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## ONE

She had expected the heat, but not like this. The morning sun, unhindered by clouds, coiled its tentacles around her naked forearms in a clammy embrace, welcoming her to this new, strange clime. The white concrete glared angrily, jealous of the attention the sun had gained. Mary blinked, momentarily taking in the heat, then the glare then, as she began to descend the rickety steps from the plane, she breathed in the foreign air.

Wood smoke danced on the light breeze and vied for her attention, loosening slightly the grip that the sun's rays had on her. The sweet scent caught in her nostril and stoked memories as she walked across the airport apron. She didn't want the memories – she had come here to forget – but the hidden fires from somewhere on the other side of the airport fence secreted a powerful fetish that demanded her mind to think back to those evenings by the fireside, cold winter nights when a dark blanket was thrown over the land and Mary and George had sat, snug in the front room, staring into the fire as it popped and stuttered its message of warmth, the orange glow dancing wild tangos across newlywed faces. No, she did not want to remember those nights and she fumbled in her handbag for her sunglasses to hide away from the smells, as if the olfactory attack was somehow allied with the brightness.

The terminal building squatted behind a low barrier of azaleas that was broken only by a faded red path which led to the glass doors. It was cooler inside, marginally, and the wood smoke was banned from entering by the reek of officialdom which manifested itself in inkpads, yellowing forms and a large, uniformed man who was melting over the armrests of a chair that was too small to protest at its load, but too polite to break.

The drops of sweat on the man's dark brow scattered as it creased, some making suicidal dives down his temples while a smile of genuine warmth climbed from his mouth to his eyes.