side?”

“At least we know Café de Provence doesn’t profile its clientele,” Kevin laughed. “I find it more than anachronistic, however, that a restaurant with a French menu and a French name --- an ungrammatical French name at that --- doesn’t have Dubonnet in its bar.”

Gillian leaned against Ryan and whispered, “See? Kevin noticed the omitted *de*. I like him already.”

The party of five at the table beside the rain-streaked window liked the food at Café Provence. There were neither appetizers nor desserts; they had ten drinks and five meals: free-range coq au vin, salmon filet, steak au poivre, seafood mélange, and braised leg of lamb.

While the busboy was clearing their table, their server was bringing four coffees and one pot of tea.

“Excellent choice of restaurants, Kevin,” Connie said.

“I agree. I thought my dinner was very good,” Kevin said, nodding to Ryan and Gillian who were her nodding their heads in agreement.

“Gillian,” Carolyn said as she stood, “let’s take my coffee and your tea and sit at the bar, Okay? These three have some important business to discuss, Kevin tells me, and they won’t miss us.”

Carolyn reached down to kiss Kevin on the forehead; Gillian gave Ryan a peck on his lips, and then stood. The wives took their cups to the bar.

“Kevin, you’ve learned Connie’s name, but you don’t know the reason she’s joined us tonight,” Kevin said.

“And neither do I know why she was trailing Gillian and me in London,” Ryan replied curtly. “Gillian’s suspicions were correct. You have been following us, right? Exactly who are you and why in God’s name have you been following us?”

“Professor Graves,” Connie Martinez began, “perhaps you’ve seen my name on the masthead of the publications of the American Assembly of Scholarly Societies. You’ll find my name there: ‘Consuelo Martinez, JD, General Counsel and Assistant to Dr. Cathey.’”

“I hope I’m not being rude, but no, Connie, I haven’t seen your name. I typically scan the table of contents of journals to see whether there’s an article I need to read; then, I read what I’ve selected and that’s about it. Sorry, I don’t recognize your name or your AASS capacities.”

“That’s probably just as well,” Connie replied. “It’s often better that my ‘Assistant to Dr. Cathey’ responsibilities remain opaque, like the assignment that brings me here tonight.”

“Okay,” Ryan said firmly, “Talk to me; first, why am I here

tonight and, second, why have you been following us?"

"Before we get into that conversation," Connie replied, "I need to invite another person." She took her cell phone from her purse and entered ten numbers. "We're ready," she said. An oddly ominous message.

Within seconds a swarthy looking man wearing a traditional khaki-colored raincoat and a slouch hat entered Café Provence. He looked around the dining room, saw Connie and then walked to their table. He removed his hat, took off his raincoat, and put them in an empty chair at the next table.

"Professor Ryan Graves," she said, "this is Carlos Garcia." Ryan and Garcia shook hands. Following the leads of Connie Martinez and Kevin Harmon, they sat.

"Who are you?" Ryan asked Garcia, then turning to Kevin and Connie, he asked them, "What is going on here? What in hell am I doing here? More importantly, Connie, Carlos, what in God's name are you two doing here?"

"Let me begin," Connie said.

"Please be my guest," Ryan replied, shaking his head from side to side. "By all means."

“Okay, here goes,” Connie began. “I was in Ann Arbor seven months ago talking with one of our AASS institutional reps. We finished our business, which was about dull AASS governance procedures. Afterwards, around 5:15 or 5:20, the rep suggested we get a beer at the Berliner Inn, technically and legally off campus but just across the street actually.”

“The Berliner Inn is a popular place,” she continued. “The booths were already full, but we found two stools at the bar. While we were drinking and chatting, there was an outburst of applause and cheers at a nearby booth.

“More beer!”

“More Heineken!”

“Barmaid!”

“Hey lady, another pitcher!”

“Gus for house president!”

“Not everyone was seated,” Connie explained, “there were several standing so I, curious by nature and training, strolled over by Gus’ booth. Gus was soused, buying beer for his fraternity buddies, blabbering about how easy his job was and how much he got paid.”

“As it turned out,” Connie said, “and here’s the mysterious

part, Gus explained that the only thing he did was to e-mail a list of doctoral dissertations from Michigan's most recent graduation program and some guy from China, Mr. Li was his name, sent him a huge check”

“This is weird,” Ryan said. “I still don't see how this involves me.”

“Please, Professor,” Connie said, “be patient. Whether it involves you remains to be seen; you'll either accept our request for your engagement or you'll be free to tell us to go to hell. Your degree of involvement is your decision.”

“Connie called me four months ago,” Carlos added. “She told me that the Graduate Deans at three AASS institutions had called her. The IT specialists in their offices had evidence that five PhD dissertations, posted on the three Graduate Colleges' websites, had been tampered with. A job only the most elite of computer hackers could accomplish.”

“Initially we believed it was merely a breach of academic etiquette,” Connie continued, “until the three IT people discovered that the hacking originated from the same place. My trip to Ann Arbor and our overhearing the chatter at the beer party was the piece

of the puzzle we needed. Somebody or somebodies are using dissertation research results.”

Ryan’s brow was furrowed. “Do you think it’s one of those website scams ‘Let us Write your Class Papers, Theses and Dissertations?’”

“We don’t think so,” Carlos replied. “Given the pattern that’s emerging we’re thinking they’re a series of cyber attacks, attempts by hackers to confiscate, as it were, research data and to damage or destroy a campus’ computer network.”

The hackers have limited their targets to the Departments of Math, Regional Planning, and Economics and all facets of Engineering, It’s data they want, we think, for nation-building through the growth of infrastructure.”

Connie was winding down, or so Ryan hoped. “Why was I watching you? I wanted to observe you and Mrs. Graves in your daily routines to see for myself how easily you blended in with the scenery, so to speak. We couldn’t ask you to help us if the two of you were too flamboyant or called attention to yourselves because of the possibilities of vivid wardrobes, dramatic haircuts, or even Elton

John eye glasses.”

Ryan stared at Connie. “Do you really work for AASS or are you from the CIA?”

19

David Thorson was relieved to being in Cambridge again, being with Jennifer and resuming his studies. Everything that had transpired in San Francisco seemed surreal in retrospect; was it a dream? Did it really happen?

Why, why did I agree to participate in this mess? he thought. Is my sending titles and authors of US doctoral research titles for China and Africa's political, economic and military gain an act of treason?

He was sitting in his apartment drinking a bottle of the cheapest beer the local Safeway grocery store had in its cooler. Why am I drinking this slop? He asked himself. I have money.

His cell phone rang; he looked at the small screen on his phone and saw it was Jennifer calling.

"Hello," he said.

"Oh David," Jennifer cried out, sobbing, "I'm so glad to hear your voice. Where are you?"

"In my apartment," he replied, "but what's wrong? Why are you crying?"

“I just received a frightening call,” she answered. “It was really scary!”

“Jen, I’m leaving right now. I’ll be at your apartment as fast as I can get there,” David said as he walked out the door.

“Please hurry, David. Hurry!” Jennifer sobbed.

“Lock the door and don’t open for anyone but me!”

David was oblivious to the time. He rushed to Jennifer’s apartment, taking the “T” as close to her apartment as possible and then running as fast as his legs would carry him. Sweat was streaming down his face.

When he reached Jennifer’s apartment, he ran up the stairs two steps at a time. He fumbled around in his pocket and found his key to her apartment. When he opened the door he saw Jennifer sitting on her couch, an afghan pulled up around her shoulders.

She stood, the afghan fell to the floor and she ran to David’s embrace. Holding her close David rubbed her back with both hands and kissed her on her forehead.

The hugs and David’s caresses continued for ten minutes. Jennifer’s sobbing had turned to soft sniffs. David led her to the couch and sat beside her.

“Jen,” David said, just above a whisper, “are you going to be okay? What happened? Tell me.”

“It was one of them,” Jennifer said, taking her head from David’s chest and sitting upright. “It was one of them, one of the men who beat me.”

“How do you know?” David asked. “What did he say?”

Jennifer paused. She inhaled deeply three times, collecting herself. Then she leaned against David again.

“It all happened so fast I can’t remember what he said word for word,” Jennifer said, “but he said the first time he met me was just for practice. He said if you, David, don’t cooperate 100%, then the next time he sees me the EMT’s will be carrying me from my apartment in a zipped-up body bag.”

David stood stone cold still except for a muscle tic in his left cheek.

“David, what’s this guy talking about? Jennifer asked. “What did he mean if *you* don’t cooperate 100% they’d kill *me*? What’s going on?”

“It’s a long story I’d rather not go into right now,” David answered. “But try not to worry, if that’s possible; you’re not getting

killed.”

“Thanks, David, but no thanks. I *am* worried. Someone expects you, David, to do something --- cooperating 100% --- or I’m dead.

I’d like to know what you’re involved in,” Jennifer said, “because it certainly is involving me despite what you say. For that reason I think I have the *right* to know.”

“It’s about a part-time job I was interested in because the money was really, really good. I’m not rich, you know,” David replied.

“David, you’re holding something back,” Jennifer said sharply, “who would threaten to kill me based on your performance in a part-time job. Don’t pull the ‘money’s good and I’m just a poor student’ act on me. You’re not making sense.”

“Jen,” David began in slow, measured language, “this part-time job is very confidential . . .”

“So, now you want me to think you’re working for the CIA, or the NSA, or some other government hush-hush organization?” Jennifer interrupted. “Confidential? What do you want me to think? You’re a part-time secret agent? A part-time spy?”

“Jennifer, this is something I simply can’t discuss with you,”

David said, trying to deflect further questions from Jennifer.

It didn’t work.

“David, I think you’d best leave,” Jennifer said with increasing strength in her voice. “I can’t deal with death threats and your refusals to be truthful with me at the same time!”

Jennifer pulled away from him. He started to speak but Jennifer put up her right hand, palm opened like a traffic cop telling oncoming cars *Stop*.

“No!” she commanded. “Don’t speak.”

David turned and walked toward the door, stopped and looked back, then turned again and left Jennifer’s apartment.

David’s return to his apartment in Framingham was much slower than his race to see Jennifer earlier in the afternoon. The “T” was full at this time of day; David stood, holding on to an overhead balance strap, shaking his head side to side. He kept thinking, how did I get my life so screwed up? What was I thinking? Why did they have to beat up on Jennifer? How do I get out of this? How do I get Jennifer out of this?

He got off the “T” and walked to his apartment building, repeating over and over the thoughts he had on the train. He entered his apartment, went to the refrigerator for a beer, then went to his chair and flopped down.

He took several gulps from the brown bottle. He stared across the room, not seeing anything; his mind was numb.

He finished the beer, went to the refrigerator for another, and then returned to his chair. He took his telephone from his pocket and entered Abdul Ryad’s number. Ryad answered on the second ring.

“Hello, Abdel Ryad here,” he said.

“Professor Ryad, this is David Thorson. I must talk to you, again.” David said, with an unmistakable sense of urgency in his voice.

“We talked earlier here in my apartment. Don’t you remember? What can be so serious now to make you sound like a lunatic?” Ryad asked.

“The job, the job. Li and Njakatu, the whole smelly mess,” David shouted, “I want out! Help me get out of this thing! Please! Please! Help me!”

“Calm down Thorson, calm down,” Ryad said. “You’re

supposed to be brilliant and unflappable, or so we thought.”

“Professor Ryad,” David said, his voice quivering, “I’m in this deal way over my head; they’re threatening to kill my girl friend; she’s frightened out of her wits. I’m really scared, too, for her and for me!”

“Thorson, you naïve idiot.” Ryad was getting increasingly upset and impatient with David. “Meet me at the Stratton Center in one hour. We’ll have coffee and I’ll try to put some intelligence in your brain.”

The rain had stopped in Brandon Vermont but Connie hadn't.

“Carlos works for the US Department of Justice . . . the FBI, to be more specific,” Connie explained to Ryan. “As you know, the FBI has many duties. Carlos works for an office whose primary responsibility is to protect and defend the US against terrorist and foreign intelligence threats.”

“I need another cup of coffee,” Ryan said. “Or, another drink. It sounds as if Connie's going to take some time with her explanation.”

Kevin got up, walked to the bar, and brought back a tall, amber-colored glass filled scotch and ice cubes. He placed the glass in front of Ryan.

Connie continued to talk. “Gus's comments in the Ann Arbor bar piqued my interest. If what he was blathering about had any semblance of truth to it, I knew this was an issue bigger than local or state law enforcement officials.”

“Dr. Cathey called a contact at the FBI, a former student of his, and then Dr. Cathey's call was transferred to Carlos's desk,”

Connie said. “Dr. C left a message on Carlos’s answering machine

“The next day Carlos called Dr. Cathey who called me in on the matter because I was a witness to Gus’s inebriated bluster and bravado. Carlos and I flew to Ann Arbor, and with the cooperation of the local police we hauled Gus’s ass to the Ann Arbor PD’s central offices,” Connie went on.

“We questioned him and made him understand that his cooperation with whoever was giving him enough money to pay for his fraternity brothers’ beer could lead him down a very dark road. He might enjoy monetary riches from time to time, but he’d be in prison for so long he’d never have a chance to spend any of it.” Connie stopped, took a sip of coffee and turned to Carlos. “Your turn,” she said to him.

“Well, I’ll fill you in on what Gus told us,” Carlos said to Ryan.

Carlos explained about some China/Africa alliance, the access to selected dissertations, and what the accumulation of data would mean to China’s ability to grow its investments in Africa, which are already immense.

“Without going into more detail than we need,” Carlos said,

“I’m sure you can appreciate how this scheme could affect the world economy even more and the diminish the US’s position of global leadership and effectiveness.”

“We scared the shi . . . , no, we scared the *piss* out of this kid. He peed all over himself,” Carlos laughed.

Ryan asked, “Literally?”

“Literally,” Carlos answered.

“I see, I think,” Ryan said. “To quote a certain US Vice-President, *‘this is a big fucking deal.’* But why are you telling me all of this stuff? I’m not a cop; neither do I work for the CIA or the FBI. I’m a professor of linguistics.”

“Ryan, we know all of that,” Carlos answered. “Because you’re a distinguished professor who is invited to give scholarly papers and speeches all over the US and Europe. No one will give your presence in airports, on airplanes or on other campuses a second thought.”

“We suspect the top 10-15 research universities are the most likely targets,” Connie chimed in. “I don’t mean to sound patronizing, but, as Dr. Cathey pointed out, what kind of research is engaged in on the campus of Western Cheaper State University? Or,

the University of Default?”

“I suspect you’re right,” Ryan said, taking a larger than normal sip of his scotch and soda. “The more creative and more richly funded professors are in the top universities; they attract the best and the brightest doctoral students.”

“The mentor and the graduate student will generate cutting edge research” Carlos said. “As soon as the dissertation is posted at either the university’s site or anywhere else on the Internet, or both, anyone who knows how to use the resources of a computer can access the data.”

“After taking the data they want they can either rewrite portions of the original dissertation or they can alter some data, making the dissertation look like someone fabricated the data. Anyone who can get a head start using the pirated data will obviously be well ahead of their competitors.”

“Let me think about this,” Ryan said. “If I agree to help both of you to unravel this ball of twisted yarn I’ll be putting myself at risk, I know; I could also be putting Gillian in jeopardy as well. Putting Gillian at the slightest risk is a deal-breaker for me.”

“Of course,” Carlos said.

“We understand,” Connie said at the same time.

Ryan looked at Kevin. “Kevin, what role are you going to play in this Turner Classic Movies intrigue?”

“I have two roles,” Kevin replied with a smile. “One, I need to figure out how the department can accommodate your travels to other campuses and your absences from your classes, if necessary, with as little visibility as possible.”

“And number two?” Ryan asked

“Number two, I’m paying for dinner tonight.”

Knowing that the best place to be ignored or to hide is out in the open where no one pays any attention to anyone, Ryad's suggestion that he and David meet at the Stratton Student Center was a good choice.

Whatever a student might need, whether it's a place to eat, to have coffee, to rest, to meet someone, to conduct banking business, to drop off clothes at the dry cleaners, or to visit a super market, it's all housed in the Stratton Student Center.

David took his regular route to campus and then to the Stratton Center. Ryad was inside the entrance standing by a kiosk with an events calendar listing the day's meetings and meeting rooms posted on a bulletin board.

"Let's go get some coffee," Ryad said to David. They went to the busiest coffee shop they could find, got their coffees and sat in a near-by booth.

"Now," Ryad said softly but curtly, "what's stupid idea of you wanting out of the China deal?"

"My girl friend was beaten badly," David began to explain, "she was in acute care at Mount Auburn Hospital for two weeks. She

almost died.”

“So,” Ryad said, “something like this has happened before throughout the greater Boston area. With a distressing degree of regularity. Your girl friend’s beating is not news, I’m sorry to say, except to you and her family. So, what makes you think she is related to our project?”

“She remembers hearing the two men mention my name,” David replied. “She heard them say something about *data* and *research*. This afternoon she received a telephone call threatening her that if I didn’t cooperate 100%, she’ll wind up in a body bag.”

“I see and I understand,” Ryad said. “But I’m afraid there’s not much you can do to reverse your earlier decision. When you associate with people like Li and Njakatu, there’s no ‘Time Out.’ There’s no ‘King’s X.’ There’s no, ‘On second thought, I don’t think I want to be involved after all.’”

“ You see, David, you made your decision and because of that, you already know too much in the eyes of Li and Njakatu.”

“Can’t I promise them, or give them my word, that I won’t tell anybody about their plan?” David asked. “Can’t they be reasonable?”

Ryad laughed. “In a word, *no*. *Reason* has nothing to do with either Li, Njakatu or you, David. Neither your word nor your promise mean anything to Njakatu or Li since earlier you pledged to assist them in this research scheme for money. How can they know when you’re telling the truth?”

“What can I do?” David asked.

“Based on what you’ve told me about your conversation with your girl friend,” Ryad answered, “I think you have two choices: first, you either cooperate 100% or, second, order flowers for your lady friend’s funeral.”

“Gilly,” Ryan began, “before the summer is over and we go to Columbus so that I can begin the new academic year, I’d like for us to go to Fenway Park to see a Boston Red Sox baseball game.”

Gillian looked up from her computer; she was drinking the tea she routinely ordered from Harrods, Heritage Earl Grey No. 42, and she was reading the on-line edition of the London *Times*.

“What was that, dear?” she replied to Ryan.

“I said, it’s too bad that Wales broke off from the UK and slid into the Atlantic Ocean and sank,” Ryan said, trying to keep a straight face.

“You loveable baboon,” Gillian said, scolding but laughing. “I’m sorry darling, what did you say? Actually I didn’t hear you, I was fairly deep into the London *Times*.”

“I said nothing of great importance,” Ryan replied. “Only that I’d like for us to go to Fenway Park to see a Boston Red Sox baseball game. The summer will be over soon and then we’ll go to Columbus for the fall semester.”

“Okay, I see,” Gillian said. “Are the Red Sox a good team?”

“The Boston Red Sox were founded in 1901,” Ryan

answered. “making them a baseball team that’s been organized for more than a century. Fenway Park, where the Red Sox play, opened in 1912. Both Fenway Park and the Red Sox are important for historical reasons if nothing else. Fenway is one of US baseball’s shrines. You and your people have Westminster Abbey; the US has Fenway Park”

“I know how much you love US baseball, especially the St. Louis Cubs,” Gillian said.

“Gillian!” Ryan playfully roared. “It’s the St. Louis *Cardinals*, the *Red Birds*, the *Gashouse Gang*, the *Cards*. Please, you’ll tear out my heart if you confuse them with the Chicago Cubs, the Cardinals’ primary rival,” Ryan said, pretending to spit at the name *Cubs*.

“I’m so sorry, sorry, sorry, Mr. Baseball,” Gillian said as she salaamed Ryan. “I think we ought to go see these Red Sox. Although I hear US baseball can be tedious, even boring one might say. I’ve also heard . . .”

Gillian’s cell phone began to ring in its all but muted signal for attention.

“Hello Jennifer,” Gillian said, having seen Jennifer’s name

on her cell phone's small screen. "Whoa, whoa, Jennifer!"

Gillian's face became increasingly downcast as she listened to Jennifer. "Do you want to come here? Your bedroom here is still available, you know."

"I understand," Gillian replied to Jennifer's comment. "Ryan and I will leave immediately and meet you at your apartment. We'll feel better if you remain in your room until you can see us out your window, okay?"

"That's fine, Jennifer; if we hear from David we'll play uninformed. We won't tell him where you are. We'll be there in 45-minutes to an hour, depending on the traffic."

"Yes. We love you, too. Bye-bye." Gillian closed her phone.

"I assume from the look on your face and your comments Jennifer is really upset," Ryan said.

"With very good reason, I should say," Gillian said as she stood, picked up her purse, and started for the door. "We're going to get Jennifer and we must hurry."

They took the elevator to the parking garage in the basement of their apartment building. Ryan unlocked the car with his remote switch; they got in the car, and took off with all speed toward

Jennifer's apartment.

“What is the reason for Jennifer's panic?” Ryan asked Gillian as they serpentine in and out of the Boston traffic.

“I can't be sure,” Gillian answered. “She was sobbing so uncontrollably I couldn't make out much of what she was trying to say. What I heard ---or, what I *think* I heard --- was something about a death threat she received and that David's all mixed up in something very dangerous and he refuses to discuss with her.”

Ryan pulled their car into the yellowed-curb No Parking area in front of Jennifer's building. Gillian opened her door and got out of the car. She stood beside their car, looking up at Jennifer's window. She and Jennifer saw each other and waved.

It didn't long for Jennifer to run out of her building toward the Graves' car. She hurried toward Gillian and grabbed her in a frantic embrace. After Jennifer calmed and stopped crying, Gillian led her to the car, opened the back door and they both sat in the rear passenger seat.

Gillian put her arm around Jennifer, who rested her head on Gillian's shoulder. Ryan carefully pulled away from the building and merged into the traffic.

There was no conversation in the car until Jennifer's crying had devolved into sniffs, and Gillian made small but reassuring talk:

“We'll get you into a nice warm bath.”

“I have an extra robe you can wear.”

“I'll fix us a nice supper.”

“It's no bother; we've missed you.”

“Don't worry yourself about not having packed a suitcase.”

Ryan let both of them out in front of their apartment building. After greeting the doorman and entering the building, Gillian and Jennifer took the elevator to the Graves' floor and went to their apartment. In 10 minutes Ryan came in.

“I think I'd like that bath you mentioned,” Jennifer said to Gillian.

Gillian took her to the guest bedroom, showed her the clothes in the closet, then left Jennifer, closing the door behind her to go to the kitchen to make tea.

Minutes later Ryan, who had joined Gillian in the kitchen, heard the shower running. “No bath?” he asked Gillian.

“Doesn't sound like it, does it?” Gillian said, giving her shoulders a shrug. Gillian poured each of them a cup of tea. Jennifer

finished her shower, put on Ryan's white terrycloth robe with a green "H" on the pocket, and went to the kitchen.

"Ah, here she is, all rosy-cheeked and buffed," Ryan said. He noticed she was wearing the robe Gillian bought for him at Harrods a long time ago, or so it seemed.

"Here you are, dear," Gillian said, handing Jennifer a cup of tea. "Do you take anything with your tea, or do you drink it plain?"

"One sugar and a bit of cream."

Gillian handed her a small sugar cube bowl and a small cream pitcher.

Gillian put a cozy over the teapot, placed everything on a tray, and then directed Ryan and Jennifer, "Follow me if you please. Let's sit in comfortable chairs while we enjoy our tea."

The three of them sat, drinking their afternoon tea as if they were in an Elizabethan teashop in Stratford-upon-Avon discussing Shakespeare.

The next morning Gillian and Ryan were sitting in the living room drinking coffee when they heard Jennifer's door open. She joined them.

“Good morning, Jennifer. You look better and refreshed; doesn't she Ryan?”

“Indeed, she does. Will you take coffee this morning or do you prefer tea?”

“I'll have coffee. I think I need the caffeine. One sugar, a splash of cream, please.”

Gillian held up her open hand. “You sit, Ryan; I'll go for Jennifer's coffee.”

“Ryan, I can't thank you and Gillian enough for taking me in. The past three days have been bloody hell for me.”

“Stop it now,” Gillian said good naturedly as she returned from the kitchen carrying a mug of coffee for Jennifer. “It's not as if you're a total stranger, a person we picked up in a homeless shelter. Right, Ryan?”

“Absolutely. Jennifer, we're friends now and Gilly and I want to help you the best way we can. When would you like to

discuss the ugly business you called us about yesterday?”

“This is as good a time as any, I guess” Jennifer replied,
“but, first could I have another coffee?”

“Ryan, I’ll get Jennifer some more coffee. Can I get you
some, too?”

When everyone had emptied their coffee cups, Jennifer
began to talk:

“I have two issues, actually. The first is a telephone call I
received from one of the men who beat me. The beating me in my
apartment was, he said, *just for practice*. The caller’s second point
was to tell me if David doesn’t cooperate 100%, the next time
they’re at my apartment I’ll be toted out in a body bag.”

“I don’t understand how David fits into this weird puzzle,”
Gillian said. “What is it they want him to do? Cooperate with
whom? With *them*, whoever they might be? Cooperate at some 100%
level of perfection? Have you asked David what any of this might
be about?”

Jennifer shook her head back and forth. “I’ve asked him all
right. He gave me some chuffing rubbish about why he couldn’t tell
me anything other than it was a confidential, part-time job and I

didn't need to concern myself about it. That's when I erupted. After all, I mean, the caller said they'd *kill* me. How can killing me *not* involve me? When David refused to be more forthcoming, I asked him to leave and he took off like a rocket."

Ryan, furrowing his brow said. "Well, well; there it is. His behavior is certainly fishy. We won't learn anything more from the anonymous caller, I'm sure. If we're to learn anything about David's mystery job, the information will have to come from him."

Ryan went to the kitchen to freshen his coffee then returned to his chair with a frown across his forehead. "Jennifer, before we or I pursue this business any further, Gillian and I need to know that we have your support to try to get to the bottom of David's 'job,' and why his less than 100% effort can have such a potentially fatal impact on you."

"Any office with the mandate 'To Serve and to Protect' clearly does not include or certify us. Do you want us, nevertheless, to be your unofficial detectives, or representatives? We might uncover information about David Thorson you'd prefer not to know."

"Yes, thank you; thank you very much, indeed. Please do

whatever you can.”

“I think I should call Connie Martinez,” Ryan said, “before I begin any sort of investigating, snooping, prying, or whatever we might call what I’ll be doing to help Jennifer

“If I’m to believe Connie --- and my saying that doesn’t mean I have any reason to doubt her whatsoever --- Ryan said, “not only are we helping Jennifer, but we’ll be helping the entire US academic community according to Carlos and Connie.”

“ Connie described the research thievery as theft of intellectual property . . . a national security matter. . . treasonable acts, to speak more to the point. ”

David sat at the small kitchen table in his apartment. His conversation with Ryad two days ago did nothing to calm his fears about both his as well as Jennifer's safety. He had tried to telephone Jennifer, but she didn't answer.

He decided to call Dr. Graves. The Graves were as close to Jennifer as if she were their birth daughter; if anyone in the greater Boston area knew her whereabouts it would be the Graves.

Whether calling Dr. Graves was a good or a bad idea, David wouldn't know. Dr. Graves wouldn't probably wouldn't answer anyhow.

The next morning David showered and dressed for the day. His senses were working at a minimalist 50% level of normal performance. He had been walking in his sleep with his eyes open since his conversation with Ryad. His ability to focus on his studies was weakened to the point of embarrassment.

BANG! BANG! BANG! He heard a thunderous knocking at his door.

"Thorson, open the door." An imperious voice from the hallway commanded. "You need to talk to us. You don't know just

how badly you need to talk to us.” BANG! BANG! BANG! “If you care about Jennifer Maley, you’ll open this door.”

David stood, then walked to the door. He turned the bolt lock and slid the security chain off its gold-colored metal bar.

The door was kicked open and two figures wearing hooded sweatshirts and nylon stockings pulled over their heads burst into David’s apartment. He barely saw the fist enclosed in leather as it slammed into his mouth; he fell, and then fought to raise his reluctant body to a more upright position. . . on all fours.

He felt a steel-toed boot kick him in the ribs. Breathless, he fell to the floor again.

Someone helped him stand. There was another fist to his face. Then there was a blow to his head and it was as if sleep had taken over.

“Whas this? Who you?” David had regained a degree of consciousness and someone was splashing water in his face. He was sitting in a kitchen chair and he had a headache of gargantuan proportions. He was certain he suffered some broken ribs.

“Mr. Thorson, we understand you’re wanting to renege on your agreement to assist the China/Africa team. That’s a bad idea,

Mr. Thorson, a terrible idea, possibly a fatal idea for you and your lady friend.”

“Are you in pain, Mr. Thorson?” another voice behind his chair said. David nodded his head in agreement. “Good,” the man said. “We didn’t waste our effort.”

The man behind David hit the nape of his neck with a heavy object. More excruciating pain.

“We’re leaving, Mr. Thorson. If you go back on your oral contract, if you break your agreement with Mr. Li and Mr. Njakatu, we’ll kill your lady friend, Jennifer Maley. You will watch us do this, and she will suffer wounds to her body you can’t even imagine. Then, we will kill you.”

The two people walked toward the door, and then they turned around. The taller one said to David, “There will be no more reminders or threats to your welfare Mr. Thorson or to Miss Maley’s. You will either cooperate with the plans to work for Mr. Li or both of you will die.”

“Pray you don’t see us a second time,” the shorter one said.

With that, they left.

At the same time David Thorson was being *persuaded* to cooperate fully with Mr. Li's China/Africa project, Ryan Graves was having his second cup of coffee at the small table in their kitchen. He looked up from a departmental newsletter he had printed from his e-mail to see Gillian and then Jennifer emerge from their bedrooms and walk toward the coffee pot.

"Good morning, ladies."

"Good morning, sweetheart."

"'mornin' Dr. Graves."

"Please, Jennifer, it's *Ryan*."

"Okay, Dr. Ryan."

Ryan and Gillian looked at each other, shaking their heads.

"Jennifer, you're proving the old adage, 'Once a Brit, always a Brit.'" Gillian said.

"I haven't heard that old saying before; what's its origin?" Jennifer asked.

"She's the origin," Ryan said, nodding toward Gillian. "I just heard her tell you."

Ryan laughed with gusto; Jennifer and Gillian stood silent, wondering what was so funny?

“I have a couple of meetings on campus today,” Ryan said.

“After that, I’m open to suggestions; how about dinner tonight?”

“You said you were open to suggestions, and then you make the first suggestion.” Gillian observed with a playful edge to her voice.

“Yes, I did,” Ryan said, “I did not, however, name a restaurant, did I?”

“To your credit, dear, you did not. So, how about that Japanese place at Massachusetts and Somerville?”

“I know that restaurant. It’s Café Mami, I think. The food’s wonderful,” Jennifer said.

“Agreeable to everyone?” Ryan said. Jennifer and Gillian nodded yes. “Okay, I’ll meet you there at 6:30.”

Jennifer and Gillian arrived at Café Mami at 6:35, and, of course, the fanatically punctual Ryan was already seated at a table for three with a glass of scotch and soda in front of him.

“Dr. Graves . . .er, Dr. Ryan, . . .What? No sake?”

“Call me an American pig but I prefer scotch before dinner. Sake’s too sweet.”

“He also prefers scotch at almost any other time of the day, as well,” Gillian laughed to Jennifer.

The server came to their table with a pot of tea, three glasses with iced water, and three teacups with no handles. Ryan ordered beef yakiniku, curry rice, miso soup and a small salad. Both Jennifer and Gillian asked for tonhatsu, with onion and eggs over rice, a popular side dish to compliment the deep fried pork cutlet. They, too, had miso soup.

“Jennifer, scotch and soda or sake?” Gillian asked?

“I think we should honor the ethnic heritage of Café Mami.”

Gillian looked at the server, “Two sakes, please,”

When they had finished dinner and were waiting for another pot of tea, Ryan turned to Jennifer and asked, “Is this a good time for our family council to discuss your threatening telephone call and David’s weird reaction to it?” Ryan asked.

“Ryan, must we? Now?”

“Gillian, Ryan, this has been a marvelous dinner. Let’s savor the moment and discuss David and his so-called classified or secret job . . . he called it *confidential*, as I remember . . . and my scary telephone call when we’re at home, dressed for bed.”

“I agree,” Ryan said. “Sitting here appreciating this food and the friendly ambience is to be savored. However, somewhere out there,” he motioned toward the entrance, “somewhere out there are damned crazy people who strain the seams of humanity and its social fabric.”

He waved at their server. “Our tab please.”

David made a hurried grocery-shopping trip, not knowing anything about Jennifer's whereabouts or safety. Wondering neither Dr. Graves nor Jennifer wouldn't answer his calls. Wondering when his pains, bruises, split lips and cracked ribs would get better. Knowing Jennifer's forgiveness was the antidote to his mental anguish.

The past several weeks had been hell for him, each day horribly worse than the day before.

He bought one can each of great northern beans, lima beans, tomato soup, and beef stew; he also picked up a small box of saltine crackers, a package of wieners, and a 5th of the cheapest vodka on the shelf. I could've bought more, he thought, but what I already have is pushing the cubic capacity of my backpack.

David laughed at himself. Who else but an MIT student would even think about a backpack in *cubic capacity* terms? Me, he said to himself; I've become a walking stereotype.

Ryan had let off Jennifer and Gillian at the building entrance. They went to the apartment and were already in comfort clothes and

were preparing tea.

As soon as Ryan parked the car in the underground car park, he went to their apartment, gave Gillian and Jennifer a “I’m here” greeting, then went to the bedroom and changed into his pajamas and robe.

“Doc Ryan,” Jennifer smiled and said, “you go sit in your comfy chair and Gillian and I will bring in the tea after it’s finished steeping . . . in about five minutes.”

True to Jennifer’s word, five minutes later the three of them were enjoying a cup of Harrods Heritage Earl Grey No. 42; this provided Jennifer and Gillian with an opportunity to discuss British tea (excellent) vs. American tea (sorely lacking).

“Before my meal at Café Mami puts me to sleep,” Ryan said, “let’s have some serious talk about where we are.”

“Probably the sooner the better,” Gillian agreed.

“Okay,” Jennifer agreed as well. “I’d like to put everything to rest, permanently. I don’t want to have all these issues in my life forever.”

“We don’t either. Let’s begin with you and the beating, can we?” Ryan began.

First, Jennifer described the scenario, which included two men who followed her into her apartment the night they had dinner at the Court House Seafood Restaurant. They beat her mercilessly, requiring an extended period of recuperation.

“It’s a wonder they didn’t kill me,” Jennifer said.

“No, I don’t think it a ‘wonder’ they didn’t kill you. I believe they didn’t want to kill you,” Ryan suggested. “Instead of killing you, they wanted to impress David with their ability to hurt him in a sinister fashion. You see, Jennifer, they’re holding David hostage; you’re the bait.”

Second, she recounted the telephone call she received from one of the men who beat her. He said the beating was just for practice and if David doesn’t go along with some plan with 100% cooperation, they’ll see to it that she’ll be carried out of her apartment building in a body bag.

Finally, she described the conversation she had with David, and his refusal to tell her about the plan, the business, the part-time job, or the scheme he was supposed to invest a 100% level of effort. Her continuing to live was contingent on David’s work effort.

“I have to say you’ve condensed some genuinely horrific

facts into a compact 15-minute summary,” Ryan said, with a sympathetic smile.

“I can’t believe David is a part of something that would endanger anyone’s life, mine or his,” Jennifer said.

Gillian sat with her saucer and teacup in her lap. She had a frowning brow and pursing lips. “I’d like some information about something we’ve never discussed, assuming it was not related to this mysterious attack on intellectual inventory in the US.”

“We took you to dinner that night because David was out of town. Correct?” Gillian asked.

“Yes, that’s so, Jennifer confirmed. “He went to California with one of the members of the MIT Linguistics Department who’s on leave this semester.”

Ryan sat up with a jolt. “Did David say the name of the professor?”

Jennifer nodded her head, “Yes, he did, but I can’t remember the name. It was an Arabic name, I think.

“Abdel Ryad?” Ryan asked.

Jennifer looked at Ryan, motionless, considering the name Ryan suggested. “Yes. Yes, I’m pretty sure that’s it. Professor Abdel

Ryad.”

“Ryan, you’re on the Linguistics faculty this term because Kevin told you about Ryad’s leave,” Gillian said. “Isn’t Ryad’s leave the reason Kevin told you he had a temporary vacancy to fill?”

“It’s a fact.”

“Professor Abdul Ryad here,” he said in answer to his ringing telephone.“

“Ryad, this is Li and I want to get some things straight with you and your Mr. Thorson. Have our ‘visits’ with his woman impressed him with the serious intentions we have regarding his cooperation and dedication?”

“Mr. Li, I’m having a difficult time reading Thorson and his plans.”

“Ryad. I’m not a fool. Don’t piss on my feet and tell me it’s raining. I want to know what you and Thorson discussed when you had your animated conversation at the Stratton Center.”

“The Stratton Center Mr. Li . . .?”

“Of course, the Stratton Center. I know about your meeting with Thorson. I know every move you make. I’m getting increasingly impatient with you. I want to know what you and Thorson talked about, I want to know it now, and I advise you to carefully consider your answer before you speak.”

Ryad stood in place knowing Li could deliver the most severe and painful violence, even fatal force if he desired, on anyone

for whatever reason. How he might save himself had quickly become Ryad's primary objective. To hell with Thorson.

“Mr. Li, Thorson initiated the meeting; he called me that day; late afternoon it was. He was desperately anxious to talk with me about how he could withdraw from his role in your Africa project. He said he would give you his word and his promise, that he wouldn't speak a word to anyone about your plan.”

“And you said?”

“I told him he had two choices. Either continue to work for you with enthusiasm and thoroughness or to buy flowers for his girl friend's funeral service.”

“That was excellent advice.”

Ryad heard a *click*. Li had abruptly ended their telephone conversation.

“Njakatu here.” His caller ID told him who initiated the call.

“What do you want?”

“We're about to have a break in security, Njakatu.”

“How do you know this?”

“I just talked to Ryad. He tells me Thorson is about to defy

our authority, power and agreement. It appears Thorson hasn't taken our warnings seriously."

Njakatu pressed the point: "How does Ryad know this? He never struck me as the wisest or the most stable person we have ever recruited."

"Ryad and Thorson have talked about Thorson's wanting to resign and that he'll give his word, and he'll promise never to disclose anything about his involvement with you and me."

"Li, what's wrong with Thorson? He must be an idiot if he thinks Boy Scout oaths of honor mean anything to us! We have given him sufficient warning, I'd say, about what will happen to his lady friend if he fails us."

"Some of my men paid a little visit to Thorson in an obviously failed attempt to help him see that we're serious about our work and workers."

"Oh? Li, you didn't tell me about that action."

"Njakatu, I wasn't trying to keep any intelligence from you; my plan was to tell you afterwards, when Thorson behaved himself in a manner we approve."

"What now?"

“I believe a couple of my men can accomplish a necessary assignment. It’s time we removed Thorson’s woman from the equation.”

Li could not see Njakatu’s eyes widen; Njakatu couldn’t see the grim determination on Li’s face when he flipped his cell phone closed to disconnect their call.

A miniature gong was on Li’s desk. He took a small, padded hammer and struck the gong twice. Two men entered Li’s office from a side door. Li handed the taller one a manila folder.

“Here’s a file with your next assignment. A photograph of the subject and her apartment address are in the file. Her campus address is there also. I want her dead by Friday.”

David Thorson was barely able to function. He continued to replay the mental recording of his last talk with Ryad at the Stratton Center, Jennifer’s beating and death threats, his beating, and Jennifer’s loss of faith in him leading to their two-week period of not talking to or seeing each other.

He had to talk to Jennifer. He needed to try to explain what he had done to their relationship. He wanted to be with her. He

wanted to hold her. To kiss her. He knew that anything beyond a kiss and an embrace was out of the question.

He took his phone out from his pocket, flipped it open and pushed Jennifer's speed dial number. Her phone rang seven times, and then a voice invited him to leave a message.

“Jennifer, it's David. Can I see you, please? I feel terrible and I want to resolve the mess I've created between us. Please? I love you, Jen.”

Jennifer didn't return David's message, which made him more desperate. For the first time in two weeks, David went to the campus and then to the Department of Economics office.

He had no academic reasons to be in the office. He had a single mission: to see Jennifer.

While David was wending his way to the Economics main office, Jennifer was riding to campus with Ryan. “I'm looking forward to returning to work,” Jennifer told Ryan. “I feel as if I've been in the dust bin for the past three days, doing absolutely nothing.”

“Let's hope,” Ryan answered, “that there'll be no surprises at your work today. I think the campus will be safe from an appearance

by the thugs who've been bothering you."

"I've been hoping all morning that this will be the case. Furthermore Dr. Ryan, I'm not only prepared to see David, I'm eager to see him. I've been praying all morning he'll come to see me . . . or at least call me."

Ryan parked his car in a faculty lot, wishing David Thorson had never entered Jennifer's world. He and Jennifer got out of the car, picked up their bags, an attaché case for Ryan and a book bag for Jennifer. They went their ways to their respective buildings.

Jennifer took the elevator to the 7th floor, stepped out of the car and then walked to her office. She opened the office door; David was sitting in one of the reception chairs.

"Jennifer!" David yelled. He got out of his chair and rushed to Jennifer. She dropped her book bag and threw open her arms. David held her in a bear hug.

"Oh, David. It's so wonderful seeing you." She kissed his ear.

David held her at arm's length. "I've missed you so much. Being away from you is more than I can bear."

Jennifer reached for David, pressed her body as close to his

as possible, and she kissed him. “David, I need you. I can’t go through all the mysterious things that have happened to me without you.”

David pulled back from her embrace. “Jennifer, I’ll come back at 3:30 this afternoon. Tell your supervisor you’re still in a weakened condition and need to leave early. We’ll go somewhere private and talk; I have so much to explain.”

“It’s a date. I’m staying with Ryan and Gillian at present, We’ll have more privacy, more appropriate privacy, at your apartment.” She snickered. “Is that okay with you?”

“Of course. It’s much more than just *okay*. I’d walk all the way to your parents’ home in London if you asked me to. I’m ready to explain to you everything about the dark place I’m in right now. A place I want to escape from.”

“Good. That makes me happy, David, very happy indeed.”

“I have missed you Jennifer. I don’t want to be without you again. I love you.”

“I feel the same, David. I love you too and our absence from each other won’t happen again. So, it’ll be 3:30 then?”

“Yes, I’ll meet you in front of your building at the main

entrance.”

They embraced again, forcefully messaging each other's back; Jennifer initiated a passionate kiss.

Jennifer looked at the round clock on the wall straight across from her desk. The hands were creeping from one minute to another. She had already cleared a 3:30 leaving time with the Office Manager who understood Jennifer's need for rest given what she had been through.

At 3:30 sharp Jennifer called good-bye to the Office Manager, looked at her desktop which she had cleared at 3:15, and took her purse out of the bottom drawer on her right.

She walked briskly to the elevator and pushed the call button. After stepping into the elevator car she pushed the Lobby button and was happy that her car hadn't been called by a potential passenger below the 7th floor. She was on an express; Jennifer was elated..

She almost hopped out of the elevator car and power-walked to the main entrance. There was David!

They embraced and without saying a word they kissed.

"This is ever so wonderful, David. Seeing you, being together again and . . ."

"Being together again," David interrupted. They kissed again, fervently.

David smiled like a kewpie doll and put his arm around Jennifer, guiding their way to the revolving door at the main entrance.

University sidewalks across the US usually need repair; the older the campus, the older the history of foot traffic, and, consequently, the more sidewalk cracks there are.

As Jennifer and David were walking toward the nearest bus stop, Jennifer stubbed her toe on a tectonic crack in the sidewalk.

As she was falling, she heard a sound she'd never heard.

Thawmp.

Lying on her back on the sidewalk, she looked up at David. His eyes were wide open in shock. There was a bloody hole just below his left ear. The right side of his head was gone and blood was spurting everywhere.

He fell as if the force of gravity had increased 10-fold.

“DAVID! DAVID!” Jennifer screamed.

He didn't respond. He didn't move. Blood pooled on the sidewalk from the wound in David's head.

Jennifer got to her knees, took David's shoulders and tried to lift him. She had his blood covering the front of her sweater and her

hands

“DAVID! DAVID!

HELP ME SOMEBODY.

HELP ME!” Jennifer screamed.

HELP! CAN ANYONE HELP ME?

“Hello,” Ryan said into the mouthpiece of his ringing telephone.

“Hello Professor Graves, this is Sara Williams.”

“Hello Sara,” Ryan said, “it’s good to hear from you.”

“You won’t believe that for very long. I’m afraid I have bad news for you and Mrs. Graves. Jennifer’s returned as a patient at Mount Auburn.”

“Oh no,” Ryan said. “With you in acute care?”

“No, I’m no longer in acute. The pressure there is just too horrendous to make that assignment a career. I’ve been transferred, working with general patients, including Jennifer.”

“What’s wrong? What happened that she’s need hospital care?” Ryan asked.

“She was with her boy friend . . . “

“ . . . David Thorson?” Ryan interrupted.

“Yes,” Sara said. “Mr. Thorson was fatally wounded and was DOA at Mount Auburn.”

“Oh no. God! How terrible! Poor David. What happened?”

“He had a fatal gunshot wound to his head . . . large caliber.”

“What about Jennifer?”

“She’s sedated and sleeping,” Sara answered. “She has a serious case of shock. Medically, she collapsed at the scene of Mr. Thorson’s death, and has an inadequate delivery of oxygen to the cells. She has all the symptoms: reduced cardiac output, rapid heartbeat and circulatory problems. She’s ungodly pale.”

“Is visitation possible?”

“Absolutely,” Sara replied. “In fact, that’s why I called you. Since you’re her, ah, ‘family’ as it were, a visit from the two of you could be very helpful.”

“I see. We’ll be there ASAP.”

Ryan threw some papers and two books into his attaché case, snapped it shut, then grabbed the handle and left his office.

When he located his car in the parking lot, he took his cell phone out of his pocket and called Gillian at the School of Sciences.

He explained the message from Sara Williams. "I'll be in front of your building in ten minutes,"

Gillian was waiting for him. She opened the car door, sat in the passenger seat, then reached over and kissed Ryan on the cheek. "What do you know?" she asked

"Not much, I'm afraid," Ryan answered. "Apparently David Thorson was killed by a gunshot to the head. Sara told me David was already dead when he arrived at Mount Auburn."

"Oh, God! No! And Jennifer?"

"She's in shock, serious shock. That's all I know."

Ryan let Gillian out of the car at the hospital entrance closest to the parking lot. After parking their car, Ryan joined Gillian at the entrance and then they went into the hospital and walked to the information desk.

"A patient, Jennifer Maley, please?" Gillian asked.

"Hmmm, Maley, Maley, Maley. Here she is," the volunteer said. "Jennifer Maley, room 603."

Both Ryan and Jennifer gave *smiles* and *thank you's* to the volunteer, then headed for the rank of elevators. Entering the elevator car, Gillian looked at Ryan, shaking her head, "I don't

cherish my memories of our visiting Jennifer when she was here after she'd been all beat up."

"I don't either," Ryan said. "Given the recent history surrounding Jennifer's beating, the threatening telephone calls, and David's strange behavior, no one can convince me they're not interrelated."

They left the elevator car when it stopped at the 6th floor and walked to room 603. A nurse wearing white slacks, a floral patterned smock and Birkenstock sandals with white socks was wiping Jennifer's forehead. She looked up when she heard Ryan and Gillian come into the room.

"I think we'd best wait and let Jennifer sleep," Gillian suggested to both the nurse and Ryan.

"Please do," the nurse replied.

Gillian looked at Ryan. "Shall we go to the cafeteria and have a coffee?"

"Very bad joke, Gilly," Ryan answered. "Don't you remember how bad the coffee is at this place? I'll have a soda, maybe a glass of juice."

“Hello, Njakatu here,” he said, answering his telephone.

“We’ve had a major screw up,” Li reported to Njakatu.

“Has the girl been taken care of?” Njakatu asked.

“No, she has not. My man shot Thorson instead.”

“What happened, Li? You told me not to worry and that you’d take care of the business of eradicating the girl from our concerns.”

“Njakatu, be calm. They’re not *our* concerns; they’re *my* concerns. Do you understand?”

“Yes, I get it. If I sounded too assumptive, that’s too bad Li. I’m very much involved in this effort. If you fail, me and my people lose!” Li ignored Njakatu’s impertinence and continued his report.

“The girl and Thorson were walking on the sidewalk. She tripped over a crack in the sidewalk at the same time my man was shooting at her. She fell, and the bullet struck Thorson in the head. He fell, dead on the spot.”

“This leaves a big hole in the timetable,” Njakatu said. “How do we replace Thorson? And, with Thorson’s death, the girl is of no use to us anymore. We can’t hold a dead man hostage.”

“You’re right about the girl, of course,” Li replied. “She’s no

longer relevant to our efforts. As to the problem of replacing Thorson, I haven't had time, frankly, to think the matter through to a successful solution. But, be assured I will."

"Don't leave me uninformed, Li," Njakatu warned. "I'm not a useless part of Africana to you. I represent one of your major investments. I expect to be fully informed."

Li ignored what he interpreted as Njakatu's insolence. He merely flipped his cell phone closed.

Click.

The charge nurse on Mount Auburn's 6th Floor West explained to Ryan and Gillian that Jennifer would likely be held in the hospital for two or three days for observation. "It all depends on her vitals; when her numbers look normal, she can go home."

At the end of the fourth day, Jennifer was cleared and was discharged the next morning. Ryan and Gillian took her from the hospital to their apartment for recuperation as well as her personal safety.

After they had taken Jennifer's few items to the guest bedroom, Gillian made coffee and tea. The three of them sat in the living room.

"Gillian, this really hits the spot," Jennifer said. "The coffee at Mount Auburn is best described as *ghastly*."

"See there?" Ryan crowed, looking at Jennifer.

Gillian ignored his statement, because linguistically it wasn't a question. It was a declarative sentence bordering on shameless arrogance. Another case of the mismatch between form and function in American English, Gillian told herself.

"I've been thinking about David's death," Jennifer said,

demonstrating that she was willing to deal with, or at least discuss, the shooting.

“The bullet hit David just below his left ear. I was walking on his left side. If I hadn’t stubbed my toe on the crack in the sidewalk and if I hadn’t fallen, the bullet would have hit me.

“David wasn’t the target; I was the target.”

“Why you?” Gillian asked.

“I’ve thought about this,” Ryan said, “and I agree with Jennifer. They, whoever *they* are, were holding Jennifer as a virtual captive in order to have leverage in their dealings with David. Shooting Jennifer would have demonstrated their determination to David.”

“But, because David has been killed, Jennifer’s no longer a person of interest to them. They can’t use her in order to force anyone to follow through with whatever plan it is that they have,” Gillian said, extending the analysis.

“Possibly, my dear,” Ryan replied. “Unless . . .”

“ . . . Unless what?” Gillian interrupted.

“Unless they think David told Jennifer about his involvement in this strategy we keep referring to as *the plan*,” Ryan said.

“I don’t want to agree with you because your idea places Jennifer in jeopardy. I think, however, there’s a very strong possibility you’re correct,” Gillian said.

“What should I do?” a frowning Jennifer asked.

“For the time being, you’ll stay here with us again rather than in your apartment,” Gillian answered. “Whoever these people are, they may not know about your connection with us. They know where your apartment is, of course. Staying with us may be your best choice as a safe haven.”

Ryan shook his head in agreement. “Gilly’s right. We’ll certainly cooperate with the police and hope they’ll arrive at some kind of closure on David’s murder. At the moment, however, I can’t think of any better option. You’re staying here with us.”

Jennifer was wiping at her eyes with a tissue. “I don’t know if I’ll ever recover from David’s death, whether it was intentional or a grisly error. We were going to David’s apartment. Finally, he was going to tell me everything. I was relieved. I believed there was a future for him and me.”

Njakatu, Li, and Ryad were sitting at a small cocktail table at the Eastside Bar & Grill. It was 3:45 but they weren't drinking by the clock this afternoon. Li was drinking a Tsingtao beer, a popular beer throughout China. Njakatu had asked for a Bass lager and Ryad was drinking water, his religion forbidding the consumption of alcohol.

"Li, you've reminded us over and over that you're our Mr. Big. You told us you'd take care of the woman," Njakatu said in a disrespectful manner which was obvious to the other two. "You didn't, did you? If Ryad or I failed an assignment, we'd be in the crosshairs of an assassin's rifle scope."

"Don't get too excited Njakatu," Li said. "What has happened is a momentary insect in the milk. We'll simply replace Thorson. Despite their high-flown language about human rights, democratic political designs, stopping the spread of HIV/AIDS and building schools in other countries and other such platitudes, most Americans can be bought. We'll find someone. Do not worry. And, in case either of you have any doubts, I'm still running this operation. It wouldn't be wise to test me on that."

“I wish I knew what David was going to tell me that day,” said a morose Jennifer. “The men who beat me mentioned *research*, *data*, and they used *David’s name*. If David wasn’t going to participate fully, they’d kill me. I remember all of this.”

Ryan added, “We also remember, only too well. Then you had a threatening telephone call which, essentially, repeated the earlier death threat,”

“Yes, and when I wanted to discuss my beating, the telephone threat, and David’s role in this melodrama, he wouldn’t clarify his actions,” Jennifer recapped. “After a brief parting of the ways, we were both ecstatic to get back together; David was going to tell me everything.”

Jennifer slumped in Ryan’s recliner and cried again. Gillian went to her, helped her stand up from the chair, and walked her to the guest bedroom.

Ryan had stretched out on the sofa. When Gillian returned she sat beside him and gently rubbed his temples.

“What in the world ever happened to our one-semester stay at MIT and a short vacation in Vermont?” Gillian asked rhetorically. “You’ve not listened to many of your CD’s. Your writing has been

negatively affected. I haven't seen you look at a single on-line newspaper to learn anything about the baseball season."

"Right. We intended to have a little decompression period before we returned to Columbus; look at us now," David said scowling, "threading our way through a tangled mess of utter dismay, and there's no Theseus anywhere in sight to lead us through the maze."

"I'm not forgetting how recent our wedding was. I'm not forgetting how much I love you," Gillian said in her soft voice. "Whatever you decide to do, you know, don't you, that I'll be by your side."

Ryan looked into Gillian's eyes. "Yes, I know that, sweetheart, but I wish I didn't need to think about it. At the moment, I'm fearful for *your* safety, *Jennifer's* safety . . . and mine I suppose. We have no idea what, when, or where these thugs, these brutes, these bastards, are going to do next."

Gillian came home in an excited mood. “David,” she said, her enthusiasm bubbling over, “there’s gong to be a colloquium at MIT, co-sponsored by the MIT Department of Linguistics and SOAS, the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London. The selection panel has accepted the presentation proposal I submitted! I’m not just a luncheon helper, you know, I’m also a linguist!

“Gilly, I haven’t seen you this happy for a long time.”

“Ryan, our recent lives have been similar to the worst scenes from *Othello*; possibly even more tragic. Who was it --- Chaucer maybe? Shakespeare? --- who coined the phrase ‘Life is a bitch?’ I am, you’ll please remember, a professionally educated linguist.”

“I know this, sweetheart. That’s what brought us together. What’s the topic of your paper?”

“‘Cultural Unity and the Ibo Language in Nigeria,’ Gillian answered. “It fits the conference’s theme and I can use my socio-

linguistic skills, hoping for a job over and above the maid's position I have in the School of Sciences.”

“You’ll remember my father was a Nigerian. I lived in Port Harcourt with his relatives for six months, and then I stayed with another set of his extended family in Owerri for six months. The data I collected for my dissertation are still reasonably current,” Gillian remarked.

During the next month Gillian worked on her presentation and didn't show it to Ryan until she was satisfied with it.

“Gilly, this is first-rate scholarship,” Ryan said. “I’m proud of you.”

Later that month, both Ryan and Gillian were out of bed at an early hour, drinking coffee and discussing Gillian's presentation for the umpteenth time.

“Gill, don't worry about your presentation. The Ibo language, especially its social uses, was your dissertation topic. No

one, I'm biased to say, understands Ibo morphological and socio-linguistic patterns attested in Ibo more thoroughly than you. Enjoy yourself, please sweetheart."

Gillian's presentation was a huge success. The Q & A period lasted 45 minutes. Finally, she left the dais and started to descend the steps at the side of the podium. When Gillian stepped off the bottom step, A man was waiting to greether, an Asian, who introduced himself to her.

"Dr. Davies. You certainly know the Ibo people, their language, and their culture. Your paper was very insightful and your ideas are brilliant. I'd like to discuss your presentation with you in more detail. I think I can also help you accomplish some major financial windfalls, as well, if you're interested, not just for you but for all of Nigeria as well."

"My name is Li, Mr. Li Arita. Here's my card"

Gillian met Ryan in the back of the auditorium after the social hour that followed the presentations. They rode the elevator to the ground floor, located their car and started the drive home.

“I’m feeling very British tonight,” Gillian said to Ryan in her pretend East London Cockney. “Shall we ‘ave eggs and chips?”

“That menu sounds typically British, Gillian. May I, however, suggest we have a drink when we get home and a shower?”

“In that order?”

“If we use plastic party cups, we can accomplish them simultaneously.” Ryan said.

“You mean if we use plastic party cups we could shower and have a drink *at the same time*?”

“No, but we could do both *together*.”

“Ryan, I prefer we do them *concurrently*,” Gillian laughed.

Ryan laughed too, enjoying the game they had devised, and

called it *Replication*. The goal of *Replication* is to repeat an idea by matching synonyms. “If anyone should ever hear us carry on like this, playing *Replication*, they would be convinced we’re the queerest couple they’ve had the displeasure to meet.”

Gillian was chuckling also. “Well, Ryan, playing *Replication* in front of a group of boors at a party would drive them away.”

“There’s that.”

Gillian pulled off her white blouse and kicked off her shoes. “You go for the drinks and I’ll get fresh towels.”

“Yes, madam,” Ryan said in a mock subservient tone. “I’ll return momentarily with your aperitif. Is there anything else, madam?” Ryan said in his best valet-speak.

“Lord help me,” Gillian replied with a heavenward glance. “Am I so desperate I’m shagging the help?”

Ryan fixed their Dewar’s with soda and carried them, one at a time, to the bathroom. He stripped off his clothes. Gillian was

already in the shower so he tapped on the shower door. Gillian opened the door just wide enough to stick out her hand for her drink.

“Is there anyone attached to that arm?” Ryan asked.”

“You’ll have to come in to the shower to find out.”

“Is it anyone I know,” Ryan asked.

Gillian laughed: “Is that the ‘know’ as used in the *social* sense or the *Biblical* sense?”

“ I’m coming into the shower to find out.”

Kevin and Carolyn Harmon drove to Boston from Vermont, planning to fly from Logan International to Columbus after a brief visit with the Graves. Since this was their last night of vacation Kevin called to ask Ryan and Gillian to join him and Carolyn for dinner.

Ryan and Gillian met the Harmons at the Mayflower Seafood Restaurant, a seafood restaurant known widely as one of the best fish houses anywhere. Ryan and Gillian arrived at the restaurant, got out of their car and watched the valet drive it away.

When they entered the Mayflower, the Graves had sense of déjà vu reminiscent of the first time they had met the Harmons for dinner in Brandon, Vermont: There was the same welcome: Kevin was standing at their table, waving at Ryan and Gillian.

“I think we’ve been here before, “ Ryan laughed as he and Gillian approached Kevin and Carolyn. “We’re viewing a virtual rerun of our meeting at Café de Provence.”

“Seems so, yes, I agree. Carolyn wanted an early drink; this, by the way, is her fifth martini,”

Kevin laughed, too raspy and hoarse, Ryan thought, to be alcohol free.

“Kevin, where did you learn to count?” Carolyn asked sternly. “This is the first drink for me.”

“Sorry, Carolyn but I think we should ask him where did he *not* learn to count?” Gillian added to the conversation.

Everybody laughed and sat at the table.

The Harmons ordered another round of drinks, a Speyburn Single Malt on the rocks for Kevin and another gin martini for Carolyn, “Bombay Sapphire please --- no vermouth.”

The Graves shared a bottle of Rombauer chardonnay.

Their dinners were among the best seafood they’d ever tasted. They had an assortment of Dungeness crab, crab and brie stuffed lobster, lobster and crab ravioli, and ahi tuna with wasabe and pickled asparagus.

When the meals were finished and three coffees and one tea were served, Carolyn put both hands on her belly. “Kevin, I can’t imagine a more satisfying meal to mark the end of our vacation.”

“Nor I, dear. We’ll still be talking about this meal months from now,” Kevin replied. “And now, you two, bring us up to date on your comings, goings and such.”

Alternately, Ryan and Gillian explained about David’s death, by a bullet they both believed had been intended for Jennifer. Gillian gave a modest report on her paper at the colloquium. “It was based on my doctoral dissertation: ‘Cultural Unity and the Ibo Language in Nigeria.’ I think it was well received,” she added.

“More than that,” Ryan announced proudly, “we thought the follow up Q & A never end.”

“There was a strange man in attendance,” Gillian said, “who told me afterwards he would like to discuss my presentation at greater length; he wanted more details. He also suggested there could be what he called ‘some major financial windfalls’ both for me and for Nigeria.”

Kevin's eyebrows arched.

"His name is Mr. Li Arita," Gillian said. "Do you know him, Kevin?"

"You haven't mentioned this person before," Ryan said as an aside.

"No, I don't know him. I'm curious, however," Kevin explained, "about a man whose surname is 'Li,' a common surname in China, is in attendance at your presentation which is based on data from Nigeria, Africa, and dangles financial gain in your face."

"We've never discussed this Gilly," Ryan said. "But, I think I'm with Kevin. Mr. Li and his comments smell like four-day old fish."

Kevin lowered his head just a bit and looked at Ryan with pursed lips, a small frown, a non-verbal message which was telegraphing to Ryan *This party is over all of a sudden and now we're talking business, some very serious business.*

Ryan returned Kevin's look by nodding his head up and down.

“What’s going on here?” Gillian asked. “You gentlemen are acting like you’re in a gay bar making eyes at the one another.”

“Gillian, do you still have Mr. Li’s card?” Ryan asked.

“Hold it there Ryan,” Kevin spoke up, “do you think this is wise?”

“I don’t know,” Gillian answered Ryan’s question about the business card. “I can look in my attaché case.”

“I hope you have it,” Ryan said. “I think we need to know more about this Mr. Li. It might be a wild goose chase . . .”

“ . . . and it might not,” Kevin said, finishing Ryan’s sentence. “I’m not satisfied we ought to pursue Mr. Li’s invitation to have a conversation with Gillian. I’m being repetitive, I know Ryan, but do you think this is wise?”

Li, Njakatu and two of Li's employees were seated at a table in The China Pearl Restaurant. "I believe I should get in touch with the Dr. Davies who spoke at the linguistics colloquium if I don't hear from her soon," Li said.

Njakatu looked at Li with an impassive expression. "Is she an MIT faculty member?"

"According to the printed program she is affiliated with the School of Sciences. But the program also said she's a socio-linguist. Took her PhD at University College at the University of London.

"That's an odd academic home for a socio-linguist," Njakatu observed.

"These days academia isn't always organized according to the traditional departmental boundaries. Almost every college at the University of London has a department of linguistics. Furthermore, I truly don't care what her tenure-home department might be. I'm

thinking she could be the replacement for David Thorson.”

Njakatu sat, sipping his tea, considering what he had just heard from Li. “I think you’re on to something very practical and eminently useful. Li. She could bring to the project something Thorson lacked. She has a background in African culture.”

“I’m pleased and flattered with your assessment of my idea,” Li said with condescension in his voice. “Dr. Gillian Davies has relatives in two towns in Nigeria, Port Harcourt and Owerri. I’m thinking the allegiances to her family roots might help her see the importance of Chinese investments in Africa.”

“There’s only one way to know,” Njakatu suggested. “Talk to her.”

“That could work, of course,” Li replied. “But I have an alternate idea, Njakatu. You’re a native African; she has relatives in Nigeria. Tell her you’re Nigerian. She will accept you with an immediate sense of connectedness, harmony, and relatedness. I’m Chinese; do I look African?”

“Of course not. It makes sense that I begin the conversation with her,” Njakatu agreed. “How do you suggest we arrange for me to meet her?”

“Simple. I’ll call her at MIT and introduce you as my business partner and that we have some investment possibilities in Nigeria,” Li began. “She would find it difficult, I believe, to avoid a feeling of national pride and a sense of wanting to help *her people*. I’ll set a date and time for the two of you to meet, since I’ll be *out of town*, at least that’s what we’ll tell her.”

Ryan drove up to the curb in front of the School of Sciences. Gillian waved to him as soon as she saw him and their car. She opened the passenger door and eased into the seat beside Ryan.

“How was your day today?” Ryan asked.

“Interesting, it was interesting; not because of the social niceties I’m usually responsible for,” Gillian replied. “The mysterious Mr. Li we discussed with Kevin called me today. Mr. Li is leaving the city and asked whether I’d be at all interested in meeting his business partner, a Mr. Njakatu, who’s from Nigeria.”

“What a coincidence,” Ryan said, “isn’t it?”

“What? The telephone call?” Gillian asked.

“No, it’s not the telephone call. What’s coincidental to me is that Li isn’t available but his partner, however, who just happens to be Nigerian no less, wants to meet with you.”

“Mr. Li told me he and Mr. Njakatu have some potential investment opportunities in Nigeria and they’d to discuss them with me.

“Not only does this whole matter with Li and Njakatu seem entirely too coincidental to me,” Ryan replied, “I think it sounds thoroughly programmed. Something these two guys don’t know about, on the other hand, is that you and I know Jennifer and because of that connection we know about David Thorson. ”

“Meaning?”

Ryan smiled a crooked smile: “Meaning we either give everything we know to Connie Martinez and Carlos Garcia and let them take over, or we tell them what’s going on and get their

wisdom to guide us. My first concern though is your safety.”

“I’ll be okay, and cautious.”

“I’m sure you will,” Ryan said, “but your involvement with Li and his agenda was what Kevin was referring to when he asked me ‘Do you think this is wise?’”

“Well then,” Gillian said, “I think we ought to have a conversation with Connie and Carlos ASAP, certainly before I have my meeting with a fellow countryman who wants to talk about Chinese investments in Nigerian businesses.”

“Don’t forget Li’s comments to you about your realizing financial gains,” Ryan added.

“Yes, that’s right,” Gillian confirmed Ryan’s memory with an expression of discovery. “I was so excited about delivering the paper at the colloquium and I was quite pleased with the ensuing discussion. I barely remember my conversation with Mr. Li.”

“The first thing we do is call Connie and Carlos,” Ryan said. “We’re amateurs at cloak and dagger stuff. We need their advice; if

anything should happen to you, I could never forgive or live with myself.”

Connie and Carlos arrived at the Graves' apartment promptly at 3:00 Saturday afternoon. Gillian went to greet them at the sound of the doorbell, smiling broadly as they exchanged hugs; they walked to Ryan and thanked him on his good decision to call them.

“We’ve already seen what they are capable of doing,” Ryan replied. “They shot one of our Econ graduate students in the head. He was dead before his body hit the sidewalk.”

“We know a little bit about Li and Njakatu,” Carlos said, refocusing the conversation. “Not enough for an indictment though. And, obviously, not enough evidence for a conviction.”

“Li is the brains behind their project,” Connie said. “But, because the first meeting is with Njakatu, it’s likely this meeting will be an exploratory session to see how cooperative Gillian might be. Njakatu will report back to Li, who’ll decide whether a second meeting will be useful.”

“Although we have no evidence, as I’ve already told you,

we're 90% sure David Thorson was working with them," Gillian said. "That makes me think they'll want to replace him as fast as possible."

"When do you meet Njakatu?" Connie asked.

"Monday, day after tomorrow," Gillian answered.

"If we're correct thinking the purpose of Monday's meeting is to test the water with you, I don't think we need an entire SWAT team assigned to guard you," Carlos said, "but we'll have a few armed agents nearby --- servers, kitchen help, an extra maitre de, a floor host whose real assignment is simply to work the room keeping an eye on you all the time after you enter the coffee room --- but you won't know who they are. We don't want you to be able to identify them. We certainly don't want your eyes to give away our people or to give you away."

"Sometimes honesty is not the best policy, especially when it involves the person we're protecting," Connie added.

Monday afternoon at 3:30 Gillian went to Esprit de Caffeine & Bagels, a popular hangout for a hurried breakfast, a breakfast or lunch to go, or a friendly place for some decompression time and a cup of coffee. She ordered a 16 oz. latte` at the coffee bar, then took it to a small table by the window.

Before she could unfold her napkin, a black man dressed in an expensive black suit, black shoes, white shirt and a red and black striped tie approached her table. “Dr. Davies?”

“Yes, I’m Gillian Davies.” Gillian had continued to use *Davies* as her surname in an attempt to keep her professional identity separate from Ryan’s, and vice-versa, Ryan had said many times.

“Please sit,” Gillian said, motioning to the chair across from her.

“I’m Njakatu, from Lagos, Nigeria, originally, but now I’m spending 50% of my time in the US.”

“Right, I believe you’re Mr. Li’s business associate?”

“Indeed I am and it’s a pleasure to meet you,” Njakatu

replied. “Mr. Li has already told me about your esteemed and scholarly presentation and that you and I have ties to Nigeria. You have relatives in Nigeria, as do I, isn’t that correct?”

“That’s correct,” Gillian responded. “I haven’t been there since five years ago. I hope and pray the government has figured out by this time a scheme whereby more citizens and communities can have access to a fair share of the oil money.”

“Where are your Nigerian relatives situated?” Njakatu asked.

“I have an uncle and aunt in Port Harcourt,” Gillian answered, “but I think I’m related to 50% of the people in Owerri.” She and Njakatu laughed, he more heartily than she; it was vitally important for Njakatu to become a trusted friend and ally to Gillian.

“Most of my father’s four brothers and two sisters are employed either by Imo State University, or the Federal University of Technology,” Gillian explained. “I have an uncle who owns the All Seasons Hotel in Owerri; he’s the rich uncle, the one who helped my father get into the oil business with Afren plc.”

“Of course,” Njakatu said, “everyone knows about the All Seasons Hotel and about Afren plc. Your family is to be greatly admired.”

Gillian labored hard to remain pleasant and to smile at Njakatu, ignoring his false front and obsequious behavior. She wondered, are you the one who beat up Jennifer? Are you the one who killed David Thorson?

She thought about Ryan, who was immediately wary of anyone who acted like a toady. Ryan, my love, you’re going to owe me after this stupid meeting with the ignorant Mr. Njakatu.

“I don’t want to appear too programmed or conniving with you,” Njakatu said, “but have you ever considered returning to Nigeria to help those who most need assistance. . . whether it’s a job, an education, or networking with business or technology leaders in other cities in Nigeria, or Africa?”

“Oh definitely, yes. I’ve thought about returning hundreds of times,” Gillian replied, smiling and nodding her head in agreement. “But I’m not Oprah. I don’t have unlimited funds and other

resources to be able to snap my fingers and make immediate improvements in the lives of other people. I can't build a school and open it fully staffed and with a complete faculty already in place. Or a hospital. Or a library. I'm an unemployed academic looking for a university position; what more can I say?"

Looking at the watch on his wrist, Njakatu sat upright. "I hate to end this conversation, but Mr. Li and I have an appointment with our US attorney Li should be returning to our office any minute now.

"I understand. I've enjoyed our meeting and talking about the place where we have our family roots. I would do anything to help the Africans most in need. And, please call me Gillian. I don't need my academic title with a fellow Nigerian."

Gillian, she said to herself, in the last 45 minutes you've given a performance worthy of an Oscar nomination in the US or a BAFTA award in the UK!

"Thank you Dr, . . . er . . . Gillian, Gillian it is! I'm sure you'll hear from me soon." Gillian left while Njakatu took

unnecessary time fumbling for something in the left inside pocket of his suit coat. He wanted Gillian to leave; he would remain, waiting for Li.

Thirty minutes later, Li entered Esprit de Caffeine & Bagels, surveyed the customers, and then saw Njakatu sitting in the back of the room. He stopped momentarily at the coffee bar and bought a small cup of the blend for the day. “Have a nice day,” chirped the barista.

He went to Njakatu’s table and while he was sitting he asked, “How was your conversation with the Davies woman?”

“I think it went well; I was the ever-happy chap, pleased to meet with a fellow countryman,” Njakatu replied. “Her interest in helping other Nigerians is keen. She’s an academic who has no job. Even in good economic times most universities are seldom in a hurry to hire linguists. She needs a job, a source of income. I think you should meet her. The sooner the better.”

Li nodded his head. “I agree. You’ve established the ‘family’ connection with her, the pride of nationalism. I’m guessing she’s looking forward to your next call. Call her; set up the meeting with the Davis woman and me. Anywhere, anytime, ASAP.”

Ryan stuck his key in their apartment door, held the door open with his right foot and picked up his attaché case. As he came into the apartment he saw Gillian sitting on the sofa, reading a book and having a cup of tea.

Ryan smiled. Seeing her in this particular pose on the sofa reminded him for the umpteenth time how lucky he was to come home and see the woman who had renewed and now shared his life. “How did your meeting with Njakatu go?”

“Well,” Gillian began, “as no surprise to me, Njakatu had a native Hausa double-edged ritual sword inside his suit coat. Fortunately, my years of yoga enabled me to execute a double back-flip, pull my 9mm handgun from my purse and shoot him in the right eye, just like Auric Goldfinger liked to do.”

Ryan laughed roundly, walked over to Gillian and kissed her, first on the tip of her nose, then on her lips.

“You made a terrible career choice Dr. Davies. With a spiel like that I’m thinking you should’ve been a screen writer; or, better yet, and much more lucrative, you could’ve been a star like that Billie Mays who was selling crap on American TV infomercials but making millions.”

“Don’t laugh, Ryan. I wish you could have witnessed my performance before my audience of one. Njakatu believes I’m single, an unemployed academic, and I have an altruistic stripe down my Nigerian back from head to butt; I need money and I want to do whatever I can to be a cultivator of good will and economic potential for my people and my nation in Africa.”

“That language you’re using suggests another alternative career choice: political fund-raising!”

“Ryan, what was I supposed to do? Lecture him on leveling process in the Igbo dialect in the Nigerian Delta region? I think not; I’m rather proud of the thespian abilities I demonstrated today.” She put her hands on her hips with a loud “*haruuumpf!*”

“So am I, sweetheart, very proud,” Ryan said. “Seriously now, what’s the next step for us, as far as you can determine based on your conversation with Njakatu?”

“I’ll be surprised if I don’t hear from one of them in the next 24-48 hours. The only telephone number Njakatu has for me is my School of Sciences number. Regardless of whether I’m called in tomorrow morning to help with a luncheon, I plan to drop by my office shortly before 12:00 noon. That’ll give one of them plenty of

time to call me.”

Ryan frowned slightly and reminded Gillian, “Before we do anything I believe we should talk to Connie and Carlos again. As I’ve indicated earlier, you and I are amateurs when we’re involved with FBI business. We transfer our professional abilities to another and vastly different line of inquiry at our own peril.”

“Thank you Professor Graves,” Gillian laughed in a pretend uppity tone. “I’m quite confident I couldn’t have deduced any of that on my own. Your investigative abilities really scare me.”

“Gilly,” Ryan said with a laugh, “stop it, please. From now on you can be Holmes and I’ll be Watson.”

As they shook hands to confirm their agreement, they smiled, rubbed noses and then kissed.

They had lunch in the apartment, an assortment of cheeses and fruit. Gillian drank the tea she ordered from Harrods, her Heritage Earl Grey No. 42. Ryan had fresh orange juice.

“As soon as we finish here and clean away the dishes and such,” Gillian said, “let’s go to my office to see whether I have anything in the voice mailbox. Okay with you?”

“Absolutely,” Ryan affirmed, “I’m as anxious as you are to advance your ‘business association’ with Li and Njakatu. But we have to be very clear and explicit about one thing: are you certain you want to participate in this madness? I don’t need to remind you how these savage men killed David Thorson instead of Jennifer with a bullet in the head.”

At Ryan's invitation Carlos and Connie returned to the Graves' apartment for another planning session. "This isn't a social invitation, I'm sorry to report," Ryan said, "this is serious business. Gilly has a meeting with Li tomorrow for lunch at Founder's Hall dining room, 1:00."

"Thanks for calling us," Connie said. "We want this meeting to be a safe one for Gillian and . . ."

"The meeting must be absolutely safe!" Ryan interjected.

A tad peeved with Ryan's intrusion, Connie continued, ". . . of course we want this meeting to be a safe one for Gillian, that's a given, Ryan, and we hope we can learn enough to be able to shut-down Li and his pin-head pals."

They discussed the security procedures they that were in place when Gillian met Njakatu and decided to use the same basic plan. Connie elaborated, "Not only will we have BPD and FBI plants throughout the room, disguised as before, but this time Gillian will wear a wire so that Carlos and I can hear the conversation. We'll be in the pantry wearing our earphones."

"Just one more detail," Connie added. "Gillian should either

wear a suit or a blazer; coats provide more places to hide the wire.”

“That’s not necessary,” Carlos said. “Gillian, we’ll provide you either with earrings, a necklace or a brooch; we can fit a mike in any piece of jewelry. Connie meet you in the Ladies Salon to fix your jewelry at 12:45.

“That’s better, Carlos,” Connie said. “You Feds have the best resources, I guess.”

“Can we clarify one more thing?” Ryan asked.

All three looked at him, trying to anticipate what he might want to add to the preparations. “Where will I be?”

Gillian shifted her attention from Ryan to Connie and Carlos, waiting for their answer.

“You certainly won’t be in the dining room or in the pantry with us,” Carlos replied.

“You won’t even be in Founder’s Hall,” Connie answered.

“That’s not an acceptable answer,” Ryan all but shouted.

“Gillian is in the middle of a deadly serious plan. She’s my wife. I *must* be where I can observe.”

“It’s precisely because of your intensely emotional involvement,” Carlos responded, “which you have just

demonstrated, that you can't be as close as you'd like."

Connie nodded her head in agreement. "We appreciate and understand your worries about Gillian's safety, Ryan. Your fears about her safety are a part of the love and compassion you feel for her every day. But, you'll have to trust us; we're pros at this sort of activity just like you're a pro at what you do . . . which isn't what we do."

"Can I sit in my car in the parking lot?" Ryan asked. Carlos and Connie rolled their eyes.

The two investigators put their heads together for 10 minutes, softly murmuring ideas back and forth. Then, like a two-person football team, they broke their huddle.

"The Director of the Founders Hall dining room and food service has an office one floor above the dining room," Carlos began.

Ryan challenged Carlos with a terse, "How do you know that?"

"Ryan, behave yourself," Gillian corrected him.

"Professor Graves," an irritated Connie answered, "this may surprise you but we, Carlos and I, we do our homework. May we

continue?”

“We’ve decided to let you wait in the Director’s office,” Carlos said, “while Gillian and Li have their lunch. You should be there by 12:00 noon, bring something to read, stay out of sight, and above all, be quiet!”

Ryan started to add another criticism but when he looked at Gillian she was shaking her head from side to side. “Don’t,” was all she said.

As it often is with couples, one word was all she needed to say. Ryan fully understood what Gillian’s *Don’t* meant. He leaned back in his chair. Quietly.

Connie looked at Gillian. “Thank you. Now, are there any questions, *Gillian?*” The emphasis on *Gillian* was intended to exclude Ryan from the conversation. Carlos snickered. Gillian tried to keep a straight face and answered, “I have no questions.”

“I have some questions,” Ryan said as he stood up. Everyone looked at him as if he were a skunk at a Sunday school picnic.

“Just kidding,” he laughed.

The other three stood, heaved dramatic sighs of relief, and

joined Ryan in his laughter.

Gillian and Ryan walked their guests to the door with *Thank you's*, *Good luck's* and a couple of *See you tomorrow's*.

Jennifer came out of the guest room, yawning and stretching her arms upwards. “Wow,” she said, “that was no nap; that was a practice sleep! Did I hear voices?”

Ryan and Gillian told Jennifer that Carlos and Connie had come to discuss the plans for tomorrow. They gave her a brief outline.

“If everyone else is going to be there can I wait in the Director’s office with Ryan?”

“Bloody hell NO,” Gillian answered. “You might be seen; Li knows you. He’ll no doubt have a couple of his body men in tow and they shoot to kill, remember?”

With tears welling in her eyes she cried softly, “You’re right, Gillian. They certainly do. It was a stupid question.”

Gillian walked to Jennifer and gave her a hug.

Ryan looked at his watch and then spoke up, “Let’s brighten the day, okay? I’d rather be with two charming women right now

instead of sad ones and I think I know how to arrange it. However, why am I usually the first one who says, ‘Does anyone want to join me in a drink?’”

“If it’ll make me charming, I’ll have a scotch and soda,”

Gillian answered.

“Make that two, please,” Jennifer replied.

“Jennifer,” Ryan said with a grin, “you’re obviously feeling better. What happened to your customary red wine?”

“When an individual reaches a certain age, like the upper 20’s on onwards, hard liquor seems more appropriate,” Jennifer explained, “but then when that person reaches a certain older age, like the 60’s, it’s time to switch back to wine.”

“Okay, then, scotch and soda all round,” Ryan said.

“Jennifer, where in the world did you come up with your chronology of drinking conventions? Are you getting your jokes from *Boys Life* or *American Girl*?”

Gillian shook her head from side to side, trying to stifle a small laugh. “For heaven’s sake, Ryan, please fetch the drinks and cut the jokes; this circus doesn’t need more clowns.”

No one slept soundly that night.

“I’ll use the ‘T’ and then the bus to get me to Founders Hall,” Ryan said to Gillian. “I need to be there well before you, by 12:00 noon. Plus I don’t think it would be wise for us to be together before your lunch date with Li. There’s always the off-chance Njakatu, Li or one of his minions might see us and there goes the game, or *match* if you prefer.”

“I appreciate the language adjustment, but I’m really not nervous, scared or edgy, Ryan. Matter of fact, I’m simply as curious as anyone in our group --- Kevin, Jennifer, Carlos or Connie --- to learn what’s afoot with David’s shooting, which we know was actually the attempted murder of Jennifer.”

Ryan opened his attaché case and placed inside it the latest issues of *English Today* and *The Atlantic*; then he grabbed a paperback novel, a Jesse Stone mystery by Robert B. Parker.

These should keep me occupied during a lunch I’m not invited to, he thought to himself.

“Gilly,” Ryan called, “I’m leaving now. Call me on my cell when you’re leaving Founders Hall for home and I’ll time my leaving for home accordingly. We can’t be . . .”

“ . . .seen traveling together because Li or Njakatu might see us by some off-chance,” Gillian completed his sentence, as couples often do.

Gillian walked to Ryan who was standing by the door. She kissed him fully and seriously on the lips. “I love you Ryan.”

“I love you, too, Gilly, with every tissue and neuron in my body.”

Neither of them said anything about Gillian meeting Li for lunch and the inherent dangers.

Ryan left.

Gillian left later, but in enough time to arrive at the Ladies Salon outside the dining room so that Connie could get Gillian fitted with her mini-microphone before meeting Li.

Connie greeted her in the salon and gave her a “miked” St. George lapel pin with the its standard red cross on a white background.

They remained silent; when the pin was affixed, Connie gave Gillian a hug.

Gillian left the Ladies Salon and walked to the dining room. She stopped at the maitre’ d’s rostrum and asked a young man in a

black tuxedo about Mr. Li's table. The young man smiled and said, "Mr. Li has just this minute been seated. Please follow me."

Li stood when he saw Gillian nearing his table. The maitre'd pulled a chair from the table for Gillian; Gillian thanked him and sat in it.

"Dr. Davies, it's very good of you to meet with me," Li said. "I know you're busy and sharing some time with me makes me feel important."

Gillian smiled and said Thank You. She was, however, thinking something else, hidden by her smile. Li, you're full of bull shit. You've already been told I have no job and that I need money.

Keep smiling, she told herself.

The server came and Li ordered coffee; Gillian asked for hot tea. In rapid time, the server brought their drinks and two glasses of iced water as well. After placing their glasses on the table, their server took their lunch orders.

Li asked for eggs benedict and a Chinese cabbage salad. Gillian ordered a cup of crème of broccoli soup and a shrimp salad with blue cheese crumbles.

Their lunch conversation jumped from topic to topic as if

they were idea shopping. Then, when Gillian put the last shrimp in her mouth, she pushed her plate toward the center of the table.

“I hope everything was to your satisfaction, Dr. Davies.”

“Yes, thank you Mr. Li,” Gillian said. “The food here is quite good actually.” *Come on*, she thought to herself. Let’s get on with *it* Li, if there is an *it* you intend to talk about.

“Dr. Davies, I know you have family ties, on your father’s side, to Nigeria. Despite the vast amount of oil and other resources in Nigeria, the distribution of the rewards has been very top-heavy.”

“Yes, I’m aware of that, I’m sorry to say,” Gillian said.

“Nigeria is a virtual gold mine, black gold that is to say. It’s among the top oil-producing nations in Africa. But because of the rampant corruption at the upper administrative levels, most Nigerians continue to suffer from lack of many simple things the rest of the world takes for granted.”

“Nigeria isn’t the only nation suffering in the ways you describe,” Li offered in agreement.

“It makes me sad,” Gillian replied. “Africa served as the foundation for many aspects of culture we know today, but there have been too many other countries who have subjugated African

nations and their people over the years. I wish I were as rich as either Bill Gates or Warren Buffett. I'd give some of my billions to help the people of Africa."

"Your comments are very compassionate as well as insightful, Dr. Davies, and they are related to my reason for inviting you to lunch today."

Gillian looked at Li and wanted to say *You are* a conspirator. A slick and smooth one, you bastard, but still a conspirator.

Gillian said, "Oh really. You think I'm compassionate: You believe I'm insightful? How so?"

Li sidestepped her question. "As you may know, China has become one of the most important and most influential investors in African economic growth since the end of the Cold War in the late 60's. A large percentage of people in the US already believe that China is the world's leading economic power. Would you be at all interested in serving as an informal agent of the Beijing government?"

"What does the term *informal agent* mean?" Gillian asked.

"It means," Li answered, "that you'll work for the Beijing government, but you'll have no official title. You'll serve, as people

say, as an ambassador or an agent *without portfolio*. Further, your services to Beijing would be known to no one, and let me emphasize *no one*, except me.”

“Why are these services so secret?”

Li told Gillian about the plan. He would send her a list of academic departments at MIT; she would get a copy of the graduation program listing the PhDs to be awarded; she would e-mail to Li the titles of the dissertations each PhD recipient had completed. Li’s staff would access the dissertations, posted in the graduate school websites, or some other Internet site, and they would use the appropriate research data to strengthen China’s sphere of influence in Africa, and ultimately the world.

“With Chinese assistance African nations will better realize the economic and cultural growth you’ve said you want very much to support,” Li explained. “China will enter into contracts for oil and other natural resources with several African nations, and we will do this with no strings attached.”

“For example, we will actively support the regimes in place in the Sudan, Nigeria, Angola and Zimbabwe. Unlike the US and other western powers, we will not dictate that they concern

themselves with human rights or other forms of political decisions. We will not interfere with those choices. Indeed, as I've told you, we don't want any changes in the existing governmental structures."

"The despots need money; we need the resources. It's a win-win situation. The increased income we provide them supports the regimes in power. Their purchasing power of military weapons and other materiel grows exponentially."

"I see," Gillian said. "But what happens to the UK, and the US?"

Li replied in slow, carefully chosen words. "I don't believe I need to spell out an answer to that question, asked by one who is intelligent enough to earn a PhD from one of the UK's most influential and prestigious universities."

"Mr. Li," Gillian began, "you're asking me to guide you and your staff to the intellectual property of researchers in the US. Intellectual property: inventions, patents, trademarks and industrial designs. Do I understand you correctly?"

"Yes, I believe you do," Li answered. "We will have access to these findings through the Internet and we will be able to apply the research before anyone else."

“Mr. Li, I am a citizen of the UK; my husband is a citizen of the US. You’re asking me to compromise the national security of both countries. What you’re asking me to do is a treasonable act.”

“Not necessarily, Dr. Davies,” Li replied. “We will pay you \$20,000 US per year, the same amount we paid Thorson. All you’re doing is sending us dissertation titles from the academic departments we have earlier identified; you’re simply sending us information we’ll read because China is a part of the international guild of scholars.”

Gillian could feel her spine stiffen. Li and his servile henchmen were the ones who killed David and nearly beat Jennifer to death. And Li drapes the mantle of *scholar* over his shoulders?

Gillian reminded herself, keep smiling. These people are suffering from a severe case of corrosion of their honor, integrity and ethics, and Li disguises their malady with talk about scholars and scholarship? Keep smiling.

Gillian knew Li’s people made threatening telephone calls to Jennifer; they also beat her mercilessly, nearly to death.

There was a relatively insignificant, small fault in the sidewalk. Had Jennifer not stubbed her toe on a crack in the

sidewalk and had fallen just when they shot at her she would be dead. They attempted to assassinate Jennifer. The bullet went over her head and killed David Thorson.

Gillian was thinking while Li expounded upon her compassion for Africa and her chance to be China's *informal agent*: A rose by any other name is a *secrete agent*, an *agent* aiding and abetting a foreign country. A *traitor*.

36

Jennifer woke to a quiet apartment. She went to the kitchen, living room, and glanced in Ryan and Gillian's bedroom. No one.

She looked at her wristwatch: 11:15 a.m. Aha! She remembered Gillian's lunch with Li while Ryan waited in the office of the Founders Hall Director. If I hurry, she thought, I can make it to the Director's office well before Li arrives; none of Li's people will see me.

She showered and dressed in what she thought an MIT female student might wear: a pair of form-fitting jeans, a white tank top with a navy blue cardigan, a pair of Birkenstocks with black socks, and her backpack. When she was satisfied her costume was acceptable, she left for Founders Hall

Jennifer made good time, she thought, as she stepped into the elevator car in Founder's Hall. Which button do I push she wondered? Ryan is one floor above the dining room, but which floor is it?

"Mr. Li," Gillian said, "What do you take me for? An idiot?"

A traitor? Both to my country and my husband's?"

Li looked Gillian straight in her eyes. "I take you, Dr. Davies, at your words with Njakatu when you said you'd do anything to help the people of Nigeria and Africa."

Gillian sat for a moment looking directly at Li. "Mr. Li, I thought I was simply making social, relaxed, informal and altruistic conversation with Mr. Njakatu. I had no idea anyone would interpret our conversation as a planning session between co-conspirators in an intellectual theft strategy."

"I see. Well now, Dr. Davies," Li began, "what do we do with you now that you know about our intentions to take advantage of the lack of technological integrity of the institutional IT security in the US? What shall we do with you? You know entirely too much for *our* security."

"I'll say nothing to anyone. I'd be too embarrassed. I would be too ashamed," Gillian answered, "not even my husband will know. I'll gather up my things now and leave. Thank you for the lunch; the food was excellent."

"Sit down, Dr. Davies," Li whispered, "or I'll shoot you here and now with the gun I'm holding. It's under the table, pointed at

your belly.”

Gillian stood at the table, opposite Li, trying her best to stare him down. “Li, you bastard, screwed-up low-life,” Gillian hissed. “Do you think I’ll fall for that nonsense? You’ve seen too many 1940 Hollywood cops and robbers films.”

Li sat back in his chair and raised his right hand just about the edge of the table. He pulled the linen napkin about two inches from his hand, revealing the barrel of a nickel-plated handgun.

Gillian said loud enough for the benefit of others, “On second thought,” as she sat down in her chair, “I will have that cup of tea after all.”

Connie and Carlos, closeted away in the pantry, heard Li’s threatening tone and Gillian’s decision to remain. They looked at each other, rolled their eyes, and heaved a sigh of relief.

“We’ve got him.”

Jennifer could not remember which floor was the one above the dining room. She was nervous but she was angry with herself for being so cavalier about not listening closer to the agenda discussed in Ryan and Gillian’s apartment.

She pushed all the buttons from floor 1 through floor 6, the top level.

When the elevator stopped at every floor. Jennifer put her thumb on the *Hold Open* button, leaning as far as she could out the elevator's sliding doors to see what business or activity was underway in each corridor.

She couldn't see well at one floor, so stretched out farther from the elevator car and saw a room with Ladies Salon on the door.

Good. Lucky me, she thought, I need to pee really bad. She stepped out of the elevator car and started walking to the restroom.

Looking over Gillian's right shoulder, Li saw Jennifer. He looked at a server and yelled, "IN THE CORRIDOR. IT'S THORSON'S WOMAN!"

The server dropped his empty tray and pulled a Bersa Thunder .380 that he had placed in the small of his back, concealed by his white jacket. He pointed the small gun at Jennifer and shot her. She crumpled to the floor of the corridor.

"YOU FILTHY BASTARD," Gillian screamed as she stood from the table again. She threw her tea cup and its hot contents in Li's face and ran three or four steps toward the elevator, but Li had

time to grab his Ruger SP101 from his lap and fire one shot at Gillian. She fell lifelessly beside a dining room table.

“OKAY, LET’S GO NOW,” Carlos commanded Connie.

Carlos reached inside his right lapel and pulled his service weapon, a Smith & Wesson 40VE pistol, from its holster as he was running toward the dining room.

Carlos saw a man dressed as a waiter holding a DS-11 Colt revolver. Carlos didn’t break his stride and shot the man in the right side of his forehead; the server fell across a table, scattering dishes, silverware , broken wine glasses and blood splatters.

Connie shouted to Carlos, “IT’S LI. ON YOUR LEFT!”

Li was disappearing through the swinging kitchen doors. Carlos took aim, using both hands to steady his shot, but there were too many kitchen employees in the way so he holstered his handgun and looked back at Connie.

Connie was bending over Gillian. “Go check on Jennifer,” She called to Carlos. Then she looked up at the maitre’d who was standing near her out of morbid curiosity.

Connie shouted, “Call 911. NOW! Tell them two shooting victims, seriously wounded, possibly life threatening.”

“DO IT! NOW!”

The stunned maitre'd made his trembling way to a telephone on the wall beside the greeter's rostrum and placed a call.

Li had disappeared through a service elevator at the back of the kitchen. He rode the elevator to the delivery door on ground level and left the building as fast as he could run.

There was a black limo waiting for him.

Seeing Li, the driver got out of the car, opened a passenger door and Li jumped in. As Li pulled his door shut, the driver bounded in to the driver's seat, started the big stretch limo and accelerated with a neck-snapping jerk and squealing tires.

“Where to, Mr. Li?” the driver asked.

“Take me to Panda's Garden. I want a drink and I want to drink it in a safe place.”

Li sat in the rear seat of the limo, thinking the day wasn't a total loss. We took care of two potential snitches. Neither Dr. Davies nor Thorson's girl friend can hurt me now. They won't be talking to the authorities, neither the Boston police nor the FBI, no one, no one ever again.”

He smiled, anticipating his favorite Chinese drink, a

blueberry gin cocktail.

Sara Williams was pouring herself a cup of coffee in the acute care's Staff Lounge at Mount Auburn Hospital. She was subbing for a regular acute care nurse who was home caring for her a 9-year old and his post-tonsillectomy aches and pains.

Thank God it's been quiet today, Sara thought. It was a thought she later vowed never to make again.

She heard a banging at the double doors to her left.

"Oh, my God," Sara said as she saw two gurneys come through the swinging doors leading to acute care. "THAT'S JENNIFER MALEY . . . and that's her . . . Friend?"

"NO! IT'S GILLIAN DAVIES!"

The two hospital techs pulling and pushing Jennifer's gurney looked at Sara with upturned foreheads, their non-verbal way of asking Which room? Sara held up three fingers.

Gillian's gurney was right behind Jennifer's. Sara held up four fingers, telling the techs Gillian's room number.

One of the Mount Auburn MD's, a hospitalist, followed Gillian's gurney and veered off toward Sara at the nurses' station.

"Here are two patients we just saw in the ER. The older woman has

a bullet in her back, precariously close to the spinal cord. The younger patient has a flesh wound.”

“Thank you, Doctor,” Sara said, as the physician took a seat in front of a computer behind the counter at the nurses’ station and began writing directives for Gillian’s and Jennifer’s care.

“Good God!” the physician exclaimed. “I know this younger woman. She’s been here before. What was it? Domestic violence? A severe beating? I vaguely remember her.”

“Yes, doctor,” Sara agreed. “She’s Jennifer Maley and she was terribly beaten by some bruisers from Boston. The older woman and her husband would come to visit Jennifer on a daily basis.”

“I see,” the physician said, “Both patients will need careful monitoring, but I’m telling you what you already know, eh? Especially the older one in room 4. If the bullet should migrate to her spinal cord she’ll live but will likely be paralyzed from the waist downwards.”

An hour later Ryan came to acute care and was pleasantly surprised when he saw Sara.

“Hello Sara,” Ryan said through a tempered smile. “Didn’t you say you’d been transferred to another floor?”

“I was. I’m here in acute just temporarily subbing for a nurse who has an ailing child at home.”

“You’re being here caring for Gilly and Jennifer is a comfort to me. It will be comforting to them, too, when they regain consciousness and see you. Where are they, please?”

“Jennifer’s in 3, your wife is in 4, over there,” Jennifer said, pointing to the south side of the room.

“Could I have a cup of coffee, please?” Ryan asked Sara as he started walking toward room 4.

He must be really agitated, Sara thought, he asked for our coffee!

Ryan studied Gillian as he tip-toed into her room. He was shocked when he saw his wife. The color of her face had turned gray. There was an IV tube fixed in her left arm and an oxygen cannula inserted in her nose. An oximeter was taped in place on the first finger of her right hand. She was heavily sedated and unconscious.

Sara brought Ryan’s coffee to him.

“What’s the diagnosis?” Ryan asked, wiping tears from his face.

“Bullet in the back, dangerously close to the spinal cord. We hope the bullet remains stable. If the bullet should move . . .”

“ . . . Yes, I can imagine what would happen,” Ryan said. “I assume there’ll be surgery.”

“Yes, absolutely; the bullet has to come out ASAP. Surgery will likely be in one or two days, as long as her vital signs are good enough.”

“Can we check on Jennifer?” Ryan asked as he started to walk toward room 3.

“Of course. She has a flesh wound. Our priority with Jennifer is to be alert about an infection.”

They looked in the room to see Jennifer. Like Gillian, Jennifer was sedated, too.

It was getting darker in Cambridge. Evening was setting in. Ryan, walking toward the elevators and he heard Kevin’s voice in the echoes of his memory: *Ryan, do you think this is wise?*

The *this* in Kevin’s question was Gillian’s having a role to play in capturing Njakatu and Li.

Ryan was thinking, If I could replay and edit that conversation, my answer would be *No. It’s a terrible idea. We need*

to leave wives out of this mess.

Eggs can't be unscrambled, though. Kevin, as it turned out, had been correct and Ryan had been wrong, egregiously wrong. Using Gillian was a bad, stupid idea. Gillian's getting shot was his fault. Ryan had been wrong. He prayed he hadn't been *fatally* wrong.

Connie and Carlos were sitting in the main lobby at Mount Auburn. There were several shops around the lobby's perimeter: a flower and gift shop, a small Starbuck's coffee shop, the Volunteer Coordinator's office, and a WHSmith book store. Connie was drinking a cup of Starbuck's Italian Roast while Carlos was scrunched down in his chair with his eyes closed.

Connie nudged Carlos with her elbow and said, "Here comes Ryan, be alert." Then Connie stood up and started walking toward Ryan.

She gave Ryan a huge hug. "Ryan, how are Gillian and the Maley girl doing?"

"Jennifer will be here for a week or so," he answered. "When

they're satisfied there's no infection Jennifer can be discharged; the physician can monitor her healing on an out-patient basis."

"And Gillian?" Connie asked

Ryan took Connie by the arm and started walking toward the waiting area where Carlos was sitting. They sat on either side of him.

Ryan explained. "Gillian has a bullet in her back, dangerously close to the spinal column. The nurse is keeping her as quiet and still as she can in an attempt to stabilize the bullet. If the bullet moves a half inch, the remainder of Gillian's life will likely be in a wheel chair."

"Why did we think her Nigeria connection would make her the perfect go-between?" Carlos asked. "I feel terrible for not stepping in and putting an end this whole affair."

"At the time it seemed a logical ploy," Connie said to Carlos. "Don't beat up on yourself; the three of us allowed Gillian to begin our chase."

"Connie's right," Carlos added. "If the Maley girl hadn't shown up unexpectedly outside the dining room at Founders' Hall, we wouldn't be in the hospital tonight worrying about her and

Gillian.”

“We can talk about our next step tomorrow,” Ryan told them. “I’m ready to go home and try to get some sleep. “The three of them chatted for another two- or three-minutes, then Ryan left them. He walked haltingly to his car in the parking lot and drove home.

Ryan turned on the lights as he opened the door. The apartment was eerily quiet. He stood in the threshold, wishing for the normal, the ordinary, the mundane.

Gillian and Jennifer would call to him from the kitchen:

Hi Dr. Ryan. We’re in the kitchen.

Hello dear. How was your day?

There was no one in the kitchen. No one called. The apartment’s silence was eerie and palpable.

Ryan walked to the kitchen and opened the cabinet door to the liquor supply. He took from the shelf a bottle of Dewar’s and set it on the counter. The cabinet with the drinking glasses was the next door; he took a glass, then went to the refrigerator for his five ice cubes. Never six, never four. He poured four fingers.

He walked back to the living room, put his glass on the end table by his chair, then went to his computer to go to the site with the

streamed signal from a jazz station in Long Beach.

He sat in his chair and took a large swallow of his scotch. *Be careful*, he said to himself. *Don't go overboard with the scotch.*

Ryan realized his liquor bill had become smaller since Gillian entered his life.

I haven't needed to warn myself about liquor consumption for a long time.

God, please watch over Gillian tonight.

Please take Gillian and Jennifer under your wings.

Ryan fell asleep.

Sometime during the night Ryan woke up in his chair, went to their bedroom and fell into bed, still dressed. He woke up the next morning at 9:30, not remembering how he got to the bedroom. Walking toward the kitchen, he saw a full glass of scotch on the table beside his chair.

He smiled and with his interior voice he said, *Ryan, I'm proud of you.*

Ryan picked up the glass, took it to the kitchen and poured the contents down the drain in the sink. He poured five cups of water in the coffee machine and three scoops of the Kenya Gold Roast coffee he had discovered at the Flat Black Coffee Company in Boston.

While the coffee maker gurgled, Ryan took a shower, shaved, and toweled himself dry. He dressed in one of his week-end outfits, Cabella's trail-hiker pants, an orange nylon fishing shirt and his Sperry Topsider boat shoes.

An orange fishing shirt? *I know, I know*, he muttered, *it's loud, but I need some color in my life today.*

With random happenstance, Connie called at the same time Ryan was pouring his first cup of coffee. Ryan looked at the caller ID on his cell phone screen.

“Good morning, Connie,” Ryan’s voice crackled at his first spoken words of the day. “As if I couldn’t guess, what’s on your mind today?”

“Ryan, don’t you remember?” Connie answered. “As you were leaving the hospital last night, you said the three of us would plan our next step today.”

“Connie, you’re usually right and the agenda for this morning isn’t any different. I plan to have another cup of coffee and then go to Mount Auburn to check on Gillian.”

“I knew that would be your first agenda item,” Connie said. “Please give Gillian a hug for me. Ryan, I have an idea about our meeting.”

“I suspected that would be your first agenda item,” Ryan replied with a brief chuckle.

Connie laughed briefly, then said, “We cannot underestimate Li’s connections throughout the Boston metro area. That said, it’s absolutely imperative you, Carlos and I meet covertly. There are

several Family Conference rooms in the hospital. We'll meet in one of them. Carlos and I will call you this afternoon around 2:00 or 2:30 to let you know where you can find us in the hospital. Okay?"

"Yes, that's fine with me," Ryan replied. "That time-frame will give me more than enough time to be with Gilly."

"It's set then," Connie began to sign off. "Ryan, I'm sure you know that Gillian and Jennifer are in our prayers. See you later this afternoon and you stay well."

Their conversation was over.

Ryan went to the bedroom to gather up his wallet and car keys and put them in his pockets. Just as he was leaving the apartment, the landline telephone rang. He walked to the phone and lifted the handset.

"Ryan Graves here," he answered.

"Hello Mr. Graves. Have you scheduled the funeral for your traitorous whore-wife? We really don't want to miss the ceremony. You'll recognize us; we'll be the ones smiling."

Click.

Ryan took the elevator to the parking area beneath their

building. He fumbled for his car keys, unlocked the car doors with his remote, and then got in the car. His hand was trembling; he was barely able to insert the key to start the engine.

If anyone had asked him what he saw en route to the hospital, he couldn't have told them. He was stunned and disconcerted. He thought about pulling to the curb so that he could either cry or scream or get out of the car and beat his hand on the hood.

He kept driving, and driving. It was a long trip today.

Finally he drove into the parking lot at Mount Auburn and found a fairly convenient stall. As soon as he turned off the ignition, he pulled his cell phone from the large pocket on the right breast of his fishing shirt. He entered Connie's number.

"Martinez," Connie answered the vibrating cell phone she kept in her bra. She had learned the importance of having a phone with silent and discrete in-coming calls.

"Connie, it's Ryan. I'm in the parking lot. One of them called me as I was leaving the apartment. They know my landline number! They know where my office is! I'll wager someone followed me here!"

“They asked about Gillian’s funeral. They either think she’s dead or they’re threatening me saying she *will be* dead!”

Ryan continued, talking rapidly as a scared person might.

“Tell Carlos; ask him where there’s a safe place we can meet. I’ll stay here in my car. Before you call me back with Carlos’ suggestion, get Gillian’s status report.”

Click.

Fifteen minutes later Ryan’s cell phone rang. It was Connie. “Ryan, Gillian is stable, all of her vitals are well within normal numbers. She’s doing so well surgery’s scheduled for tomorrow morning at 6:00.”

Ryan exhaled an enormous *Thank-God* sigh. “Connie, that’s great news. Thanks. What did Carlos have to say about our meeting?”

“The three of us will separately go downtown to the Copley Square Hotel, go to the registration desk and ask for directions to the Revere Room. That’s a question we’ll ask simply to deflect inquiries from anybody following us. They might ask, ‘Where is the meeting the guy ahead of me asked about?’ ‘Sir, he’s going to the Revere Room on the 6th floor.’”

“Actually,” Carlos continued, “we all go to the 10th floor, use the skyway to the old Hancock Building. Once inside the Hancock, separately we’ll go to the 3rd floor where my cousin Bill Magoy’s law firm has offices. Go to room 312.”

“Okay,” Ryan said. “When are we doing this?”

“Right now,” Carlos answered. “Time is a luxury we don’t have. I’ll go to the Copley first, at 3:15. Connie, you’re next at the hotel at 3:35. Ryan, you go at 4:00.”

There were five of them, Li and the group of Four from Beijing, meeting in a private conference room in the Doubletree Hotel in downtown Boston. In the corridor two men stood in front of the door barring anyone’s entrance. There were two more men inside the meeting room standing in front of the door barring anyone’s exit.

“So, Mr. Li,” said Mr. Song from Beijing, “we hear there is unfinished business in Boston.”

“I believe I have taken care of that ‘business,’ as you call it. Both Dr. Gillian Davies and David Thorson’s woman were taken care of by my men in the Founders Hall dining room. I saw the women fall to the floor. They are quite dead.”

Mr. Wu from Shanghai asked, “Mr. Li, how was it possible for you to observe the deaths of these people? You were running to the kitchen at the time, we’re told, looking for an escape.

Furthermore Mr. Li, are you aware of the fact that the two women did not die? Mr. Li, are you aware of the fact that they survived and are presently recovering in the Mount Auburn Hospital?”

His mouth agape, Li could barely manage a “No, sir. I did not know that. I was certain they were dead.”

“Mr. Li, did we make an error selecting you to organize our connections in the US,” asked Mr. Chen from Yangshuo. “Is organizing the US network too big a challenge for you? The people you have selected to help you--- Ryad and Njakatu --- are definitely second-rate. Your judgments are questionable.”

“Before you attempt to answer Mr.Chen’s rhetorical question or reply to Mr. Wu’s observation about your fleeing the scene let me remind you,” said Mr. Tan from Hong Kong, “the stakes in our US venture are too high for any more bad judgments, or falsehoods, half-truths, or ineffectual excuses .”

Li stood. “Yes, sir, I understand.”

“Well then, let me remind you of another principle guiding our efforts. We have no desire to waste our time hearing your alibis. Feeble and most likely fatal alibis,” Mr. Tan said, emphasizing *fatal*.

“You don’t need to supply any answers or excuses or explanations. Your business, despite what you may have thought, is not finished and this makes us disappointed in you, extremely disappointed. So, to get to the heart of the matter.”

Tan continued. “If we are to deepen our relationships with the nations in Africa, and, in achieving that goal, magnify our international position of political and economic leadership, having knowledge of US research results before they are disseminated is absolutely essential. Do I make myself clear?”

Li, still standing, lowered his head in a slight bow, “Yes, sir.”

Mr. Song, the leader of the Group of Four from the capital offices in Beijing, spoke condescendingly to Li. “Mr. Li, the US is a big country. Not as big as China, of course, but big, nevertheless. It takes time to travel in this large country. That being the case, we want to be reasonably fair with you, because we remember the exalted position your family enjoys as a result of your ancestors’

contributions to the new China. But you, Mr. Li, unlike the older and respected members of the Li family, need a constraint, a reminder.”

“Consequently,” Mr. Song concluded, “we will meet in this place at this time three weeks from today. You will report to us that the US network is in place. If it is not, do not bother yourself to come to the meeting. You will have dishonored the Li family. Your presence will be unnecessary and your life and the lives of your immediate family will be redundant. Do you understand what I am telling you, Mr. Li?”

“Yes, I understand.”

The guards at the door stepped aside. Li stood beside his chair while the Group of Four filed out of the room, followed by the guards.

When Li was the only person left in the room, he sat down and noticed the seat of his chair was wet.

He had peed his pants.

Arriving separately as planned, Carlos, Connie and Ryan entered the Copley Square Hotel, walked to the desk to ask their decoy question, took the connection walkway, and were sitting in room 312 in the old Hancock Building. It was a conference room now for McGoy and Associates, led by William D. McGoy, Senior Partner, Carlos' cousin. The office manager had seen to it that a pot of fresh coffee and Styrofoam cups were brought in and placed on the circular table,

Carlos was finishing his second cup; Connie still had a half cup. Ryan, the last to arrive, asked for creamer for his first cup.

“What do we do now, Carlos?” Ryan asked.

“I have already arranged with the Cambridge and Boston cops to have four officers assigned to acute care at Mount Auburn to guard rooms 3 and 4. I'm sure Li has learned by now they're still alive. The ladies should be safe from any second efforts by Li, Njakatu, or any of their terrorist underlings.”

“What do you want us to do?” Connie asked Carlos.

“Let me start my answer with what Ryan's going to do, and that will answer your question.”

Carlos began to outline his idea. “This is the background story I suggest: Ryan, you and Dr. Davies share an office at MIT. She told you about her meeting with Njakatu and how excited she was to be able to assist her people in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa. Njakatu had set up a lunch meeting with his business partner, a man from China, a Mr. Li, She showed you his business card.

“The next thing you knew was that Gillian had been shot and was in the hospital. You don’t know how it happened.”

“Mr. Li’s telephone number and e-mail address were on his business card, which had been left on Dr. Davies’ desk. Since you two office mates were especially good friends, you want to meet Mr. Li to see how you can help advance Dr. Davies’ dream of helping the people of Nigeria. Connie will be your secretary who accompanies you. She’ll record what we hope will be enough tangible evidence to put Li in the Big House.”

“Connie?” Carlos asked, “is this okay with you?”

Before Connie could answer Ryan interrupted.

“Maybe I’m a chauvinist, but I don’t want Connie to accompany me to a meeting with Li. Connie is a wise person. She knows the unwritten and tacitly agreed upon rules of behavior of

academia, and organized --- and sometimes poorly organized --- crime. But her serving in any capacity that might put her in jeopardy simply won't happen."

Carlos had a frown on his brow: "Why? If Connie has the gifts and talents you attribute to her why can't she be your *secretary* as you deal with Li? It seems a logical part for her to play."

Ryan erupted. "Just like it was *logical* to use Gillian as our first contact with these guys when she met Njakatu? Sure, Carlos. It's a real humdinger of a *logical* idea! Now you tell me where in hell did our earlier *logic* put Gillian? It put her, Gillian, my wife, in a hospital bed with a .45 bullet in her back encroaching on her spine!"

Carlos held up both hands in a defensive position. "Okay, okay. We won't use Connie. But that means we'll need to wire you just like we did Gillian."

"Carlos, I have no problem with that," Ryan agreed. "Just leave Connie out of the masquerade."

They discussed the security procedures they used when Gillian met Li and agreed to the same basic plan. Connie reminded them, "Not only will we have our people as plants wherever you and Li meet; but they'll be disguised as before. And, like Gillian, you'll

wear a wire sending an audio signal to our recorder.”

“Not exactly a *wire*, as such.” Carlos added. “Gillian had a St. George’s cross lapel pin. We’ll provide you with a Pilot pen you can have clipped inside your shirt pocket. It’ll look like any Pilot pen purchased from any Office Max, but it’ll have a wireless microphone built into the retractable clicker on top of the pen.”

Carlos continued, “It’s absolutely essential we record Li’s comments, hoping we’ll get enough evidence to incriminate him and his gunmen once and for all in this international scheme.”

“My turn,” Connie said with an inward laugh. “There are many scholars in the US in both public and independent colleges and universities who have invested their careers to the discovery and clarification of the universe of knowledge.”

“No,” she added, “it’s more than a career; scholarship is a *way of life*. To have anyone from another country --- any country --- access this knowledge and use it for purposes harmful to the US is unethical, devious, and criminal. If any US citizens are complicit in these computer hackings, they’re guilty of treason. Non-citizens are guilty of grand theft, plagiarism, and espionage. ”

Ryan looked at Connie, his face delineated with respect.

“Has anyone ever accused you of not respecting the life of the mind?

No. Probably never.”

“People, it’s time to go. We’ll leave in the same order we arrived here, 15 minutes apart,” Carlos directed. “Ryan, let us know when you’ll be meeting with Li.”

“I will, of course. Now, I’m going to the hospital to see Gillian.”

In another hour Sara Williams would be off the clock. She was physically tired and emotionally drained, but that's the way life is when you nurse patients in acute care. Her shift was from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. No shift at Mount Auburn is longer than 12 hours. Research is clear: after 12 hours on duty there is greater possibility of staff mistakes.

Mistakes don't heal.

She'd had a good day, despite her fatigue. Two patients' progress was so good they had been moved to rehab. Jennifer Maley was conscious, alert and anxious to know about Gillian. Gillian was still in her induced coma and remained connected to a ventilator in order to maintain a regular breathing pattern.

At 6:00 p.m. Ryan walked through the swinging doors to acute care just as Sara was looking at her wristwatch checking the time.

Ryan nodded and gave a Thumbs Up to the four uniformed policemen standing guard outside Jennifer and Gillian's rooms. They smiled in return but didn't move an inch.

“Good evening, Sara,” Ryan greeted her in an almost chipper mood. “You’re not getting ready to leave are you?”

“No sir, Dr. Graves. Not for another 59 minutes! But who’s counting? In 59 minutes I’m out of here.”

“How are they today?” Ryan asked as he and Sara started walking toward Gillian’s room.

“Gillian seems to be doing nicely. The docs were discussing her prognosis this afternoon. She’ll be brought out of her induced coma soon, tomorrow or the day after most likely.”

“Sara, that’s wonderful news! Fantastic! You have no idea how much I miss her. She’s here in this bed; I can see her and I can touch her. I can run my fingers through her hair but we can’t talk. I want more opportunities to tell her how much I love her.”

“She’s a fortunate woman,” Sara said. “You’ll have many more chances to tell her, I’m sure.”

“Sara, I’ve been the lucky one, ever since Gillian came into my life.”

Abdel Ryad was preparing Turkish coffee. *These Americans*, he thought, *they serve only colored water*. Turkish coffee is very

distinctive. The grind is more accurately described as *crushed*. The beans are reduced to a powder, a dust almost. He added two cups of sugar to the water.

He was especially proud of his coffee cooker, once the property of his grandparents on his mother's side. It was a long-handled pot with a narrow neck about eight inches long, called an *Ibrik* in his home. He set out three small cups, smaller than espresso cups. They, too, he inherited from his wife's parents.

As he examined the top of his coffee table to make certain everything was in place he heard three knocks on his apartment door: *knock, knock, knock*. He went to the door and opened it. Li and Njakatu were standing there. Although he was expecting them, Ryad was momentarily speechless.

"Let us in, Ryad," Li said. Ryad ushered them in with a sweep of his hand.

They spent 45 minutes hearing Li's bogus report that the Group of Four from Beijing was very pleased with their progress

and his leadership. Li knew that as soon as there was a replacement for David Thorson, and both Njakatu and Ryad were gone, everything would be ideal.

Ryad had become too unstable. Njakatu too ineffective.

Li even laughed as he expressed his pleasure to both Ryad and Njakatu. They had second and third cups of the thick, sweet coffee. If it's my neck on the line, Li was thinking behind his false Cheshire cat smile. I don't require any assistance from these two inept asses.

"I need a day or two to consider our options for replacing Thorson," Li said, signaling the end of the meeting. "I'll notify both of you when we need to meet again."

Ryad excused himself and carried three dirty coffee cups to the kitchen. Li looked at Njakatu and motioned with a nod of his head toward the kitchen where Ryad was rinsing the coffee cups.

Njakatu stepped quietly and quickly to the kitchen and pulled a ceremonial dagger from a sheath looped through the back of his

belt. With his left hand, he grabbed Ryad's chin from behind, pulled it back and slit Ryad's throat with the knife in his right hand.

Ryad fell to the kitchen floor and made several gurgling sounds. A pool of blood was spreading on the floor.

Li and Njakatu walked to the door, ready to make a quiet and rapid exit from Ryad's apartment. Li looked back at Ryad's body: "He knew too much and wasn't effective; we don't need him. He was expendable."

"And so are you," Li said to Njakatu. He pulled a small and easily concealable Taurus 905 9mm snub nose revolver from his back right pocket.

"Li, what are you? . . .Don't!"

Before Njakatu could complete his question, Li shot him in the head. Njakatu fell immediately.

Li reached inside his suit coat and pulled from the inner pocket a plastic bag containing eight ounces of marijuana. He put the bag beside Njakatu. Li left the apartment, hoping he was leaving behind the appearances of a drug deal gone bad.

Njakatu will be replaced easily. Ryad had out-lived his usefulness to the project. Li was confident he could recruit Dr. Davies' officemate, Dr. Graves, to replace Thorson. I'll have a good report for the Beijing Four he told himself.

How had I ever brought such losers as Njakatu and Ryad into my circle?

He left Ryad's apartment and closed the door behind him. Li thought of his family and their safety, which seemed more assured now. He smiled.

The next morning Ryan called Li, careful to use the landline and not his cell phone. He didn't want his cell number available to Li and his people.

"Good morning Mr. Li. My name is Ryan Graves; Dr. Davies, whom you know, is my office mate."

Then Ryan repeated, almost verbatim, what Carlos had scripted for him. *Apparently I'm a better than average actor*, Ryan told himself. When all of the stuff is over, Gilly and I can become

active in community theater.

Li bought into everything because it would provide safety for him and his family. He wanted to cry with happiness when Ryan said he wanted to pick up where Dr. Davies had left off with the Nigerian development and improvement activities. After Ryan's invitation Li agreed to meet him for lunch the next day at the Chinese Garden on Mass Avenue at 12:30.

I think Dr. Davies' officemate is a genuine naif, Li said to himself. He'll serve well enough as Thorson's substitute.

Carlos and Connie met with Ryan in his small office on the MIT campus that afternoon. Visiting Professors, unless they're Nobel laureates, are often fortunate to have an office larger than a custodial closet. The roomier offices were already assigned to the permanent faculty, for whom the size and location are symbols of achievement, power and authority. A corner office with windows, having room for a desk, bookshelves, and a conference table with

chairs, was closer to heaven where the professor's omnipotent cosmic force lived, whether the cosmic entity is God or Allah or Mohammed, or Whomever

“I can't give you a suggested script to use with Li tomorrow,” Carlos said. “Play it as you hear it; this lunch will test your improv talents. Just remember one theme: we have to get Li to say more about the China/Africa connection. If you can get him to describe their computer hacking so that they can steal the research results of US scholars and doctoral students, we'll have enough to nail his balls to a tree stump and tip him backwards.”

“What would you do with her if Li were a woman??” Connie asked.

“Haven't you heard the expression 'tits in the wringer'?” Carlos asked.

Connie crossed her arms across her chest. “Ewww,” she groaned.

“People, this middle school repartee` is not only

linguistically immature but pretty boring,” Ryan said. “Can we refocus now?” Connie and Carlos snickered.

Carlos continued, “Okay. Sorry.” Connie tried to hide a smile. “When you hear a plate crashing on the floor in the kitchen, that means we have enough evidence recorded in Li’s own voice and you should get your ass out of there ASAP. Got it? Is it all clear to you?”

“Sure,” Ryan answered. “Just make damn sure I can hear a plate, or a tray of plates, broken into smithereens,”

“Don’t worry. You’ll hear it.” Carlos assured him.

Not knowing what tomorrow might bring or how it could end, Ryan knew he had to drive to Mount Auburn to check on Gillian and Jennifer's progress. These minutes could be his last with Gilly.

When he entered the double doors to acute care he saw Jennifer sitting in a wheel chair talking to the charge nurse. Both of them were holding coffee cups exactly like those in the hospital cafeteria. It was obvious they were having a pleasant chat.

"Good evening, Dr. Graves," Jennifer said, giving him a slight wave with her empty hand. She turned to the charge nurse, "this is Dr. Ryan Graves, Gillian Davies' husband."

"It's *Dr. Graves*?" the charge nurse asked.

"I'm a PhD, not an MD. Let's not play doctor," Ryan answered. "First, how's Gillian today? Next, please call me Ryan."

"She's coming along fine. As a matter of fact, I'm glad you

came. I have important and good news for you. Tomorrow morning at 8:00 the physicians will bring Gillian out of the coma.”

“That’s the best news I’ve had all day,” Ryan replied, “and I’m neither exaggerating nor being politically or socially correct. It’s the absolute truth.”

“Dr. Gr . . . Ryan, I’m glad I’m the one who could bring you the good news,” the nurse said.

Jennifer had good news, too. “I’m going home tomorrow,” she told Ryan.

“You’re going to our place aren’t you?” Ryan asked.

“Do you think I should?”

“It’s your decision,” Ryan answered. “You know you’re welcome to stay in our extra bed room for as long as you want. By the same token, though, as far as Li’s men are concerned, they think you’re dead. I believe you’ll be safe in your own apartment now.

“That’s what I’ll do then,” Jennifer said. “I miss living in my

own flat.”

“I miss my apartment,” Ryan laughed. “I’m going home and to bed. Tomorrow’s a big day.”

Ryan looked at his bedside clock the next morning: 7:15. I slept well, he thought, given everything that’s on my mind and my plate today. In 45-minutes Gillian should be conscious.

He finished shaving and showering in record time. He dressed casually putting on a pair of Levis, a white polo, Adidas sneakers, and a black blazer. He left the apartment, thinking he’d better get a good breakfast. He drove to Kylie’s Kitchen on Harvard Square.

He found a table on the large patio and when the server came he brought a thermal pot of coffee and a mug, making Ryan a happy customer. He ordered a small orange juice and an onion bagel with cream cheese and chives. When he finished his breakfast he left a tip for the server and left.

Ryan took a time-killing stroll through a bookstore, up and down all the aisles. He stopped at the mystery section and bought a Colin Dexter novel for Gillian's reading since she was going to be taken out of the induced coma this morning. She'll want to have something to read. A Brit to the core, Gillian had a strong affection for Dexter's Inspector Morse stories.

He looked at his watch: 10:18. Another two hours to fill before meeting Li. Aha, he saw a new and used CD music store. He went in and looked over the store trying to see a sign "Jazz Old and New," or some such.

He saw a sign: "New and Used Jazz CD's" and walked toward it. There were several bins and he casually began with the A's.

He found nothing of interest from A through L, so he skipped over M through R and started thumbing his way through the S's, looking for older Sinatra recordings. He hit it lucky: *Sinatra at the Sands, with Count Basie*. Arranged and Directed by Quincy Jones. He bought it for himself. I hope this discovery is a harbinger

of good things today, mainly for Gillian, somewhat for me.

He looked at his watch: 11:30. Another hour to go before the appointment with Li. Ryan decided he'd drive slowly to the Chinese Garden, as slow as the traffic on Mass Avenue would allow.

When he arrived he saw there were only three parking spots in the public lot across the street from the restaurant. Ryan coasted his car into the lot and filled one.

He took his cell phone from his blazer's inside right pocket and called acute care at Mount Auburn; the number was on his speed dial list, so he pushed just one button on his phone. He heard the number he dialed ring twice.

"Hello, Nurse Williams, Acute."

"Sara, it's Ryan Graves. What about Gillian? Do you have some good news for me?"

"Indeed I do, Doc. She's no longer in the coma and she's awake, sort of."

“Sort of?”

“Doc, she’ll return to her former clear-headed self as soon as her system recovers. Induced coma recovery time varies, depending on the individual. You have nothing to worry about, though; Gillian’s doing okay and she’ll be fine.”

“Thanks Sara. I’ll stop by later this afternoon. Oh, before I go, do you have a report about Jennifer?”

“Yes. One of the hospital vans will take her to her apartment tomorrow morning, I’d say about 8:00 or 8:30. Her flesh wound’s still sore but seems to be free from any infection.”

“That’s great, Sara. Thanks a bunch and good-bye. Later.”

Click.

Ryan reset his cell phone, turning the incoming call ring Off, replacing the ring with Vibrate, then he put his phone in the right inside pocket of his blazer. He got out of his car, locked it with his remote and walked across the street to the Chinese Garden restaurant.

The headwaiter walked briskly to greet Ryan, who told the waiter “I’m meeting another party, a Mr. Li.”

The waiter said, “Please follow me, sir,” and then he ushered Ryan to a table against the wall in the back. There was a *Reserved* sign in the middle of the table.

“Mr. Li reserved this table. It’s his favorite. He is a regular customer here. Something to drink, sir?”

“Tea will be fine, if you have it.” Ryan smiled at his own wit.

“Sir, we always have tea. This is a Chinese restaurant.”

“I know; just joking.”

The waiter walked backwards three steps, gave an obligatory bow, then turned around and started walking toward the kitchen.

“Tea if we have it’. Stupid American,” the waiter muttered.

Five minutes later a different waiter brought a porcelain teapot to the table. Ryan poured tea into his Happy Dragon cup, and took a sip. He regretted he hadn’t requested a different drink; the liquid in his cup was barely recognizable as tea, or any beverage he had previously tasted. *If Gillian tasted this tea she’d send it back and ask for dishwater since it’s cheaper*, he thought. Thinking of Gillian made him smile.

“Am I interrupting an especially happy memory? You have he smile of serenity on your face,” Li said as he approached the table.

“Yes, as a matter of fact, I was having an idea about my wife,” Ryan said, standing and extending his left hand toward Li. “You’d like her very much if you met her.”

“I’m sure I would, Dr. Graves. I think the only person we know in common is your office mate at MIT, Dr. Davies. I hear she’s had an accident.”

“True, but she seems to be recovering nicely,” Ryan replied. *You slimy bastard*, Ryan thought. *You know damn well it was no ‘accident.’ I’d like to choke you until your tongue hangs out and*

your eyes go buggy.

“I’m happy to hear that. She has an enormous interest in a project my partner and I have in mind that will promote significant financial development not only in Nigeria, but other African nations as well. We were pleased more than you can imagine that you are willing and dedicated to assuming Dr. Davies’ role in our project.”

Ryan’s mind was racing. *Protect Gillian’s identity*, he warned himself. *Act green, but not stupid. Convey motivation to assume Gillian’s part in the project.* Most of all, *don’t tip your hand by asking questions like an attorney would in court.*

“Yes, I’m fully committed to do whatever it was that Dr. Davies had pledged to carry out. But, Mr. Li, you’ll need to bring me up to speed. Dr. Davies didn’t share any details with me.”

The second waiter returned to the table. “Will you have your regular lunch, Mr. Li? The waiter asked.

“Of course.

And you, sir?” the waiter turned to Ryan.

“I’d like two egg rolls, a cup of wonton soup, orange chicken and rice.”

“The rice? Steamed or fried?”

“Steamed please.”

The second waiter was as ill mannered as the first. Ryan wondered if all the service staff were as gloomy as the first wo, or are they hard faced because either I’m with Li or because Li is with an Anglo-European? I’ll never be here again. Don’t worry about it, Ryan thought.

Ryan reminded Li, “You were about to provide some details.”

“Yes, “ Li said. “Allow me to give you some background. Since the end of what you Westerners call the Cold War, China’s international agenda has become less ideological and more practical, emphasizing trade, cooperative business enterprises, and energy resources. This has been a successful refocusing for us. In the last 15-20 years the Chinese economy has been growing at almost double-digit rates every year.”

“That’s an impressive record,” Ryan said, “but how does it relate to Nigeria in particular and Africa generally?”

“A very good question Dr. Graves. About one-fourth of China's oil imports currently come from Africa, largely from Nigeria, Sudan, Zimbabwe and Angola . Furthermore, African

dictatorships regularly buy weapons and military equipment from China.

“I see,” Ryan said. “But what was Dr. Davies going to do? You’ve given me some general notions about China’s economic history, which is amazing by the way”

A third waiter, a pleasant and attractive Chinese woman with large breasts brought their food from the kitchen and correctly matched the orders with the person who asked for it. Her presence didn’t stop Li.

“Our first commitment,” Li began, “is to protect China’s business relationships in Africa. We must not --- perhaps *will not* is more emphatic --- allow the US, or the UK or any other European countries stand in our way.”

“That’s strong language,” Mr. Li. “How was Dr. Davies going to support you?”

Li described how doctoral dissertations in all areas of engineering, geology and economics, “to name a few,” would be identified from graduation printed programs for a centralized office of Chinese computer stars who would then hack their way into the dissertations and steal the data long before they became public in

more traditional venues.

“Do you have any questions Dr. Graves?” Li asked.

“Hmmm,” Ryan grunted and then picked up his cup took a sip of the wretched tea. It was a stalling technique he used to give him time to think. “Yes, I have a question or two . . .”

Ryan could feel his cell phone silently vibrate “Before we have a Q & A session, I hope you’ll excuse me while I go to the Men’s room?”

“Certainly. Take the door behind the last booth on your right.”

“Thank you.”

Ryan got up from the table and walked to the rear of the restaurant. He opened the toilet door, went in and heard a crash of dinnerware dropped to the floor.

Carlos had the information necessary to indict and convict Mr. Li!

Ryan replayed his mental recording of Carlos’ last words to him: When you hear the crash of dropped plates in you “should get your ass out of there ASAP.”

Ryan pulled his cell phone out of his blazer pocket. He read

on the phone's screen, "1 missed call." He didn't recognize the number. He pushed the recall button nevertheless, thinking he missed call might be from either Carlos or Connie.

"Hello," the voice on the receiving end of the call said," this is acute care, Mount Auburn Hospital. Nurse Ava Madison speaking."

Ryan's heart rate tripled; is it about Gillian? No! Oh, my God! No! It can't be!

"My name is Ryan Graves. Someone at this number tried to call me three or four minutes ago."

"One moment, please," the cool and detached Ava Madison said.

Ryan stood in the Men's room, trying to imagine what could or might have happened to Gillian. She was conscious today. Maybe she remembered an important detail. Maybe she had a relapse. Maybe . . .

"Dr. Graves it's Sara Williams," she cried and gasped. "I'm the one who tried just a minute ago to talk to you on your cell."

"What's up, Sara? Is it Gillian?"

"No. Not Gillian. It's Jennifer. Poor Jennifer!"

Sara was sobbing; Ryan knew bad news was about to smack him in the face.

It's Jennifer. Jennifer Maley. She's dead."

"Sara," Ryan said firmly, "stop for a minute. Sit down.

Inhale deeply through your nose. Exhale through your mouth.

Jennifer died because of complications from of a flesh wound? Is that what you're saying? That's unbelievable!"

Sara, still breathing heavily with an erratic pattern said, "No. No. It wasn't her shoulder wound. Someone shot her in the back of her head, execution style."

"Sara, is Gillian okay?"

"Yes, emotionally she's distraught over Jennifer's assassination, but physically she doing okay."

"I'll be there as fast as the traffic will allow," Ryan said.

“I’m sorry Mr. Li but I need to leave,” Ryan said when he returned to their lunch table. “The department secretary called me regarding some urgent business while I was in the Men’s room; cell phones deprive us of privacy at awkward moments. “

“Yes, they certainly do,” Li said. Oddly, he asked nothing about the call from the departmental secretary; he didn’t say anything like I hope it’s not bad news or I hope it isn’t serious.

“I understand,” Li said in a matter of fact voice. “Perhaps another time I can fill you in on more details.”

“Thanks for understanding,” Ryan said over his shoulder as he started his double-time walk out of the Chinese Garden and across the street to his car.

The traffic was *moderately* heavy, which means to Bostonians only that cars aren’t bumper to bumper. Ryan arrived at the hospital 45 minutes after he left Li in the restaurant.

He raced to the bank of elevators, pushed the Up button and the doors of an empty car slid open. The 10-second ride seemed an eternity.

Ryan leapt out of the elevator car and hurried through the

double doors. Sara was nowhere to be seen. A nurse in traditional dress greeted Ryan: white dress, white leather shoes rather than sneakers, Crocs or Birkenstocks and even a nurse's cap!

"May I help you sir," the unsmiling nurse said in a detached voice.

"You must be Ava Madison. I'm Ryan Graves. I talked to you about 45 minutes ago. Gillian Davies is my wife. Where is Sara?"

"Those are a great deal of topics in just one breath," Ava Madison said with one peaked eyebrow and an S-shaped smile.

You arrogant bitch, Ryan thought. There's been a murder in this suite, one of your nurses is nearing a melt-down, and my wife is in a room waiting for surgery because some bastard shot her in the back. And you're mocking me?

"I'm going to my wife's room. Before I leave I'll want to know about Sara."

Ryan turned in a military-style about face and walked to Gillian's room, pulled back the privacy curtain, and saw a smiling Gillian.

"I overheard your conversation with the Wicked Witch of the

West, Are you wearing red shoes?" Gillian said weakly.

Ryan was bending over her bed to give her a hug and kiss, as best he could despite all the invasive attachments she still had plugged into her body.

"Gillian, I love you so much. You'll never know how happy I was when Sara told me you were fine. It was equally sad to hear about poor Jennifer."

"I know; it's tragic. Her living in the US turned out to be the exact opposite of what she'd dreamed of."

There was a rustle of the privacy curtain as Carlos and Connie came into the room.

"One of our agents standing guard here called me to report about the shooting," Carlos answered the question displayed on Ryan's face, Carlos, how did you know to come here?

"Carlos, what happened?" Ryan voiced his question this time.

"It seems a female person wearing white slacks, sneakers, and a white lab coat came to Jennifer's room. On the right breast of the lab coat was 'Mount Auburn Laboratory.' On the left breast a name was written cursively in red thread. My men couldn't read the

name.”

“She told them as she walked by them into the room. ‘I’m from the lab; here for a blood draw.’”

She was carrying one of those little tool-boxes people from the lab carry with them. A pistol with a silencer must have been stashed in the tool-box or in the small of her back.

Gillian added, “No one would think to stop a phlebotomist from the lab.”

“You think not?” Carlos said. “I’m sorry, Gillian, but only green or totally incompetent cops or agents would allow anyone, regardless of the clothes they were wearing, to enter the room of someone who’s being guarded! Hell, the shooter wasn’t even wearing one of those plastic photo-ID cards clipped to her lapel!”

Carlos was steamed. “I don’t know what BPD or CPD will do, but the two FBI agents are on unpaid, indefinite leave as of an hour ago!”

“I’m not sure that’s enough, Carlos,” Ryan said, seething. “Public castration wouldn’t be severe enough. It could have been Gillian; you know that and I know that,” he spat out.

Ryan took Gillian’s hand and gave it a squeeze. She asked no

one in particular, “What can we do for Jennifer now?”

Connie patted Gillian’s shoulder. “Gillian, in the next day or two you have surgery scheduled to remove the bullet. You don’t need another straw on your camel’s back. Why don’t Ryan and I make arrangements for Jennifer’s memorial service; we’ll do fine.”

In a weak voice Gillian replied, “You’re right, Connie. You and Ryan do what you know is appropriate for her.”

Jennifer’s memorial service was held two days later in the non-denominational chapel on the first floor of the hospital. All but one member of the Department of Economics attended.

Graduate students from the department and the GSA leadership were there.

Sara Williams and Ava Madison were there, both very tearful.

Several staff from the School of Science who knew both Gillian and Jennifer were there.

Kevin and Carolyn Harmon came all the way from Columbus.

Connie began the service by reading Romans 8:31-39 from

The Message, a Bible translation in contemporary language.

“So, what do you think? With God on our side like this, how can we lose?”

Ryan spoke about Jennifer’s reinventing herself as an American, her sense of humor, her living with him and Gillian as their daughter, and her contributions to their quality of life.

Carlos read a benedictory selection, also taken from *The Message*: Revelation 21:1-5. “Death is gone for good – tears gone – crying gone –pain gone.”

After the service Ryan invited the Harmons, Connie and Carlos to join him at Mount Auburn to give Gillian a report on Jennifer’s service. The Harmons had a flight to Columbus in two hours and excused themselves from the hospital visit.

“Give Gillian our love and tell her we pray for her rapid recovery,” Carolyn said.

Carolyn gave Ryan a hug and a kiss on his cheek. “Ryan, take care of yourself,” she said.

“I’ll see you within the month,” Kevin said, shaking Ryan’s hand.

Carlos and Connie decided it would be more appropriate if

Ryan visited Gillian by himself; Since Jennifer was as close to them as a blood relative, Gillian and Ryan needed family time together, just the two of them.

Consequently, only Ryan went to the hospital. He sat on the edge of Gillian's bed, held her hand and told her about the large number of people who were there. Connie and Carlos read the scriptures. Sara and Ava were there. It was a fitting tribute and celebration of Jennifer's life.

Ryan was still holding Gillian's hand. They prayed silently, at his bidding, in honor of Jennifer's spirit. Tears were flowing down their cheeks.

Two days later Gillian had surgery to remove the bullet from her back. It was a delicate challenge for the surgeons because the bullet was so close to her spinal cord.

The operation was understandably time-consuming, but after six hours the surgeons had removed the bullet. Gillian was taken to the recovery room where Ryan was sitting in a chair beside her bed. He looked up from his reading and smiled.

The surgeons left to take a shower.

Two days after the surgery, the physical therapists had Gillian up and out of bed, practicing her walking with a therapeutic walker designed to rebuild back, leg and arm muscles with each step. She didn't walk more than two steps the first day; after six days, she was walking 20 steps.

Whether Gillian was in bed, sitting for 15 minutes in a chair or using her walker in the corridor, there were two BPD uniforms and two FBI field agents posted to protect her, two in her room, two at the door, or two walking in front of her and two walking behind her.

Gillian was protected 24/7. Jennifer had been senselessly

killed because of the *possibility* that she knew too much. How much Gillian actually knew no one could say, but there clearly was the *possibility* that she also knew too much.

Thinking of *possibilities* and its semantic cousin *assumptions*, Li, and his goons made Gillian's safety a continuing concern for Ryan and the authorities.

The new officers had enormous responsibilities; a woman disguised as a "lab phlebotomist" while their colleagues were, supposedly, on post, had assassinated the young woman in room 3. They could not let this happen again. The newspapers, radio and TV stations had a field day with "Hospital Killing Under Officers' Noses."

Carlos told them, "If anything happens to Dr. Davies in room 4 while you are on watch I'll punish all of you in ways that will make your curse your mothers for having birthed you. Do I make myself clear?"

The four officers nodded *Yes*, not particularly eager to say anything.

One week later Ryan, Connie and Carlos were having dinner

at the Texas Roadhouse Restaurant. Before dinner Connie had her Dubonnet, Carlos said to the server “una cerveza Tecate, por favor,” and Ryan asked for a double scotch and soda. They scanned the menu.

Connie suggested they order the Texas Family entrée for three so that all of them could enjoy everything: the steak, the sausage, the brisket, and baked potatoes with numerous toppings.

The server carried to their table a tray with their drinks and three plates. Behind him were three more servers, each one carrying a heavily laden plate.

Ryan said. “I’ll have a Heineken with my meal.

Connie joined him. “That sounds good. I’ll have a Heineken too.”

Carlos asked for another cerveza Tecate, “I need to maintain my ethnic identity, you know,” he said to nobody in particular.

Ryan began the after dinner conversation with a question to Carlos: “When do we move on Li? My classes begin in 21 days and I need to take Gillian home, assuming she continues to improve at her remarkable rate, while I try to prepare for the fall semester.”

“We’ve given Li a week to worry about how much Gillian

remembers from her conversation with Njakatu,” Carlos replied. Planning and arranging Jennifer’s service delayed us a couple of days, but I don’t think that has put Li’s arrest and indictment in jeopardy.”

“How do we find these guys?” Connie asked. They aren’t listed in any of the area telephone directories. . . .”

Ryan smiled and broke in, “Here’s where I help. Gillian left Li’s business card in my office. I have his telephone number. I can call him like I did earlier and set up a meeting with him. I’ll tell him how we can help him hang the computer hacking for the China/Africa project on the head of his dead buddy Njakatu.”

“How, Ryan?” Connie said. “How do you plan to frame Njakatu?”

“Hell, Connie, I don’t have a plan and it really doesn’t matter because I don’t need one. I’ll suggest he and I meet for lunch at one of his favorite hangouts and when he shows, Carlos, his agents and the BPD will nail him at the front door.”

“Sounds simple. Sounds okay.” Carlos and Connie said in unison.

“One more thing we need to consider,” Ryan warned. “Li is

seldom alone; he'll either have a couple of his guns traveling with him or they'll be waiting inside the restaurant disguised as employees.

Carlos looked at Connie then turned to Ryan. "The entrance, the dining room and the restaurant's kitchen will be covered like paint. Ryan, don't worry."

"Like your people covered Jennifer's room? You tell me I shouldn't worry that my ass is going to be hanging out? Jennifer didn't worry, either."

"Not our proudest moment."

Connie put her hand on Ryan's left arm. "We're all still grieving Jennifer's death, Ryan. I don't want to sound smarmy, but it's time for us concentrate on doing all we can to protect the integrity of research universities in this country and find newer ways to deliver aid to developing countries, starting with Africa. What we're going to do to nail Li's butt on the barn door. I don't know that will put an end to their stealing research data from universities, but it'll put a crimp in their style and slow them down. Moreover, that's what Jennifer would want. She'd want us to catch Li for her and for David, too."

“Okay,” Ryan replied. “Let’s do this.”

“Hello, Mr. Li,” Ryan greeted Li when he answered his telephone. “Ryan Graves here.”

“What do you want Graves?”

“You need my help. I know you’re in trouble with the people you work for,” Ryan guessed.

“How do you know this?”

“I can’t remember. I think it was David Thorson who told me. No, that’s not correct. It wasn’t Jennifer Mayle; I’m sorry, Li, I just don’t remember who told me.”

“Why did you call me?”

“I’ve already told you. You’re in trouble with your higher-ups; you need my help. We need to talk about this face-to-face. You pick the time and place.”

Li took a couple of minutes to consider the best option for a place to meet, a place where his men could stand by.

“Li. Are you still on the line?”

“Yes, I’m still here. All right Graves, we’ll meet at 11:00 day after tomorrow morning at the Andala Coffee House, corner of Mass

Avenue and River Street.

“What about Njakatu?” Ryan Asked. “Will he meet with us?”

“No. I’m sorry but Mr. Njakatu won’t be available to join us. He was called home on a family matter you see.”

Somebody just added cornstarch to this plot, Ryan thought. It has thickened a lot. It makes no sense for Njakatu to not join us; he was, after all, the prime recruiter. In this project, he was the Africa to Li’s China. Njakatu was more likely at the bottom of the Charles River or in a casket. He’s most unlikely to be in the coach section of an Air Nigeria 737.

The more Ryan thought about Njakatu’s absence, his meeting with Li became all the more dangerous.

Andala Coffee House has a superb product served in an excellent location. The different grinds of coffee are excellent. Faculty meet at Andala with their colleagues for discussions of research, visiting scholars, general lectures about current events and other major areas of inquiry in the academy, like campus politics,

It's also a place where people go who want to be associated with the best and brightest. Their motivation is purely adolescent: identity through association. The Andala is always busy because MIT has a large faculty and many students.

Ryan met Connie and Carlos later that afternoon to plan Ryan's meeting with Li tomorrow morning. They met at the Andala; it was an on-site planning session.

Ryan began their meeting. "Can you get some of your agents and BPD cops inside the coffee house?"

"No problem," Carlos replied. "But they won't be disguised as staff. They'll look like ordinary customers, faculty and students."

Connie smiled as she concocted her comment, "Do you really think the BPD and the FBI have enough agents and cops who have beards and wear Birkenstocks to blend in?"

Ryan laughed. “They sound like the faculty and the students on my campus in Columbus.”

The initial look on Carlos’ face melted into a smile. “If it becomes necessary we’ll have the Boston University Theater Department apply beards, but only for the men, not the women.”

“Chauvinist pig,” Connie laughed.

“The Chief will buy the sandals I hope,” Carlos said. “We’ll have eight people inside talking and drinking coffee. There’ll be four street people hanging out on the corner of River and Mass Avenue. They’ll be only 20 feet from the entrance. All 12, inside and outside, will be armed and will have license to shoot as needed, no command to fire will be necessary.”

Ryan was shaking his head in wonder, with a wrinkled brow. “Do you think I should carry a weapon, maybe a small pistol, in my pocket?”

“HELL NO,” Carlos answered emphatically. “You have no experience with guns and you’d probably shoot yourself in your balls. How would we explain that kind of injury to Gillian? ‘Sorry, Gillian. Ryan just gelded himself with a .22 caliber hand gun.’”

Connie laughed so hard she almost fell out of her chair.

“Ryan, Carlos is right. Just let yourself be . . .”

“ . . . I know, I know, just let myself be the bait,” Ryan interrupted. “I still think I should be armed in some way.”

“If we give you any kind of weapon it’ll be a Daisy BB gun with Red Ryder’s face etched on the stock,” Carlos said.

Connie thought this was funny, too, and laughed harder than before.

“Okay, Whoopi Goldberg, are you going to sit across the street thinking up comedy lines?” Ryan asked.

“I’m sorry, Ryan,” Connie said, “I think my laughter is a defense mechanism. Everything has become so tense, and the circumstances involving you with Li are so dangerous, what should I do? Cry? Shave my head? Sacrifice a goat? That wouldn’t help anyone.”

“No harm, no foul,” Ryan said. “I’m sorry. But seriously, Connie, what will you be doing day after tomorrow?”

“Oh, I don’t now,” Connie replied. “I’ll probably do my regular routine, you know, watch soap operas on TV and eat chocolate bon bons.”

“They aren’t *soap operas* anymore, Connie,” Ryan corrected

her, “their reinvention is *daytime dramas*, as if the name change brings greater integrity to them. But remember your Shakespeare: a rose by any other name. Daytime dramas are still emotional and mental dumpsters.” Now, it was Ryan’s turn to laugh.

“Ryan, you elite academician,” Connie roared back laughing, “I was only joking.”

“Oh, really?” Ryan said in a parody of condescension.

“Yes, really, I was joking,” Connie said. “I never eat chocolate bon bons when I’m watching daytime dramas.”

The three of them had a good, hearty, therapeutic laugh!

“I’m hungry,” Carlos said, wiping the laughter tears from his face. “Anyone for a bite to eat.”

“Absolutely,” Connie answered. “Where?”

“I can’t go,” Ryan declined. “I’m going to the hospital to see Gillian.”

“Connie, let’s go to the Maria Bonita Restaurant. I’ve heard excellent comments about it from my *amigos* in BPD.”

The three of them stood and then started walking to the door.

Carlos asked Ryan, “Should we meet tomorrow night at your place just to review where we are?”

Ryan and Connie both thought it was a good idea. “Sure, tomorrow night,” Connie said. Ryan added, “7:00 at my place.”

Ryan elbowed his way through the double doors leading to acute care. He saw two BPD uniforms standing on either side of the door. He nodded to each man as he went through the door to room 4. He pulled back the privacy curtain; Gillian had the head of her bed cranked up in a position better suited for reading. She was reading *The Last Bus to Woodstock*, the Colin Dexter mystery he had bought for her hospital reading.

A man and a woman dressed in casual clothes --- jeans, Harvard sweatshirts and sneakers --- were sitting on either side of the bed. The FBI plants.

Gillian looked up when she heard the swish of the privacy curtain.

Ryan came into the room, smiled broadly and asked, “First, how do you feel today, and second, is Inspector Morse about to catch the killer?”

“In that order . . . First, yes I’m feeling wonderful. Second, no, not yet, but I’m fairly certain he will by the last page,” Gillian

answered, putting the novel in her lap and holding up her arms to receive Ryan's hug.

Ryan gave her a tender hug and then a kiss. He stepped back one pace from Gillian's bed.

"How've you been Professor Graves? Are Li and his cohorts in jail?"

"No, but let me say first how good your color is. You look like the youngster I first met in Philadelphia at the linguistics convention, which is to say, *fantastic!*

"Don't blow smoke in my face or elsewhere in my anatomy, Ryan. What's up with Li?"

"Don't worry about Li. He'll get his, and soon."

Gillian frowned. "I'm not worried about Li. You needn't caution me, you silly sausage. It's you I worry about."

"I know. I'm sorry to be evasive. Li will be arrested in the next day or so, if everything goes according to plan."

"I'm not going to ask you a question with an answer I already know or I don't want to hear and then get my knickers in a wad," Gillian said. "I worry about you enough already."

"That's fine with me," Ryan said, "although I wouldn't mind

helping you untangle your knickers.”

“Please don’t joke, Ryan. I worry because I remember what happened to David and Jennifer all too well. I shouldn’t want Connie or Carlos to come through that door,” Gillian said nodding toward the door, “and tell me, ‘Gillian, there’s bad news.’”

“I’ll be careful. I’d be mad as hell if anybody caused either of us to miss the other one. I’m going now, hoping you’ll get a good sleep. We need to plan our trip to Columbus, you know.”

He reached down and kissed Gillian. “I’ll see you tomorrow,” he said.

“You’d better.”

Ryan was at the hospital at 9:00 the next morning. Gillian was still asleep.

“She had a restless night,” Ava Madison reported, “so at 11:45 I gave her a muscle relaxer and a sleeping tablet. She might not wake for a while.

Ryan nodded his head up and down. “I’m not surprised she didn’t sleep well; I imagine I’m part of her insomnia problem.” He didn’t elaborate.

Nurse Madison offered Ryan a cup of coffee. Yes, he said. He finished his coffee, gave his compliments to Ava, and then he went home.

He frittered away the rest of the day. He drank a couple of cups of Gillian’s tea, tried to read from a *New Yorker*, watched some newscasts on MSNBC-TV, looked at part of a Cincinnati-Cardinals baseball game on TV but napped through six innings.

Around 3:30 that afternoon he fried a hamburger patty and toasted two slices of whole-wheat bread. When he assembled his sandwich he put Dijon mustard on both pieces of the whole-wheat

toast, put a substantial slice of Stilton cheese on one piece of toast and a slice of red onion on the other.

He took his first bite and was in self-centered awe of his gourmand abilities. This is one great sandwich! If Li or one of his guns takes me down tomorrow, I want to remember this sandwich, he thought, in case St. Peter should ask about my culinary skills, or what's wrong with my breath!

Carlos and Connie weren't expected until later this evening. Ryan looked at his wrist and saw 4:45 on his watch. He called both of them and suggested they come now. "I'm getting a little edgy," he confessed.

Connie arrived at 5:15; Carlos at 5:35. They reviewed the plans they had created yesterday and they decided their strategy would be effective.

They chatted about the cops and agents who would be stationed outside and inside the Andala Coffee House. Two cops and two agents would be outside, near the entrance, dressed appropriately in undercover clothing.

Inside there would be two men at a table near the entrance and two more men at a table by the large display window. There

were two more at a table in the rear of the dining room near the kitchen.

“Ryan, you’ll be seated with the two guys at the big window; when Li approaches the front door, you go meet him. That’s when we cuff him. If something goes bad and shooting seems inevitable, get on your stomach! Remember, my people have orders to ‘fire at will,’”

“Okay, I understand.” Ryan said. “It seems we’ve finished our business. Coffee, tea or something stronger?”

“Neither. Nothing for me,” Connie and Carlos answered simultaneously.

Both of them stood, preparing to leave. “I’ll save my ‘something stronger’ for tomorrow after we’ve nailed Li,” Carlos said.

Connie laughed. “I’ll buy.”

The next morning Ryan made an early 7:00 trip to the hospital.

“I’m happy to see you, early better than late,” Gillian said, with more enthusiasm than yesterday. “Do you have a breakfast

meeting? Something else that gets you up and around at an early hour?"

“Oh, nothing really important, I’d say. It’s just . . . uh . . . business . . . you know, boring academic stuff.”

Ryan bent over and kissed Gillian. “I wanted to tell you before today’s agenda takes control of my life how much I love you.”

He kissed her again, and then stood up.

“I’ll stop by the hospital later today. Till then, keep recovering. I love you,” And then Ryan left the room.

Gillian had tears in her eyes five seconds after Ryan’s departure; she knew Ryan was evading her questions. A wife knows these things. He was involved in something, something dangerous with Carlos and Connie. He had come to the hospital in case he might never see her again.

It was his *Good-bye* to her in case a *Good-bye* event should happen.

Ryan saw a Starbuck’s coffee shop a couple of blocks ahead on his right. He drove into the parking lot and found a space beside

the building in the shade. *It's going to be a hot one today*, Ryan told himself. Then he laughed. *How many uses of "hot" are you alluding to?*

He entered the coffee shop, looked around the room. He saw Connie and Carlos sitting at a table for four. He walked toward their table. Both Carlos and Connie looked up, sensing another's presence.

Connie smiled at Ryan and spoke first. "This is a major coincidence. I had no idea distinguished professors on sabbatical got up at this time of day."

Ryan said nothing, but stood beside their table, smiling and nodding his head up and down.

Ryan looked at Carlos. "Okay Mr. FBI guy, it's your turn to belittle a poor scholar who can't afford to buy his ailing wife a new pair of shoes."

"Please," Carlos groaned, "spare us the story of your high-minded yet pitiful career and existence." Carlos pulled out one of the available chairs. "Here you go big guy, grab a chair and welcome aboard the Crazy Train! Have a seat."

While the three of them laughed at Carlos' humor, it was

obvious their laughter was forced. All of them were thinking about Ryan's appointment with Li this morning at 11:00.

Connie wondered aloud, "Why in God's name am I even here this morning. I'm not a cop; I'm not employed by the FBI, CIA or NSA. I work for a scholarly association. Our members create knowledge, and then disseminate it through our teaching, public service and publications. The only arrest I've made --- *arrest* as in *cease* and *desist* --- was Gary Stoltz when he put his hand in my crotch while we were watching a DVD in American History class in high school."

"What did you do?" Carlos asked.

"I grabbed his wrist and pulled his hand away."

"Not Mr. Right, huh?" Ryan asked.

"Oh, no. Gary turned out to be Mr. Everything Right. He was handsome enough to be on the cover of *Gentleman's Quarterly*. He was from a well-respected family, an all around athlete, went to Princeton and then to Harvard Law."

"Why'd you let him go?" Carlos asked.

"I have several politically correct answers --- my Girl Scout and Methodist virtues and all that kind of stuff --- but actually there

are only two: First, being naïve, I was scared about what the next step might be. I had no ideas about petting.”

“Second; I realized 5-6 years later, I was stupid. I’ve regretted that first arrest many times!”

Connie’s self-deprecation created another round of forced laughter.

Ryan looked at his watch: 9:45. “I think we have time for another cup. Anyone interested?”

Carlos thought for a minute. “If we leave now, we’ll arrive at the Andala Coffee House between 10:15 and 10:30. I’d rather be sooner than later.”

“I agree. Let’s go,” Connie was ready.

Ryan entered the coffee house at 10:35 and surveyed the room. He saw what anyone would expect to see in a big city coffee shop near a college campus: business types, university students and a scattering of faculty, no doubt. One table seated four hospital workers still in their green scrubs.

He didn't see anyone who looked like an officer of the law: no police uniforms; no FBI black suits, white shirts and solid colored, yet muted ties.

Nor was there anyone wearing a deer-stalker cap.
Elementary, my dear Graves.

Ryan turned to his left and saw two men sitting by the large display window at a table for four. One in khakis and a navy blue turtleneck, the other in British tan corduroys and a green Henley sweater.

He walked toward the table. When he was beside it the two men stood, speaking simultaneously, pretending they had been waiting for him.

“Dr. Graves it's good to see you again.”

“Welcome to Boston, Professor Graves.”

One of the men pulled out a chair with its back to the door.

“I can signal you when Li is about to enter the place,” green sweater whispered.

They sat for only fifteen minutes but Ryan was certain it was an hour or more. His feet were sweating. He had an urge to pee.

Blue turtleneck murmured you softly, “It’s Li. He’s alone.”

Ryan stood and walked toward the entrance to welcome Li. according to plan. Li saw Ryan through the half-glass door and smiled at Ryan with a royal wave, a twist in the wrist.

“RYAN! BEHIND YOU!”

Ryan turned to locate the voice. It was Connie standing at a table toward the back of the shop. A man was standing four tables away from her wearing a three-piece business suit; he had been startled by Connie’s warning yell and shot at her. She fell to the floor hard.

Blue turtleneck drew a pistol from the small of his back at shot at the man who shot Connie. Ryan saw blood spurt from the man’s throat.

People were scrambling to get on the floor and underneath their tables. There were screams of fright.

“Call the police!”

“This man’s dead!”

“Somebody help this woman.”

“Get down! Get down!”

“Holy mother of Christ!”

Ryan looked back at the entrance and saw Carlos atop Li who was spread-eagled on the sidewalk. Carlos was pulling Li’s arms behind his back.

Two men in the back of the coffee shop took off their windbreakers, showing their BPD uniform shirts and badges. They walked round the shop and tried to restore order and assure the patrons everything was okay. Two men wearing jeans, sneakers and MIT sweatshirts came through the front door and tried to settle the crowd.

Ryan rushed to the back of the room to determine the degree of Connie’s wound. She sat up holding her right shoulder. “You’re going to help me learn how to do things with my left hand,” she joked. “At least for a while. This isn’t too serious, I don’t think. It’s a flesh wound.”

Ryan helped her to her feet. Connie reached for a chair and

sat down. Ryan patted Connie on her good shoulder and went to the front door. He saw Carlos shutting the rear door of an unmarked car; Li was in the back seat beside a man in a black suit. Two more men in black suits sat in the front seats.

Carlos looked up from shutting the car door and saw Ryan coming out the front door. “We’ve got him now! Ryan, the US government appreciates all you’ve done to help apprehend this bastard.”

“Carlos, don’t blow smoke up my butt and speak for the US government,” Ryan laughed. “These days the only constructive thing that comes out of DC are either social security checks to retired people or Washington Nationals baseball scores. However, I’m glad I was able to help *you*, Carlos. And Connie, you too.”

“I’m leaving for the hospital. I’m ready to see Gillian.”

Ryan pushed open the double doors leading to acute care. He glanced at the nurses’ stations in the middle of the 5-room suite and saw Sara Williams.

“Good afternoon, Sara,” Ryan said, “are you running the place all by yourself today?”

“No, Ava’s on duty, too, but she’s down in x-ray; they can’t seem to find two of Gillian’s pictures.”

“How is she today?”

“Follow me, please.” Sara started walking toward Gillian’s room with Ryan two steps behind her.

Sara stopped in the doorway and knocked three times.

“Gillian, you have a visitor.”

Ryan peeked around Sara’s shoulder and saw Gillian sitting in one of those bigger than life recovery chairs; she was still reading the Inspector Morse novel he had bought for her. Sensing Sara’s presence, Gillian looked up from her reading and put the novel in her lap,

“Ryan! Oh, my god, Ryan!” Gillian shouted. “Come here and give us a hug!”

Ryan stepped around Sara, walked to Gillian and bent down. He put his left arm around her and placed on her lips a juicy, open mouth kiss that would surpass any kiss between long-lost lovers on a *daytime drama*. His tongue found hers.

The kiss lingered until Ryan stood. “Just let me look at you: sitting here, reading. You’re looking like my Gillian again. I’m

ready for us to return to Columbus and resume a duller existence: teaching, writing, eating, cooking. You may not know it but I have a license to grill.”

Gillian groaned. “Oh, no. Not another James Bond joke, please. You’re as anxious to return to Columbus, as am I, Ryan my love; so am I, as soon as possible. As a matter of fact, I’m feeling remarkably fit.”

Ryan couldn’t ignore her use of *fit* and despite himself he laughed. “Gilly! You think you’re *fit*? Have you ever seen a 75-year-old black woman dance the Bus Stop or the Electric Slide?”

“Actually, Ryan, I have not. Furthermore, by whose authority are you, my Anglo-European love, lecturing me about black women?” She asked, laughing.

“However,” she continued, “I’m greatly relieved to have you here with me, all safe and sound I must say. This morning you said you had a full agenda of business items today. How did your so-called business go?”

Ryan asked himself, how much do I say without her having the fantods?

“It went okay. “

“Just ‘okay?’” Gillian asked.

“Right, I’m sorry to say, just ‘okay.’ We’ve been laboring under the urban myth that if the IT people build firewalls, then bigger firewalls, and then great big firewalls, we believe no one can break into . . .”

Gillian interrupted. “. . . I get the picture. A firewall the size of the Great Wall of China . . .”

“Must you?” Ryan asked. “No allusions to China if you don’t mind. At best, we’ve bought US universities some time, enough time to make cyber-security a reality. On a more positive note, I think we’ve resolved, however temporarily, this huge national issue.

Jennifer asked Ryan: “A Chinese issue with African accompaniment?”

“Yes.”