

The Luggage

By Constance Urdang

Travel is a vanishing act
Only to those who are left behind.
What the traveler knows
Is that he accompanies himself,
Unwieldy baggage that can't be checked,
Stolen, or lost, or mistaken.
So one took, past outposts of empire,
"Calmly as if in the British Museum,"
Not only her Victorian skirts,
Starched shirtwaists, and umbrella, but her faith
In the civilizing mission of women,
Her backaches and insomnia, her innocent valor;
Another, friend of witch-doctors,
Living on native chop,
Trading tobacco and hooks for fish and fetishes,
Heralded her astonishing arrival
Under shivering stars
By calling, "It's only me!" A third,
Intent on savage customs, and to demonstrate
That a woman could travel as easily as a man,
Carried a handkerchief damp with wifely tears
And only once permitted a tribal chieftain
To stroke her long, golden hair.

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