

ONE

An intense panic gripped her as she waited in the arrivals hall of the Julius Nyerere International Airport at Dar es Salaam. She wasn't at all sure she had done the right thing by accepting the position as a doctor at one of the clinics in Tanzania.

The burden of responsibility to prove something to the world rested heavily on her shoulders, and she could almost feel its weight pressing down on her as she still looked up and stood erect, bold and brave, a single woman in the throng of men. She needed to show everyone, including herself, that she could do this; that the incident in Toronto didn't mean she wasn't competent.

Her bloodshot eyes slowly looked around, studying the crowd milling about restlessly, eagerly waiting for the loved ones to arrive. It had been a sixteen-hour journey from Toronto, and she longed to stand under a refreshing warm shower. She could feel a certain desolation and vulnerability wash over her as she stood with her bags, praying that she would finally be met by her host. Why hadn't he come to meet her yet? Where was he?

She was a petite woman in her early thirties, with an appearance that could fully describe only Spanish women. Her long, dark hair shone under the bright lights of the arrivals hall. Her dark, chocolate brown eyes held a dramatic, puzzled look of innocence. She could easily be described as a stunningly beautiful woman, and she was well aware of her attractiveness to men, which only added to her general unease, standing all by herself at the airport, surrounded by hundreds of men casting her curious glances.

Some of the blatantly interested men were slowly circling her now, waiting and watching if someone was on his or her way to meet her. If not, perhaps they would be only too happy to assist her. The truth

was, in spite of the façade she put up that she was a tough woman, deep down inside, she was very sensitive. Glancing at her watch, which she had already set to Tanzanian time, she looked up, feeling a sense of alarm as she realized her host was almost half an hour late.

Suddenly, from within the crowd, she saw a tall man running up to the cordoned off area where the newly arrived passengers were waiting, holding a small sign that read: 'Dr. Faith Valencia.' He looked breathless, surveying the passengers, searching for her. Faith quickly stepped toward him.

"Dr. Kami Mwamba!" she called out, relief coloring her voice.

He turned his head to see her approach him. Bowing slightly, he smiled wider, showing rows of pearly white teeth. "Dr. Valencia, apologies for being so late; I'm Dr. Kami Mwamba at your service!"

Faith couldn't help herself; she had to smile back at him both out of an instant fondness for the man and her immense relief at being rescued from the arrivals hall. She extended her hand to warmly shake Dr. Mwamba's.

"Let's go to our vehicle. I'm sure you're very tired," he said, picking up one of her bags.

"Thank you, Dr. Mwamba! I'm delighted to finally meet you," Faith said.

"Please call me Kami," he replied with a smile. "I'm the clinic's director, and I guess I'm also your supervisor, but I think you hardly need any supervising, right?" he said, his chuckle carrying his infectious good humor.

Faith liked him immediately. Things were beginning to look up for her. They reached the vehicle and loaded her luggage into the trunk. She sat in the passenger seat beside him. She began to feel more at ease and smiled to herself, as she noticed that they drove on the left in Tanzania as well, just like in Toronto.

As they drove along through the streets of Dar es Salaam, Dr. Mwamba chatted away excitedly about the clinic and the many doctors and interns they had in residence.

"Today, I'll give you a tour," Dr. Mwamba said, "and of course, you'll get to meet your colleagues in our unit. At present, we have two French doctors – Dr. Anastase St Martin and Dr. Remy Patenaude. And then there's Liam Connolly, an incredible male nurse from Ireland, and the equally amazing Kanoni Masanja, a Tanzanian nurse who newly graduated from one of our finest institutions." He then winked at Faith. "And then, there's me. I don't just sit around and shuffle papers though I'm the supervisor."

Faith smiled to herself. Dr. Mwamba sounded like someone who could see the funny side of every situation.

"I cannot stress enough how invaluable you're to us, Dr. Valencia," Kami continued. "Some of the patients prefer a woman examining them."

"I can imagine how indispensable Kanoni's services should be, in that case," Faith said. "I'm glad I've come here when the need is obviously great. I would love to help wherever possible."

"Oh, you can say that again," Dr. Mwamba said, only half joking.

"What is every doctor's work style like?" she queried.

He seemed to spend a couple of minutes contemplating that question before answering. "Dr. Patenaude is old school, but he's brilliant. You might even find it challenging to work with him sometimes."

Faith nodded, digesting that information, as Dr. Mwamba continued, "Dr. St. Martin, however, is much younger, and is quite a cool guy. Liam isn't a graduate, but he comes with a wealth of experience to make up for that. Kanoni is quite an asset to the team, and is full of compassion for her people. We really need more like her!"

After a short pause, Kami smiled at her, and asked, "And what is your work style, Dr. Valencia?"

Smiling, Faith began, "I'm a pretty flexible person, but I think I like professionalism best. At the end of the day, I'm on the patient's side, and I believe in patient-centered medicine. I think one can never find the perfect team to work with, but what you just described comes really close."

Kami seemed a bit thoughtful before he said, "Dr. Valencia, there has been a slight change in the terms of your contract; it's nothing drastic, of course. I will show you the documentation when we arrive at the clinic. The bottom line is that some of us will not be staying at Dar es Salaam for long.

"There's a new clinic not far from the Serengeti, and this clinic desperately needs doctors. We have to send some of our doctors and nurses. At this point, we can afford to send them only one nurse and two doctors. More will be coming soon, I know. So I need to ask you, will you be one of the two doctors to go to the new clinic?"

Faith sighed. This was a complication she hadn't expected on her very first day here. What was she doing, thinking things were beginning to look up?

"This is temporary, though," Dr. Mwamba added hurriedly. "My understanding of the situation is that, in another month or so, one more doctor will arrive to either of the two clinics, and we're also hoping to gain another nurse."

Faith was still unsure of how to answer him. "Can I think about this?" she asked. "I mean, once I get settled at this clinic, maybe I'll know what my answer will be."

It was Kami's turn to sigh, as he said ruefully, "I wish I could afford to give you that time, Dr. Valencia, but the truth is, we need to give them our answer tomorrow. As much as I hate to push this onto you, I really need your answer tomorrow, right after you've had some rest

and you've settled in. I'm really sorry; I wish things were different.”

“Who else is going to the new clinic if I agree?” she asked.

“Dr. St. Martin looks like he'd volunteer to go. We need a native nurse to go there since it's a country clinic, so Kanoni would have to go. She can speak Kiswahili, and so only she can take care of things at a rural clinic. But in any case, Liam would have to accompany her to help her out with everything in the first few weeks.”

During the rest of their drive, they didn't speak much, and Faith thought about everything he had said. As much as she wanted to help all she could, she wasn't sure she wanted to plunge into a drastic situation. The truth was, she was terrified of working at a rural clinic right away. Maybe her head would clear up tomorrow, she thought to herself.

Inside the clinic in Dar es Salaam, she was provided with the tour she was promised, and an opportunity to meet with all the members of the staff.

Faith was impressed; it was a new but efficient clinic. Everyone was proud of the government initiatives. Suddenly, a fierce longing to put down roots there overcame her. The very thought of leaving the city clinic and going far into the countryside near the Serengeti plains terrified her.

Dr. Mwamba had been right about the first doctor; Dr. Patenaude had immediately shown a conservative attitude toward her. It wasn't like Faith wasn't exposed to the old school approach; she'd always disliked it. But she could also see that Dr. Patenaude was indeed a fantastic doctor, and he seemed to be a favorite with his patients. Well, that was what really mattered, she said to herself.

Dr. St. Martin, on the other hand, was astounding. Dr. Mwamba clearly wasn't joking when he said that the younger doctor was a *cool guy*; he was a heck of a lot more than that. First of all, he was one of the best looking men she'd ever seen in her life. Faith was truly

awestruck when she saw him turn around and look at her for the first time.

Dr. Anastase St. Martin had almost black hair, an almond complexion, and dark brown eyes. His face spoke of his south Mediterranean roots, and he was lean and yet powerfully built.

He had a relaxed air about himself that made everything he did look easy, effortless, and casual. He must be at least six feet two inches tall, Faith guessed delightedly.

Faith wasn't very tall herself, but she had always had a thing for tall men. She had frequent visions of such men stooping down and sweeping her off her feet. She focused her eyes on his face long enough to notice a tiny birthmark near his lips that added to the sultry mystery of the man.

On being introduced, he looked down at her because of his impressive height, and bestowed on her his most electrifying smile, that she almost had difficulty breathing for a moment. Dr. St. Martin then took her hand in a caress and shook it; she had to breathe deeply and fight to put the resultant flames out.

At the official dinner, she knew he had deliberately picked the seat opposite hers. Each time he regarded her warmly and smiled at her, she felt a shiver of excitement go up and down her spine.

The dinner guests consisted of the entire medical staff in their unit, including Dr. Kami Mwamba. The occupants of the table were busy chatting away, while Faith just remained quiet, silently sizing everyone up.

“Do you think you'll be volunteering for the new clinic near the Serengeti?”

Faith turned to regard Dr. St. Martin, as she set her wine glass down. His elegant French accent was charming. “I have to give Dr. Mwamba my answer tomorrow. I understand you have volunteered to go.”

He grinned in a captivating way as his eyes caressed her. "Let's dispense with our titles, shall we? We always address each other with our first names, without our professional titles, except when we're in the presence of patients and the public. Please feel free to call me Anastase; or, you can call me Stase, if that's easier for you."

When she didn't quickly respond, he continued smoothly, "Yes, Faith, I have volunteered, but I have been offered the luxury of being able to give the matter much thought. I really regret that you have not been provided with that professional courtesy. If I can personally make your decision much easier, then I would feel greatly honored at such an opportunity."

At that moment, Faith wanted to do nothing more than just melt right there. How was she going to get through dinner, let alone working alongside him at the new clinic? She could almost feel her cheeks flush hotly at the thought.

She hid her emotions quickly and well, and met him in the eye. "Thank you very much for your kindness and thoughtfulness." After a few seconds, she voiced one of the questions on her mind. "I assume we'll have our cabins or apartments? Or will we share with other doctors and other members of the clinic staff?"

Dr. St. Martin nodded. "We'll all have our own private lodgings. That's one of the blessings of the new clinic." He swirled the liquid in his glass thoughtfully, and continued, "However, I have to warn you that on the flip side, life will be a lot more in the raw and untamed, so to speak. We'll see patients with a host of medical problems and emergencies that the city sometimes doesn't see. I don't want to scare you, Faith; in fact, quite the contrary, I would love it if you could consider joining me and working alongside me, but I want to be honest and upfront about the real situation there."

Faith smiled in spite of herself. She knew she shouldn't let the doctor's charm blind her to the harsh realities when she thought and made the decision. The challenges he was describing made the

opportunity very hard to refuse. She decided to be practical and not give her dangerous attraction for him any importance. "Anastase, what types of illnesses we are likely to encounter?"

"You're a general physician, aren't you? I'm not sure you've come across many patients with diseases such as malaria, sleeping sickness, polio, tuberculosis, and leprosy. Some common diseases you might be familiar with are AIDS, pneumonia, and a lot of water-borne and sanitation related diseases. And naturally, there will be the usual patients with many types of injuries, and then we'll have to deliver babies and provide pre-natal care."

When Faith seemed to have absorbed everything he had said, he added, "Faith, I volunteered because I'm a doctor of internal medicine, and I've been specially trained in immunology. Up in the higher country and near the plains, there is a great need for doctors who understand infectious diseases. But your role is very important too, because we also need a doctor who can diagnose, prescribe, heal and order tests, as well as assist with more complex matters, like the ones I just spoke about."

When Faith remained skeptical and unconvinced, he finished evenly, looking into her eyes clouded with doubt. "I know you haven't specialized in a particular area, but I'm well aware that you can definitely help me and be the other set of hands that I desperately need. I can't do it all by myself. Faith, you have the training for what we'll be up against, even if you aren't a specialist. I think we'd complement each other and make a great team."

Faith could sense that Dr. St. Martin meant what he said; there was a sense of the extraordinary about him. She knew that if she joined him, she'd most certainly witness some medical miracles. However, as impressed as she was by his candor, and even though a part of her wanted to join him and practice the kind of medicine she had always wanted to, her innate restraint made her probe further before making a commitment.

Smiling directly at him, she moved her dinner plate aside. "Anastase, I don't doubt that I would learn a wealth of skills and gain experience like never before. But I'm not as experienced as the others, and I still believe that someone with more experience would probably be of much more help to you and the patients. That assignment is not for me. Don't you think so?"

Dr. St. Martin set his fork down before giving her question some thought. He leveled his gaze at her and smiled gently. "Remy is an OB/GYN, and Kami is a pediatrician, so that leaves you, in my opinion, as having the most appropriate qualifications and the best professional credentials to accompany me. Besides, I think I'd go mad having either of them around for too long."

As if he'd sensed her inner conflict, he pressed home his point. "Faith, I know it's ultimately your choice, but I must be honest here that if you come with me, you'd make a very crucial member of my team."

He winked at her, and at that moment, Faith felt the fatal and palpable undercurrent of attraction between them. She knew it would take her a while to process all the information he'd given her and make an objective decision. She needed more time to think, and she didn't want to immediately succumb to his charms and give in. She had, after all, come here to help people, and not to be drawn in by a handsome man's magnetic eyes.

Yes, she was flattered by the exclusive attention he seemed to be giving her. But that wasn't what should influence her decision. She smiled her most professional smile, and said in a cool voice, "Thank you very much for your confidence in me, Anastase. You drive a hard bargain. Still – I am not very sure. I'll let Kami and you know of my decision first thing in the morning."

If he was disappointed that she wasn't immediately swayed by his pitch, he hid it very well. Smiling widely, he inclined his head, and then continued, "My original plan was to put in my notice and

return to France, but now maybe I'll stay around a little longer. You and I together could do a lot of good for this country. Think about it." He cast a casual glance at his watch, and smiled at her. "I have to be at the clinic early tomorrow to get things ready for our departure. There are a lot of supplies to pack."

Rising, he put down his napkin. "There's an urgent need here, and there are a lot of sick people. We must do all we can to help everyone. I hope you sleep well. I'll see you in the morning, Faith."

"Goodnight, Anastase," Faith returned with a smile.

After he left, she got up and went over to Kami.

"I am going to bed now. I guess I have jet lag to thank for that," she said and smiled ruefully. "I have spoken to Anastase, and I told him that I will give him and you my decision first thing tomorrow morning. Goodnight, Kami, and thank you for the wonderful dinner."

Rising, Kami smiled playfully, and said, "Ah, most excellent, then I look forward to receiving your decision tomorrow after breakfast. Sleep well, Faith, and welcome to our little community."

She walked along the corridor slowly watching for her room. Finding it, she opened the door and looked inside. It looked very comfortable, and already she felt quite at home.

Faith locked the door, and prepared to get ready for bed. Each room had a private washroom which consisted of a shower, sink and toilet. After a quick shower, Faith sat on her bed and looked over the things she had brought and arranged some of her papers.

Sighing, she put her things away and switched off the light by her bed. She tossed and turned for quite a while before deciding that something was bothering her. *I won't be able to sleep for a long time.* She fidgeted.

The room was very dark and quiet. She switched on her light and

looked at the time. Her watch read 12:27 am.

She ran her tired fingers through her long, dark hair. She put on her robe and slippers, took her room key and left for the open corridor. She nodded at a security guard, and he came over to her.

“Is everything okay?” he asked her.

“Yes, I just couldn't sleep. I thought that if I got some exercise... Is there some staff lounge I could sit in?”

The burly security guard regarded her curiously. “Follow me.”

Faith walked behind him. They turned and twisted around the halls, and she was finally led to an area that was open, but with mosquito-proof screens. The late night breeze rushed through in giant waves. It felt deliciously refreshing. Faith turned to thank the security guard, but he had already left and was walking down the hallway.

The lounge was furnished with wicker chairs with pillows and large mats on the floor. The whole scene was perfectly tropical. She immediately felt calm and happy in this balcony lounge open to the breezes. The night air was filled with many strange sounds and smells. Faith sat down on a chair with her feet tucked under her bottom. She inhaled again and noticed a faint flower fragrance in the air.

When she saw a sleepy cat on one of the chairs, Faith smiled. She liked this little slice of heaven very much. Closing her eyes, she concentrated on the strange night sounds, the fresh and cool breeze and the faint floral scent. It was refreshing and calming, just what she needed to relax and fall asleep.

After a few minutes of restful silence, she heard a sound. Opening her eyes, she was surprised to see Anastase tiptoeing away. She sat up straighter, and he stopped in his tracks and turned around. He must have heard her awaken.

“Ah, Faith, I hope I didn't wake you up or startle you.” When he

moved closer, she noticed he was wearing light cotton slacks and a T-shirt. On his feet, he wore leather sandals.

She suddenly realized that she was not wearing her makeup and that she was barefoot and clad in just a robe. Feeling very self-conscious, she said, "Anastase, don't worry, I was already awake. I just haven't been able to sleep."

He came closer and stood by her chair. "May I join you?"

"Please do." Faith sat up straighter, but didn't unfold her legs.

Anastase St. Martin took the seat beside the one she occupied. "Looks like I'm not the only one that can't sleep. At least you have the excuse of jet lag."

Faith studied him at close range. He really was beautiful even in his sleepy state. She had to stop herself from sighing loudly, and instead, told herself that it would be stupid to complicate their working relationship by letting her attraction for him get to her. *I need to draw a line.* She cleared her throat and asked, "Why couldn't you sleep? Are you worried about tomorrow?"

He smiled at her warmly. "You're a mind reader. Yes, actually I am. I'm worried because of several things that may or may not happen." With a certain sense of urgency, he continued, "It is critical that the new clinic is a success. So many lives depend on it, Faith."

After a few seconds of silence, he said softly, "By the way, I love your name. It really suits you. May I ask you a personal question, Faith?"

She was surprised by his compliment and desire to learn more about her. "Absolutely. Please feel free to ask me anything." On impulse she added, "If we're going to work together, we need to be comfortable with each other."

Comprehension dawned on Anastase's face. Her remark seemed to have pleased him no end. "Do I dare to think that you have agreed to join me on this critical journey into the high country and the plains, Faith?"

By then, Faith had decided that she had to go if for no other reason than to practice the kind of medicine she had always longed to practice. And to be honest: also to be with him, though that was definitely not the main reason. She was unable to explain why she felt so drawn to him with a force she couldn't deny.

Then, suddenly, another thought occurred to her. What if he was just being nice and trying to get her to help him at the clinic? What if she was reading too much into whatever they already seemed to share? She needed to know for sure.

"Yes, Anastase. I have thought about it. It's the chance of a lifetime and it will give me the opportunity to be a part of something really huge. And it's exactly the kind of medicine I have always longed to practice."

Anastase carefully considered what she had told him. He felt inside that there were other reasons why she had agreed to accompany him, but at this point, all he really cared about was having her by his side on the long road to the rural clinic. He was very happy about her decision, and he told her so.

"Faith, I'm delighted! Thank you very much. You won't regret it, I assure you. We'll make a great team. I wouldn't want anyone else beside me but you."

He sat back and looked a lot more relaxed. He ran his strong, shapely, attractive fingers through his hair. His hair refused to be tamed, and some of it flopped back on his eyes. "I guess I look pretty rough," he said, as he tried to smooth his hair back completely.

"No, you look great," Faith said, and immediately regretted voicing her thoughts out loud. "I mean, for being in bed earlier," she added quickly. "What about me, then? You have found me in my bedclothes and robe, with no makeup on. I must look rough too."

Anastase surveyed her carefully. Then he leaned a little closer to her. "Actually, I think you are incredibly beautiful, Faith. You're one of

the reasons I couldn't sleep tonight. I found myself thinking about your beauty a little too much this evening."

Faith nearly fell out of her chair. She hadn't expected that compliment. Her cheeks flushed hotly. "I guess I could be candid as well, then. I couldn't sleep tonight because I was thinking of you."

Anastase St. Martin looked taken aback at her admission. He had never expected her to be attracted to him as well. "Faith, please tell me more about yourself. I know you aren't married, but do you live with a boyfriend? Do you have someone special in your life right now?"

Taking a deep breath, Faith wondered if his eagerness to gather more information on her meant that he was romantically interested in her. "I was in a long-term relationship, but it ended before I came here. He didn't want to wait for me for a year."

Nodding his head, he smiled at her with deep understanding. "I must say his loss is my gain," he said, winking at her.

As he spoke, Faith understood that he had been through heartache similar to hers.

"Faith, I'm lonely here. I want, no, I need someone who would love me, someone to hold my hand. That's just how I am. Is that so strange?" he asked with his romantic French accent.

A thrill spread through Faith's veins. "Anastase," she began, "I've been lonely too since my breakup back in Toronto. That emptiness troubles me a lot. I wondered if I've done the right thing by coming here, but now that I have met you, I know I have."

Anastase looked at her with an expression resembling surprised adoration. As his heart began to soar with hope and the possibility of getting together with a truly beautiful woman, he moved closer to her and looked deeply into her eyes. His dark brown eyes smoldered with fire.

He reached out and took her hands in his. "I can hardly believe my wonderful fortune that you have agreed to come work with me in the new clinic. I couldn't possibly ask for anything more than that!" He continued to hold her hands in his lightly, as if weighing if he could go any further at the moment. "I'm deeply attracted to you, Faith, and would love to get to know you much better and more intimately when the time is right."

She longed to kiss his deliciously masculine hands and stroke his fingers against her lips. Reluctantly, she said, "I guess I should go back and try to sleep. How about you, Anastase? By the way, I love the sound of your name."

He smiled widely, showing his sparkling white teeth. She could almost imagine how lovely it would be to kiss him and run her tongue over his teeth, mouth and lips.

"Thank you, Faith. My name is French, but maybe not so typical nowadays. My mother is part gypsy and she wanted a very special name for me. Her family came from southern Spain and Andalusia. I was born in Nice in the south of France. That's where my parents and my brother live now. My brother's got a typical Spanish name – Anacleto. I believe you're also Spanish, or at least half, perhaps?"

Faith was captivated by his irresistible charm. *He is becoming more and more interesting.* "Yes, I am half-Spanish. My father was born in Mexico. My mother is from a European background, even though she was born in Canada. She has, I believe, some German, Dutch, Irish, and maybe even a little Italian blood in her. Quite a mix, isn't it?"

Anastase laughed lightly. "That's a beautiful mix, and I love it! Gypsies are mixed too. We have many different cultures within us. I love my background, and I'm really proud of my heritage."

"So you should be. I'm too, come to think of it. Anastase, we have a lot in common, don't we?"

He looked at her with intense desire in his eyes. "Yes, we do, my dear Faith."

"Well, I guess we better head back to our rooms?" Faith suggested reluctantly.

Anastase got up slowly and stood beside her. He was a fair bit taller than she was. He hesitated, aching with a burning desire to kiss her deeply.

Faith looked at him tenderly, and as if in prompting, she touched his arm lightly. "Anastase, thank you for everything. I have enjoyed myself more than you can imagine."

His heart beat faster within his chest. He now decided he had to try. "Faith, I have also greatly enjoyed myself, and I would like to thank you for that." He slowly came forward and looked in her eyes. He began to bend down a little toward her. Reaching around, he pulled her gently toward him.

He touched her lips so gently with his that she almost fainted at the beauty of it. Anastase then began to kiss Faith deeper and more seductively, his hungry lips, mouth and tongue probing into hers. His fevered, warm, and pliant tongue sent sparks of burning desire shooting through Faith's body. She tilted her head, and Anastase stroked and licked her exposed neck with a trail of fire which seared his explosive desire into Faith's body and soul.

Faith had never been kissed with such devotion, such adoration, such beauty and such fierce, hungry longing in all her life. He kissed her like he hadn't shared himself in years with a woman. His deliciously sweet and fragrant lips set her on fire for more. There was something wild and uninhibited about his touch and caresses. She continued to run her hands on his arms, back and neck; his soft yet masculine skin felt terrific on her fingers and hands.

Anastase hungrily embraced her before intensifying his searing kisses. His fevered lips came down on her thirsty neck, shoulders

and face again and again like raindrops. Hot and passionate. Laced with deep longing. There wasn't an inch of those parts of her that he didn't kiss, lick or caress.

Faith was absolutely weak at the knees by the time they finally decided to break slowly away as he dropped one last kiss on her long, dark hair. Hugging her with his strong arms, he circled her waist and held her tightly to his body. He wanted much, much more, but he also knew that this was neither the time nor the place.

Anastase looked into her eyes and smiled. "Shall I walk you to your room?"

"Yes, I would love that."

He placed his arm around her waist, turned to her suddenly, and whispered, "You're an exquisitely beautiful woman. I can't wait to be with you alone again."

As they neared the area where the security guards were, he removed his hand from her waist, leaving her feeling suddenly bereft of his warmth.

"I'll probably see you at breakfast in the morning, Faith, but if I don't, I'll definitely see you at the clinic. We need to arrange for the trucks to be loaded with the final items we need to set off for the long drive. If you want or need to sleep in, don't worry, please do. I'll ask them to save you some breakfast."

When they reached where they had to part ways, he said softly, "Faith, I can't tell you how much I enjoyed our time together this evening. I'm so grateful we met here. We both really need this. Now that we've got the complications out of the way, we can just be ourselves, spend as much time together as possible, and really get to know each other." He looked at her one last time with great longing. "Goodnight, my sweet Faith. I'll miss you till later this morning."

Faith smiled like a capricious goddess. "Anastase, I miss you already." She shrugged her shoulders. "I am still not sure if I am

PEACOCKS AMONG THE TAMARIND TREES

going out into the wilderness. I don't think I really want to get lost in darkness.”

Faith slipped into her own room and locked the door. She stood leaning on the door for a few seconds with her eyes closed. Her mouth was still full of the salt and fever of the man's hot kisses. She felt exhausted, completely ravaged. Then she breathed deeply and steadied herself.