

Goodnight, Travel Well

by Kevin Hunter

There was no longer the heat. By carriage and between the shadows the leaves of the trees made down the long, steep hill overlooking the town, we traveled slowly back along, its lumpy dirt path raising our bodies, shackles, books and pens about the cabin. The thick ceiling of tall green trees peeled away, revealing the sun's bright orange hue and the sharp glisten of his extended knife came again more clearly. In the distance below the many homes and village shacks spilled beautiful pure white clouds from chimney tops, which mixed with the light mist of rain and finally layered the air in a pall grey mist. At street-level came the scent of the water's open air, so clear and foreign it was as if one were not really breathing. Crowds crowded around the cabin. Black and brown faces who danced and sang about the carriage, pointing, laughing and jeering towards my bonded self. It was still possible to see through the mud and soot on some of them. They were not all naturally so, it seemed--some seemingly as white as sand--but all had allowed themselves taken by the earth, like blotches of paint to a canvas. They threw and placed jewelry and trinkets and papers and toys and clothes and confetti and earth and sand and water and photos and all else they could carry; the cabin quickly became furnished in bright golds, reds and blues. Their bodies laid against its windows, doors and wooden wheels impeding its movement. I couldn't see the deformed, yet. An overlapping chorus of voices spoke a language of what seemed guttural grunts and carried from ear to ear, bouncing about the cabin walls. They cupped their hands as if hoping for water to spring from my mouth but I could still not understand them. During the exchange he sheathed his knife, dug into his pockets and took out a note, finding space amongst my already crowded jacket pockets to put it, all the while staring at me caringly. "Umpatu," he said and nodded. "Nuanu, Umpatu," he said putting a hand on my shoulder. I wondered whether his daughter was really now alright. We stood up

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and some of the many trinkets fell from my person: letters, pictures, teeth and nails among others. He opened the door of the cabin.

Leaving the carriage, there was the feeling of the reddish, orange and clay-like dirt through my toes; the constant smell of freshly baked breads, fried fish along with decaying flesh and salt and blood. It trickled down my back into my legs, into my sandals where some of the villagers collected and carried it off in hurries.

Apparently those protrusions weren't hallucination and hadn't gone away. He pushed me forward from my back which caused great pain and gently pierced the crowd with his determination for me to re-enter the house. Their wide white eyes contrasted their skin, like bright jewels from ash and they did not relent their focus on me. In this way we walked. The oddly colored wood homes of pink, orange, magenta, and yellow towered as if wondering where I'd been or what I might still be doing there. Days earlier this place was still an imagined city of folklore and yet there remained the lingering impression of my wife's perfume about my collar-- light lavender-- though I couldn't shake the foreshadowing sense of it's fading. The old woman was beckoning me inside. But there was no longer the heat.

