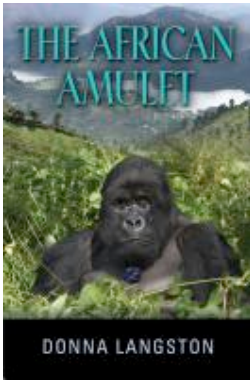


THE AFRICAN AMULET



DONNA LANGSTON



The African Amulet is about a primatologist who travels to Rwanda to study endangered Mountain Gorillas. During that time, he encounters changes that force him to question his sanity, and draw unwanted attention from poachers. It is the Mountain Gorillas and an African Shamanistic Priestess who offer James possible salvation. This story is an interplay of science, psychology and mysticism, where the reader is taken to a beautiful part of the world, Rwanda.

The African Amulet

Order the complete book from

Booklocker.com

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/8081.html?s=pdf>

**or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.**

Your free excerpt appears below. Enjoy!

THE AFRICAN AMULET

DONNA LANGSTON

Copyright © 2015 Donna Langston

ISBN: 978-1-63490-457-5

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the author.

Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Bradenton, Florida, U.S.A.

Printed on acid-free paper.

The characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the author.

BookLocker.com, Inc.
2015

First Edition

***DEDICATED TO MY DAD AND MOM
KURT AND MARTY BRENNE***

***“IF YOU ACT ENTUSIASTIC THAN YOU’LL
BE ENTHUSIASTIC”***

-DALE CARNEGIE

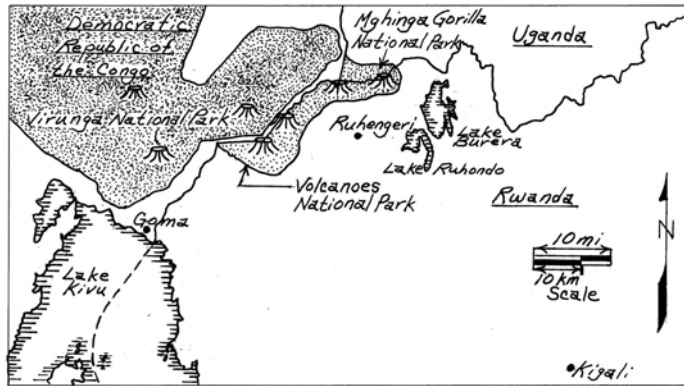
*“When one sense perceives the hidden, the
invisible world becomes apparent to the whole.”*

— Rumi

Acknowledgements

This book has been under construction for about four years during that time my biggest help has come from my husband, Radford Langston. Not only has he read the book countless times but he has offered suggestions and red marked the manuscript vigilantly. Rad also produced the map, which I hope helps to organize all the activity that occurs in the story. My children, who are young adults, have tolerated my rants and perpetual questions and encouraged me to follow through and publish. My editor, Jo-Ann Langseth, treated my words gingerly yet professionally, allowing me to have a finished project worthy of publishing, and I am very grateful for her expertise. To my friends who would occasionally ask, “How’s your book coming?” thank you for in that statement I found a gentle reminder not to leave it behind.

MAP OF VOLCANOES NATIONAL PARK AND SURROUNDING AREA



Chapter 1

Journal entry, January 11

I keep thinking I'm crazy. But I'm not. But what if I am? What just happened goes beyond words. My mind has no logical explanation for what just happened. This experience should only be found in science-fiction books, not my personal journal. I have to write this down before Lucy gets here or I might convince myself it never happened. I'm testifying to my moment of insanity right now. I hope nobody ever reads this or I could end up sitting in a sterile room, wondering what my name is.

Harborside Hospital, Seattle, Washington, February 18

“Dr. Webster, can I just speak to you for a moment about James Burton?”

Dr. Webster stopped in the hallway, releasing a big sigh. He looked down at his watch and answered, “Yes, Dr. Benton. What is it? I have a meeting in a few minutes so it must be quick.”

“Thank you. This is important. I spoke with a doctor from, I believe, Rwanda, a Dr. Karibika. She said James was showing signs of dissociation, irrational thought processes, and paranoia before he went into a coma. She wanted to know if he had a history of psychiatric disorders. I'm not aware of James having these symptoms, but it could be late onset. Do you think he's had a schizophrenic episode?” Dr. Benton asked.

Dr. Webster, a tired-looking psychiatrist with thinning black hair, carried an odor of musty old socks. “Rwanda! What the hell is he doing there? Haven't you been his friend and prescribing doctor for years?”

“Well, yes. I've treated him for anxiety and low-grade depression, something not unheard of for most of us. But still, there

are usually some signs of disorientation, mild delusions, and a chaotic lifestyle before onset of psychosis. He's had none of these, just typical anxiety. There has got to be another explanation," said Dr. Benton.

Handing Dr. Webster a folder of papers, Dr. Benton continued to voice her opinion. "If you don't mind, would you review the pages of his journal that lead up to his situation? The nurse from Rwanda thought it might be helpful to review them. We can call the hospital back in a few hours. They just don't want to miss anything."

Seattle, Washington, January 11

He walked into the coffee shop feeling slightly irritated. His eyes shifted nervously around the room and he saw the predictability of this coffee shop. James always thought his life would unfold in some exotic location. Nothing was wrong with Seattle, but moving only 200 miles away from his family left James wondering what he was missing.

The light yellow walls held artsy pictures, lit by a flickering electric fireplace in the corner. A large blue swirl, captured in an ancient-looking frame, held his gaze. A woman with long red hair faced a tumultuous ocean. The waves encompassed her in an embrace. James felt an immediate desire to have a connection with life.

"Good morning, sir," interrupted the barista, who was wearing a coffee-stained button-up shirt, conveniently covered by the *Seattle's Finest* logo on her apron. "Welcome. Do you know what you want?"

Now that's a good question! James thought, struggling to order something different.

"Yes, please. An almond scone and a 16-ounce latte," he replied.

Locating a deep, overstuffed chair, James sank into the moment. Lost in thoughts, he attempted to push away despair and focus on the present. He was leaving for Rwanda in six -- no, five -- days. Just

thinking about it made his stomach lurch. Finally, to be out of the classroom and at a field site in Volcanoes National Park, with actual gorillas! An overwhelming feeling of excitement filled his body.

Getting comfortable, he shifted his weight on the orange cushions. Through the window, he could see people going places. James used to be jealous when he viewed others leaving, always wishing he too had a destination. Now he did -- Africa, no less! To finally be realizing a deep dream was amazing, yet daunting. His mind threatened to taunt him with negatives and irrational fears of this trip, but he sighed deeply and consciously thought of all that was good. Visions of gorillas, volcanoes, and his life with Lucy -- all of it helped to replace doom with gratefulness.

Leaning back in the chair he smiled, catching his reflection in the window. He silently reprimanded himself for letting his dark hair get so shaggy. His face carried the shadow of not shaving. Lucy insisted he had good looks, but truthfully, James wasn't so sure. Then again, he could think anything he wanted, so why not see himself as sexy and mysterious?

As he stood up to leave, he saw an older woman struggling with her walker. James rushed ahead to hold the door. He respected anyone who moved forward, regardless of the pain. A genuine smile between the two-signaled a connection, if for no other reason than an unspoken knowing. Once again, he checked his pockets for the car keys and walked out.

Chapter 2

Hope Hospital, Kigali, Rwanda, February 19

Standing over the hospital bed, they looked down at the still figure. Dr. Uwera scanned the room and saw a clean, antiseptic environment. Glad for the order, he looked to Dr. Kirenga for information.

“We have obtained a little history. Basically, the patient is a healthy 34-year-old male with no medical history,” said Dr. Kirenga. “The bullet entered his left arm and made a clean through-and-through, missing the humerus, nerves, and all major blood vessels. He was brought in, treated, and kept overnight for observation. His prognosis was improving until this morning, when his temperature spiked and he lapsed into a coma. We have administered IV antibiotics. The poor guy was just in the wrong place at the wrong time, a big problem in this country. We did find this with him,” he said, handing a worn leather notebook to Dr. Uwera.

“I’ve never been able to keep a journal,” said Dr. Uwera. “Look at these pages -- they’re all filled up.”

“I can see that! And I find it so amazing when people can keep track of their lives this way. I read most of it last night. It’s pretty interesting, plus it might give us some insight into his neurological functioning. If you’d care to review it, then perhaps we could discuss it with his doctors back in the States. Luckily, James signed a release of information last night when he was still conscious. I took the liberty of sending the first 20 pages to give the others some understanding of his mental state. This might seem unethical, but I believe it’s important,” said Dr. Kirenga.

“Sure, I’ll look at it tonight. Let’s continue with the same treatment, and you can inform me of any changes,” Dr. Uwera replied as he quickly checked his watch and started down the hallway.

Seattle, Washington, January 11

The ride home from the coffee shop was uneventful. Focusing on his Rwanda trip provided a break from the often-played tape of his continuous self-doubt. As James eased his car into the driveway, the grey house looked reassuring and welcoming. Outdoor lights dramatized the huge pine trees on either side of his doorway, while large bushes lined his driveway.

James sighed with assurance. Even though he craved excitement, something about the status quo soothed him. The night carried icy temperatures of the Northwest, with a touch of an orange and red sunset peeking out from behind the mountains. Gripping his tattered briefcase, James stepped out of his white Subaru. The air felt refreshing as he walked to the house. January brought the normal monotones of grey and white, but the brightness of snow had left a glistening of hope on all that it covered.

As James opened his front door, he was hit by warm humidity that rushed at him from the inside. The whole world spun. Trying to stabilize himself, James touched the familiar black rim of the door handle and unexpectedly felt something rough. Reflexively jerking his hand away, he looked down, and saw thistles embedded in his skin.

Confused, he gazed into the house. His comfortable living room was gone. There, in place of the couch, giant ferns and green trees shot up all around. The air was dripping with moisture, so thick he could barely identify features across the room. James rubbed his eyes and examined the fog that was floating where his chandelier should have been.

Fighting a wave of nausea, he struggled to understand what he was seeing. *A forest, definitely a forest*, he thought, *but what the fuck is going on?* As he crossed the threshold into his living room, he tripped. On the ground, his foot struck a spiraling root where sage-colored carpet should have been. A mass of thick brown roots ascended above and weaved around the floor of his house. The ceiling was obscured by dense fog.

Disoriented, James again tried to make sense of what he was seeing. How could his living room have been turned into a forest? It looked like a haunted house that had gone tribal. Not only was his living room now a dense jungle, but it was filled with buzzing and chirping noises from the natural world. Looking for any landmark, he noticed a pink and yellow sock, balled up and hanging from a thorny bush. *Shit*, James muttered. *That's Lucy's, the one Sadie always carries around. Okay. So this really is my house. I didn't make some wrong turn into Crazyville.*

As he tried to process these sights, a strong sensation moved down his arms. It started in his shoulders and continued past his elbows into his hands. The sensations came in painful bursts, like lightning shooting through his arms, and then, as if his body were no longer his, he watched those stricken arms bulge in size.

Reaching out to stabilize himself, his hand found a knobby surface. It appeared to be a tree, slick with moss. As he hung on, James was sure he was going to collapse. Nothing was right. No matter what cognitive tricks he could conjure, his reality wasn't changing.

Prickly sensations on his arms and legs alerted him to the coat of fine black hairs, now sprouting. He reached down to touch his body and was surprised at how thick and silky the hair felt. It was warm and oddly comforting, like a fur coat.

It wasn't just the hair -- his legs had also transformed. They looked about 36 inches in diameter. Gone were his clothes; instead, a black coat enveloped his entire body. Looking down at his hands, he saw five digits equipped with fingernails. But instead of white smooth skin, he had black leathery palms.

James swooned in a trance, until intense vertigo and energy spiked through him. His stomach let out an enormous growl, leaving him feeling famished. James looked down at himself and saw a mammoth body, not of a human being but of a mountain gorilla.

Was he hallucinating? Was it those drugs from college? Was he finally having a flashback, or had he lost it entirely and become psychotic? Had all those years of counseling and worrying about being crazy finally created a self-fulfilling prophecy? He knew there was no one there to comfort or assist him. Whatever this was, he had to rely on himself to get through it.

A loud sound pulled him from his thoughts. A strong primal scent filled the air. He felt his mouth drop open as he viewed the scene before him. A clan of 12 gorillas, mountain gorillas -- the animals he would be visiting in six days -- was standing there, staring at him. One was pounding his chest and wailing.

No. This was not right. He should have been standing in his living room. Yet with God as his witness, he was standing in an African forest with gorillas. By now, all the gorillas were pounding their chests, pacing, and looking expectantly at him.

A sickening odor triggered his instinct – run! Using his powerful legs, James crashed through the trees that had appeared around him. He and the troop traveled for what seemed like miles. Though still in shock, flight had taken over. Suddenly everything went still and James realized that the sickening smell was gone.

The troop stopped to rest and began eating foliage. A female gorilla rubbed up against him, her warm and comforting touch bringing relief and calmness. Through all his confusion and fear, James felt oddly peaceful. Resting on wet leaves and pine needles, he could hear a quiet stream close by, and everything seemed in place in this African forest, everything but his mind. *You have taken a turn down a very scary road, the road to insanity!* It screamed. At the same time, James knew that he also felt warmly connected to these gorillas, and to this place. *I must be crazy as a loon*, he observed, a little too calmly. Just as he was thinking of lifting his mammoth body up, the experience again changed. A ringing brought James back to his living room.

The smells were domestic, and the lighting artificial. James looked around and saw his brown couch and leather recliner. Not

knowing what else to do, he sat down on the couch and took stock of his body. It was back to its normal, semi-fit shape. Nothing looked out of the ordinary. No indication at all that only a few minutes earlier he'd been a hairy ape. *What the hell!* Not that James actually believed he'd become a gorilla but... didn't he just have a real-life moment or moments as a flesh-and-blood gorilla?

Was I hallucinating? James blinked, shut his eyes and then reopened them. The picture on his living room wall of Earth from outer space just stared back at him. Nothing could have prepared him to interpret these last thirty minutes – or was it ninety? *What time is it?* James looked at his watch and saw that only ten minutes had gone by from when he'd left his car. *Blackout! That's exactly what happened,* James told himself. *I've heard about this kind of thing happening to others! Maybe somebody drugged me in the coffee shop. Yeah, that's it! That would explain everything. So who was it? Who is out to get me? Maybe someone jealous of my African trip?* As he continued his thinking, James felt that maybe his theories were ridiculous, that maybe instead he was simply crazy -- losing it, going off the deep end.

He touched his arms and legs and felt skin. The thick coating of fur had vanished. James held his hand up to the light and saw white, with a few freckles and veins. Gone were the black leathery palms. His clothes appeared normal: jeans, plaid shirt, and brown hiking boots. Everything checked out. Still, nothing was right. Adrenaline seemed to churn in his stomach, steadily rising into his upper body until it found expression in one final thought -- *I really am crazy.*

Through his erratic heartbeat and burning hot body, James tried to breathe. *Okay,* he thought, *maybe there's another explanation.* He flashed to Lucy saying, "If you think you're crazy, you probably aren't." He was hoping she was right. *I need to talk to her,* James realized. Picking up the phone, he noticed that his hands were shaking. Using his right hand he firmly grasped his left in order to keep the phone still. The grandfather clock in the dining room clanged the nine o'clock hour as James anxiously waited for the phone to be answered.

“Hello,” Lucy said.

The caller ID read “James’s cell,” but silence dominated the airwaves.

“James, can you hear me? Are you there?”

“Lucy, Lucy! Thank God it’s you,” James said.

“Well, yes, James, I’m here,” Lucy replied. “Are you all right? You sound a little frantic.”

“Yes, and confused. Where are you? I kind of need you,” James said.

“I’m just leaving the grocery store. I should be home in about five minutes. Are you okay? Are you having another panic attack?”

“What? Panic attack? Um...maybe. I don’t really know what I’m having. I mean, I’m okay -- just a little freaked out. I don’t feel so good,” James replied.

“Do you need an ambulance? What’s wrong? Are you having a heart attack?”

“No, nothing like that. Some really weird things just happened and I need you home,” James said.

“Okay. Well, I’m almost there. Just try to relax and drink some water. Oh, and breathe. Three deep breaths make everything better, okay? James, are you still there?”

“Sure I’m here. Okay, I’ll breathe,” he said.

After hanging up, James was left with nothing but his fears and a dial tone.

Chapter 3

Seattle, Washington, January 11

As Lucy walked into the living room she couldn't see James.

"James," she called. "James, where are you?"

Hearing muffled noises, she found him sitting in the kitchen, facedown on the table. Lucy touched James's head, kissing him gently.

With her heart beating fast she tried to calm herself, "James, you look a little pale and you're sweating. What happened?"

"I don't quite know what to say," he stammered. "Please, whatever I tell you, promise you won't leave me."

"Oh, God! Did you cheat on me?" Lucy asked.

"What? Cheat? God, I wish...No, I mean...Okay, I'm just going to tell you. The truth is, I changed. You know, like I became something else."

Given James's somber and delicate condition, Lucy proceeded with caution. "Umm, really? I mean, what are you talking about?" Lucy sat down and took his hand. "Okay, tell me again," she said.

"I'm not making this up. I came home from the coffee shop and the next thing I know, I'm in a jungle," James said.

"A jungle? What? Seriously, I don't understand. How long were you in a jungle?" Lucy asked, trying not to sound sarcastic.

James took a deep breath and, his voice shaking, he began to speak. "Well, it seemed like an hour, but I think it was only ten minutes! I guess I blacked out. I remember sitting in my car in the driveway, walking to the front door...and then things happened."

"What do you mean, things happened?"

"It's hard to explain, because I can't even believe it myself."

“James, please tell me what you’re talking about.”

“Well, I changed.”

“Okay, changed. You already said that. Like *how* did you change?”

“Well, you know. Like, things changed.”

As Lucy stared at him, James knew he better talk.

“I believe I turned into a gorilla.”

“A gorilla, is that all?”

“Lucy, I mean it. One minute I’m myself walking into the house, and then my whole body changed and I’m a gorilla.”

“Right, okay. But then what?”

“Well, the house or living room turned into a jungle, and I ran. I mean, *we* ran. There was a troop of gorillas and we all became frightened. Scared! I remember feeling really scared. Anyway, there you have it.”

“So,” Lucy began, “you’re telling me that you changed into a gorilla and our home became a forest. I wish you could just be honest. What is really going on?”

“I know this is hard to believe, but it’s important that you believe me. I’m scared -- like really scared. What is wrong with me?”

Lucy seemed to grasp the seriousness and softened her responses. “Could it have been hallucinations, or maybe a dream?”

“What? Honestly, Lucy, what does a hallucination feel like? And do you even know it at the time? I don’t know. It just really freaked me out,” James said. “It went beyond seeing and hearing. It was more like knowing that my whole being switched to that of a gorilla. I know you’re wondering if I’m crazy because let’s face it -- I certainly am.”

“It’s okay, James. You’re just in shock, and you need to relax. You and our living room are back to normal. Give it some time and things will make sense.”

“Lucy, do you think I’m losing it?”

“Honey, no, you’re fine. I really don’t think you’re having a psychotic break. If you were, there would have been other signs. This is the first time you’ve seen or heard things that seem abnormal, right?”

“Shit, Lucy! What do you think? Have I seemed crazy? I’m not even sure I know what the hell a psychotic break is.” James said.

She stared.

“No, I’m not hearing any damn voices and I’m not seeing make-believe people,” James said. “And how the hell would I know if I’m having a psychotic break? I’ve had some feelings of not knowing, I mean a nagging feeling of missing something. Just some slight feelings of despair, but that’s it.”

Lucy took a deep breath and said, “James, I realize you struggle with depression. But honey, that happens at some time or other to most of us. Feeling depressed usually doesn’t include hallucinations. To answer your question, a psychotic break is when you can’t tell fantasy from reality. When you hear or see things that no one else does. It’s as if your mind is playing tricks on you. Your reality becomes different.”

“Well, wouldn’t my gorilla experience qualify as a different reality? Have you taken any walks in the jungle lately?”

“Well, aren’t you the funny one. No, no jungle time for me. But honestly, a break usually involves many areas of your life, not just one particular situation.”

“Could I be having hallucinations with depression? Could it just be coming from my depression?”

“Well, with long-term chronic depression some delusions can surface, but it’s not the norm, and the depression has to be severe, I mean really bad,” said Lucy.

“So that’s not me?” asked James.

“No way, you have a normal life. You go to work, you eat, sleep, have sex, and laugh quite a bit. People who are deeply depressed usually aren’t functioning, or not very well. So no, your mild depression could not have caused this, and psychosis develops over time, not just in a minute or two,” said Lucy.

“Thank God! So if I’m not crazy, then what the hell happened?”

“Well, that I don’t have an answer for. Maybe the stress and excitement over the trip just created a vision so strong that you went into some kind of trance.”

“Can that really happen?” said James.

“Sure, why not?” said Lucy, sounding more confident than she felt. She kissed James and in a low voice asked him something about the capabilities of a gorilla in the sack.

“Really? Hey, why didn’t I think of that? How about I take a shower and we’ll see what happens?” James replied. As he stood up, James felt a wave of vertigo wash over him. He grabbed on to a chair for support. Looking up, he saw Lucy staring at him.

“I’m fine! Really, I’m fine,” James said, sounding way more confident than he felt.

The bedroom was dark as he walked into the room. Flipping on the light switch, James started feeling better. Turning on some music, he began to relax as Jimmy Cliff sang in his soothing rhythmic way. Something about those drums always made James feel better. As he stripped off his clothes he looked at his body for signs of extensive hair or any other gorilla traits. Preoccupied, James didn’t notice Sadie, his Newfoundland, until she backed away from him. “Hi, girl, what’s up? Where were you during all this?”

Sadie was cocking her head and not advancing for her usual attention.

“Okay, this is really weird, Sadie. What’s up?”

By now, the 140-pound dog was crouched, and growling softly. Trying to reassure her, James bent down to rub her ear. As he reached out, her mouth transformed into an unexpected snarl, which she had never done before.

Jumping back, he yelled, “What the hell, Sadie?”

Sadie cowered and slunk back into the corner with her tail between her legs.

Sitting on the bed, James grabbed his head, hoping to bring understanding. He shut his eyes and opened them again. Sadie approached, no longer snarling but eyeing him warily, and looking very confused. Taking a deep breath, James thought, *Maybe I’m not crazy after all. Maybe I need a shower.* He then admonished himself, *I was not really a gorilla, for God’s sake! I just need some clarity.* Sniffing his skin, James thought he detected a strong wild scent, kind of like a bear in the wild. It contained a strong urine smell with an earthy undertone.

This is strange, James thought. He shook his head as if trying to clear the cobwebs from his brain, and stepped into the steaming shower.

He thought about his day. Lately, he had been thinking about the meaning of life, his life. He knew he had been searching for a purpose or an understanding of events. He believed it was good for people to question and ponder instead of just reacting to situations. After years of going through the motions of everyday living, James wanted more. *Could this gorilla experience actually mean something? Maybe not that I’m going crazy, but an opportunity or message about who I really am, or have been?*

As James stepped out of the shower, Sadie came running over. James realized the intensity and weight of this situation. Was he seriously questioning his sanity? He didn’t have time right now to be

disconnected from reality. Having Sadie love him again was reassuring.

Downstairs, Lucy was in the kitchen. As James hugged her, she too appeared happier with his scent.

"You smell better. I mean clean, and more like yourself," Lucy said.

"What did I smell like before?" James asked.

"Well, I'm not sure. Maybe sweaty and strong. It sounds weird, but before, you had the scent of adrenaline. You know when people have been really scared and they smell of sweat and nervousness? You had that smell, but this was wilder, almost sexual."

"Maybe I shouldn't have taken a shower," James responded, raising his eyebrows.

"Actually, James, I know what happened," Lucy said.

"Really?"

"Sure. The gorilla spirits have descended upon you so you can create a new line of cologne for men. Your destiny is assured."

"Hmm, that's an idea...whatever works," James said as they sat down to eat.

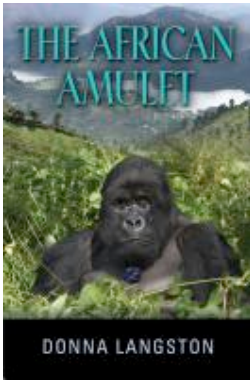
"Honey, how are you feeling? You smell better but you still seem to be in a daze," she said.

"I guess I am, but now that you're here, it's better. I'm tired of thinking about it. So why don't you take my mind off it?"

"I understand it's tough dealing with thoughts and feelings that make you anxious, but it's important you don't just blow this off. You of all people know that unprocessed feelings and experiences tend to create more stress if they're not worked through."

"Lucy, please don't try to be my therapist. I know you mean well but it's weird. I don't want to be your client," James said, touching her upper thigh.

Leaning into him she whispered, "Okay, but tomorrow we talk."



The African Amulet is about a primatologist who travels to Rwanda to study endangered Mountain Gorillas. During that time, he encounters changes that force him to question his sanity, and draw unwanted attention from poachers. It is the Mountain Gorillas and an African Shamanistic Priestess who offer James possible salvation. This story is an interplay of science, psychology and mysticism, where the reader is taken to a beautiful part of the world, Rwanda.

The African Amulet

Order the complete book from

Booklocker.com

<http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/8081.html?s=pdf>

or from your favorite neighborhood
or online bookstore.