

## UNTIL THE WORLD BROUGHT TO ME AGAIN ITS GOLD ITS VERMILLION

by

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“Betois, get me my slippers will you?” Dietrich was lounging on the rattan recliner. The sun had gone down and it was that time in the bush when all the birds came like a great cloud of humming voices to the acacia trees and lavender spilled into the sky. I bent down and massaged his feet. First, the right then the left. I placed the slippers on his pedicured smooth feet. He had a strong German profile but his hands and feet were soft.

“Betois come over here.” He slapped his thigh softly. “Sit down and tell me something sweet.” I perched obediently on his thigh and stroked his arms and legs the way I know he likes. Then I bent down again. I know how to make it happen quickly but now he’s taking some pill and it makes everything last longer. I’m exhausted by the time he comes. “Betois, I think I’m tired of this. Turn around. Be a sweet girl.” Everything is taking too long. Soon we will go out to dinner with the rest of the guests from the camp. I need to get dressed.

Today we’ve seen many lions. But tonight we will search for a leopard. I love the animals. These beautiful caged things. Because no matter what anyone says, they *are* caged. They may have huge tracts of land in which to roam but they can’t leave those lands. They are not free. They are beautiful, shining, startling specimens of despair.

He often speaks of me as if I’m not in the room. As he will tonight. I can hear him.

“I found her,” he says, motioning in my direction, “in a village in the back woods of the Philippines. They didn’t even have toilets. They didn’t even have running water. Her parents had more than ten children. I thought I’ll save one. I could take one out of poverty.”

We live in Cologne not far from the cathedral. In the summer we go to the Black Forest. We have one child—a son named Hans. He’s a shy, quiet child who never pleases his father. But there are other children from his first wife and his second. Three boys and two girls. He was nearly 70 when Hans was born and I was 18. I was younger when I first arrived, but Dietrich knew many people in the government and they’d put their blue and green stamps on everything. *Köln. Nordrhein-Westfalen*. In German. I hated the sound of it and the sound of all of them. In secret I speak to my son in Filipino and sing him Filipino lullabies.

“They were happy to see her leave. One less mouth to feed, you know. You can’t imagine what it’s like—that kind of poverty.”

On their safaris I look out over the veldt with my Steiner binoculars. I have many favorites. Especially the giraffes—tall, stately creatures who gallop through the high grass. They watch with their luminous eyes but make no sound. The giraffes have no voice.

ACCOMODATIONS: FIRST CLASS HOTEL, LODGE AND PRIVATE HOME. ACCOMODATIONS AS SHOWN IN THIS ITNERARY BASED ON TWIN BEDDED ROOMS WITH PRIVATE BATHS OR SHOWER.

Even when we camp in the wild, we have a private shower right in our tent. The big spiders come out at night and along the river we hear the hippos growling. When we walk to

the main lodge we are careful not to wander into the bush. Even Dietrich who is usually so full of bravado is careful not to stray. Black Mambas slither through the grass.

As a child Dietrich had been sickly, asthmatic, and frail. In fact a mama's boy. Who told me that? Was it his brother Peter? Perhaps. "You are a good strong man," I told him. My German is still broken, halting, although he has a woman come three times a week to tutor me. "I am good wife," I say and laugh. "You are a good strong man and I am good wife."

I know more than I let on. What I meant was not that he was a good man but that he was very good and strong therefore it made sense to say a good strong man. Didn't it?

But I know that he is not a good man. I heard him in the library at home with his friends and I knew they weren't good. When I went into the room to bring them their Moselle and Franken, I smiled and kept my eyes lowered. They smoked cigars and laughed loudly. There was a gold spittoon where they spat. Sometimes I saw pictures of girls—young as I'd been—splayed out on the inlaid rosewood table. The maroon curtains were drawn.

Today we are going on another safari. We go out into the middle of the veldt.

The darkness that was terror, that was blindness, lifted slowly veil by veil.

I wanted to stay at the Treetop Hotel and watch the beautiful reddish, mud-covered elephant that came the first night we arrived. We have a guide from Strasbourg. Her name is Helga. She is a woman of a certain age. She and Dietrich do not like each other. "Herr Sauer, would you like to go see the hyenas today?" she asks.

"I've had enough hyenas in my life. Of the female sort. You know, Helga, I don't think there are really male hyenas." He laughs, his head thrown back.

I want to know about her—Helga. She has no ring on her finger. I heard someone ask her if she ever married. How nosey. How intrusive. But I admit I wanted to know. And she said, no, never.

What a life is hers? Never married; to travel all over the world. I'm sure the work is hard. I would love to work. I asked Dietrich if I could work. I want to make a contribution. Contribution was my new word. He laughed like that was the funniest thing he'd ever heard. "Your contribution is between your legs," he laughed.

Being with the animals is peaceful. But I miss my Hans. His fumbling arms and legs. Being here in the calm, the problems fade in the blue grey mist. I think life is closer here. And also death. Death seems more natural.

There are people from all over the world. Japanese, American—lots of Americans with their fanny packs, expensive shoes, and staring eyes. Indian, French. German, but thankfully not many. On this trip my husband alone is German. And Helga of course.

At the watering hole the massive Cape buffalo licks salt from its lips and eyes me. I feel like it is saying why are you, Betois, so timid? So fearful of darkness, of shadows?

At the Mount Kenya Safari Club I go alone to the animal orphanage. My guide's name is James. He has soft black eyes and a voice like syrup. I touch his hand accidentally when I reach to touch a wounded baby gazelle.

Today we are going to a Masai village. The red, black and green patterns of their blankets are so bright they assault my eyes in the sun. They are beautiful tall people who

dance and sing. But after their dance I see a woman whose eye is swollen and weeping. Our guide tells us her eye is infected by a fly bite. The flies are like a veil of blackness on her face.

This morning I am sitting with Dietrich and a Vervet monkey comes down from the rafters of the open air dining room and grabs Dietrich's potato. Dietrich is so surprised. "Get the fuck off." He swats at the black-masked little monkey and then realizes this is not the way to be here. It is not like at home where he can swat Hans and spit his words. No, he must be aware of others here, of decorum.

The owner of the camp rushes over in his large brimmed hat. "He's just a naughty little monkey," he says.

Dietrich doesn't like the owner. When we first arrived he greeted him, "Good afternoon, Herr Sauer and..." he looked at me and stumbled, not knowing I could be Dietrich's wife. "This is my wife Betois," Dietrich snapped.

They say the Vervet monkey is very smart and knows who to steal from. But I wonder?

Dietrich now laughs. Teaches our waiter the words "the best in the world," and the waiter teaches him the same in Swahili, *Bora Katika Dunia*, and *Msaada*, which means help. They must be used to all of these tourists with their constant questions.

Did I tell you Dietrich has terrible allergies? Peanuts, and kiwi berries and wasps and spider bites. I carry an EpiPen everywhere. I must take it when we go out into the veldt. I must always have it with me.

Tonight we are going down the Mara River. It is so beautiful at night. But as we go down the boat begins to leak. I was just out among the boats this afternoon. They all looked fine. Our guide doesn't panic but rushes us quickly back to the camp.

A Superb Starling settles on the table. Someone has sunk the sky into its wing and turned it iridescent. On its breast the sun turns red-orange. Here in the high grass the rhinoceros rises. The whole universe is balancing on the tip of its horn.

I have beautiful clothes. I wear a jeweled shawl. Flung into the reckless dark.

The Masai do not believe in dogma. But they believe in tradition.

For a long time nothing came to me in dreams. Then I began to see my salvation was through the eye of the storm. In a word.

To name the beasts:

Giraffe—Twiga

Rhinoceros—Kifaru

Hippopotamus—Kiboko

Lion—Simba

Elephant—Tembo

At dusk an elephant crosses behind a stand of fig trees. I see her as if in slow motion. Each ponderous gray foot descending. She is like the mind having gathered all the little stray thoughts into her one single form. The chattering monkeys, the twittering starlings, the skittish gazelles, anxious jackals, intense leopards—all lie down in the mind as her form appears, walking—one, two, one, two, one, two—a slow breathing with no beginning and no end. When we die something beyond our mind will continue walking like that among the great trees.

The wildebeest are migrating, crossing the Mara River.

Amboseli. Island of Mbasa. The Rift Valley. Then Lake Ngora. Home to one million flamingoes. When we drive up they rise like a herd of pink exclamation points scintillating.

Another game drive. Lion stalks a gazelle. The gazelle is at the watering hole but it raises its head; it knows something isn't right. Its tail twitches. Lion lies low in the grass waiting. The gazelle goes back to drinking. But then it's too late. Lion raises on its haunches and the gazelle jumps and tears through the grass. Lion is after her. When he overtakes her he sinks his teeth into her neck as if it were soft cheese.

OPTIONAL ACTIVITIES THAT MAY BE DANGEROUS DEPENDING ON THE ITINERARY YOU HAVE SELECTED: OPTIONAL ACTIVITIES BY INDEPENDENT SUPPLIERS WILL BE AVAILABLE AT SOME OF THE PLACES YOU WILL VISIT. SOME OF THESE ACTIVITIES CARRY WITH THEM THE INHERENT RISK OF SERIOUS PERSONAL INJURY. THESE ACTIVITIES INCLUDE, BUT ARE NOT NECESSARILY LIMITED TO: (A) WALKING SAFARIS (B) CANOE TRIPS (C) GORILLA TRACKING ON FOOT (E) HOT AIR BALOON TRIPS ...YOU SHOULD BE AWARE THAT YOUR SAFETY CANNOT BE GUARANTEED. SHOULD YOU ELECT TO PARTICIPATE IN SUCH ACTIVITIES WHILE YOU ARE ON TOUR, YOU ARE, OF COURSE FREE TO DO SO. HOWEVER, YOU MUST UNDERSTAND ANGUS & REICHT ASSUME NO RESPONSIBILITY FOR YOUR SAFETY.

I remember the day Dietrich came to our village. It was not the rainy season. Tourists often passed through because we were near the famous ruins. Even as a little girl my father pushed me toward the front of us children. I was different than the others. Father had dark skin but Mother was light. All of my brothers and sisters took after Father. I was lighter even than Mother with green eyes and skin like a grasshopper's belly. My hair had a tint of gold like the eye of an osprey. "Where did this sleep-walking *tarantado* child come from?" My father wanted to know. Even as a child I walked in my sleep. *Tarantado* means bastard. From the beginning he wondered if the blood in my veins was his. But over time he found a role for me. I drew people in, and then he sold them his teak carvings and hammered necklaces. Then Dietrich came, smoking his long cigar, wearing a wide brimmed hat and with big teeth that smiled too much. He bought, of course, the things Father offered and then they went into the back room and sat talking for a long, long time. My mother brought in a bowl of *Kare-Kare* and later a bowl of *Halo-Halo* covered with shaved ice. When they came out Father told me I was going to go with Mr. Dietrich who would teach me German. I don't want to learn German I told him.

"Think of your brothers and sisters, your mother," he said. "Why do you always think only of Betois?"

Mother's eyes filled with tears that didn't fall. That night I heard them in the next room arguing. Hissing at each other like two cockroaches.

"You never wanted her," Mother said. "You were just waiting for this day."

"We have no choice woman," he yelled. "Don't you see how hard it is to keep all these mouths full?"

"She's useful to you. She brings people to our goods. We need her!"

“You need her. You have always needed her.”

“You will never believe you are her father.”

“Impossible. I have no more to say. The one sacrifices for the many. It is tradition!”

“Tradition is another word for tyranny!” Mother screamed.

ACTS OF GOD AND THE LIKE:

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It is late in the afternoon when Dietrich collapses. There is a flurry of activity. The owner of the camp has several servants rush for the emergency kit. “Quick,” he barks.

“No,” Dietrich commands. “Betois,” he snaps his fingers, “go get the shot.” I hurry to our tent. Search in the bag. Just last night wasn’t it there? But it’s not there. Time slows down. I hear in the background people running.

The darkness that was terror, that was blindness, lifted slowly, veil by veil. I sat in the tent and tried to remember where those words came from. I can’t rush out with my hands empty. But I can’t find the EpiPen anywhere. The suitcases—I look there. In Dietrich’s, in

mine. Under the straw mat. The drawer of the little nightstand. Nowhere. Leaving the tent I run into Helga. But she is not rushing anywhere. Our eyes lock. She has blue-gray eyes. Blue like the eagles at home.

I packed early in the morning. They made arrangements for a small plane to come in and pick me up. It lands on a dirt runway amidst the dust and flies. The plane— so small there is only room for Dietrich, myself, and the pilot. Perhaps if Hans were with us there would be room for him too. Looking down, the lazy crocodiles are piled along the banks of the river. Dietrich is here but in a box at the back of the plane. “My throat,” he gasped, holding his throat. “Dietrich, Dietrich.” He reached up to me. I was so shocked I pulled back. Was he reaching to embrace me or to hit me?

I shook my head. I wanted to tell him I couldn’t find the EpiPen but there wasn’t even time for that. “Dietrich,” I called. But in minutes he was gone. I was standing over him along with the camp owner and many tall black servants shaking their heads. Someone reached down and closed his eyes. They were terrifying. Staring as if they saw a ghost, or a ghoul come to kill him.

In the village where I lived people could raise the dead. I saw it with my own eyes. A woman come out of the grave with yellow mud on her face and her hair all matted and filled with bugs. Sitting in that plane I’m afraid I will hear Dietrich knock, knock against the new wood of his box.

I said goodbye to Helga and thanked the owner of the camp. The one who Dietrich hated because he hadn’t known I was his wife.

I packed up his things. His long cigars. His slippers lined with lambs wool. His silk robe. But I didn't take them with me. I left them beneath the camp bed in our tent along with 15 Euros on top.

We landed on a narrow strip of dirt and a tall white man came and took me to a car, which drove for many miles to the city. I had the trip itinerary in my lap. The picture of a Water Buffalo on the front. When I was little my oldest brother used to hoist me up on a Water Buffalo. While he worked in the fields I rode as the sky turned gold and vermillion.

NOTE: TOURS ARE OFTEN IN REMOTE AREAS WHERE  
COMPETENT MEDICAL ATTENTION IS NOT READILY  
AVAILABE. CLIENTS WITH A HISTORY OF MEDICAL PROBLEMS  
THAT MIGHT REQUIRE ATTENTION DURING THESE TRIPS  
SHOULD TAKE THIS INTO CONSIDERATION.