

# Bruchko

by Bruce Olsen

## Part 2

“Why, Lord?” I asked. “What am I doing here?” But I untied my mule and continued. The hills were too steep to ride him, so I pulled him along, stumbling, barely in control of myself.

Then, looking across a deep valley to the ridge on the other side, I saw a cluster of huts. It was an Indian village. I blinked.

Thank God. I had found the Motilones.

I worked my way down the valley, then slowly, tediously up the other side. It took several hours. I kept looking ahead of me, expecting to see some Indians. Then, because my eyes weren't looking at my feet, I would trip and fall.

Finally I reached the circle of huts. I felt a great surge of relief as a group of people came down toward me.

“I'm here!” I shouted, not caring whether they could understand or not.

Twenty or more Indians surrounded me, staring and jabbering in their own language. I tried speaking to them in Spanish. No response. I tried the few Indian phrases I had learned during my stay in the Orinoco. Still no response.

All the people seemed old and wrinkled. They looked at me, poked me, and laughed. Most were missing teeth. When they opened their mouths, their red, toothless gums showed.

We walked into the village. Women and children came out to look at me. No one understood a word I said. They didn't even try to listen.

I was sure there must be a chief. Perhaps he and the young men were out hunting. I kept looking up, expecting them to arrive. But they didn't come, and I got tired of standing in the middle of this circle of smiling, senile old folks, women, and children. I still felt sick and dizzy.

What could I do to communicate? Then I remembered the small wooden flute I had brought along to amuse myself. Perhaps these people would be interested in hearing me play it.

I got it out of my pack, sat down, and began to play. As I did, almost everyone nodded in time to the music. When I stopped, one old fellow put his hands in front of his mouth, making the motions of playing, as though to indicate I should play some more. So I struck up a tune I had learned from the Indians on the Orinoco River. Another man suddenly produced a flute and copied the line I had played. I gave him a second line, and he copied that one, too. Soon we were playing the song together.

Then he played a melody I'd never heard before. I copied him, line for line. By this time the whole village had stopped to listen.

Our playing went on and on. I began to get tired, but no one got up to leave. Finally, at three-thirty in the morning, we quit.

It rained heavily that night. I lay awake in the hut I had been taken to, listening to the heavy breathing of the men who were with me. At least I was in a safe place, with people who seemed friendly.

The next morning there was still no sign of a chief. I was given a breakfast of rough, boiled roots and horrible-tasting liquid. I forced them down; I was hungry enough to eat anything.

No one seemed interested in continuing the flute concert, but left me for their own projects. The little children played games. One old fellow sat in the sun, leaning against one of the huts. When I looked over at him, he smiled back.

I walked over to him. “How are you?” I asked in English.

He started talking in his own language, which was what I wanted. I mimicked what he had said.

He laughed, said some more words, and I tried to repeat them. Again he laughed. The game seemed to delight him, and we continued for at least two hours. It was my first experience in trying to understand a language without having any clues. Fascinated, I soon forgot everything else. I was beginning to be able to separate some of the sounds, and it was just a question of time, I thought, before I began to get the meaning of some of the words.

Suddenly, without warning, a blow hit my back and knocked me onto my face. I lay stunned. A man was standing over me, yelling and wailing at a terrific pitch, slashing at me with whips that he held in each hand. White froth dripped from his lips. I tried to roll away from his blows, but several young men appeared and poked me back toward him with long, sharp arrows that they held in their hands.

Then, at the man's direction, I was picked up by two of the warriors and thrown into the hut in which I had spent the night. No one came in after me. I lay on the floor, panting, almost terrified. Welts were rising on my arms and legs where the whip had hit them.

An arrow slashed through one grass wall of the hut and hit the wall on the other side. Other arrows followed. The men had surrounded the hut and were shooting at me through it. The arrows didn't have enough force to break my skin by the time they came through the walls, but they were heavy and made ugly bruises and blood blisters where they hit. After fifteen minutes of this I collapsed on the floor, my hands over my eyes.

The man who had used the whip came to the door of the hut and shouted at me. By this time I had figured out that he was the chief. He now had a long arrow in his bow and looked insane. I hugged the ground, begging in English, "Please, don't. Don't. Please, don't."

He left the doorway. There was a long pause, and hope surged through me. Then I heard a pphht, and an arrow blinded me with pain. As the arrows

continued to fly, the scene became unreal. It seemed like the kind of thing that happens only in movies.

At the moment of my greatest terror, it occurred to me that I needed to pray. "God," I said, "how long is this going to go on? Do I have to go through this?" I could imagine a future filled with torture, inability to communicate, and death.

Then a strange thing happened. It was as though I were struck down. I seemed to see Jesus on the cross. I started to cry.

"O Jesus," I said, astonished and fearful. "That's what You faced. We must have seemed filthy to You, like these Indians seem to me. Oh, how senseless our hate must have been."

I lay quietly. "God, I will give You what I can. I give You my strength, my life. I'll put up with anything, any trouble. I'll even die if You will let me communicate about Your Son to the Motilones."

Perhaps I had prayed that prayer before. This time, though, I meant it. Thinking death was near, I had to mean it.

A few more arrows hit me, but I was no longer terrified of them. After a while the chief was restrained by some older men. Later I learned that he had been drunk—a frequent condition for the chief and the other Indians of the tribe.

I got out my flute again and began to play. I had left it in the hut overnight. Its mellow sound was a comfort and seemed to make the pain in my arms and legs less severe. Soon someone outside began to play with me.

But the chief made it clear that I was not welcome in the village. There was no reason why I shouldn't leave. I packed up my belongings, got on my mule, and started back toward Machiques.

Just as I was about to enter the jungle below the village, an old man called to me. He signaled that I was to wait and disappeared into one of the huts. He came out carrying a child.

I went back to look at the child. He was a boy, perhaps four years old, who appeared very sick. Some of the other villagers, seeing me look at the child, brought out other children, who seemed to have the same disease. A circle of concerned, sad faces formed around me.

I had a small vial of an antibiotic with me, but I hesitated to use it. It was six months past the expiration date. However, these children might die if they didn't get some kind of medical attention. So I got out the medicine and began to administer it. There wasn't enough for all the children, so I gave a half dose. I had no confidence that this would help them, but it was all that I could do.

I unpacked my mule and waited to see the result. I asked God to heal the children where the medicine couldn't. A day passed, and there was no change in their condition. But the day after that, one child began to look better. A few hours later all were showing encouraging signs. Within a week they were playing happily.

The chief changed his attitude toward me. He could see that I was interested in helping his tribe. Later I learned that the day he had found me in his village, two of his young men had been shot to death by white settlers. So he had reason to dislike me.

My visit stretched on. I began to learn the language. Soon I realized that these were not Motilone Indians. None of the descriptions of the Motilones matched up with this culture.

These Indians called themselves "Yukos." I wasn't to contact the Motilones for another year. And my reception was to be even more fearful.

## CHAPTER 9: BRIBERY

I finished packing the mule and walked around him, making sure that all the cinch straps were tight. A small huddle of Yukos watched me. I looked uncertainly at them. Should I do more than say good-bye? Should I shake

hands or hug each one? The Yukos looked stolidly at me, no sign of emotion on their faces.

I held up a hand. "Good-bye," I said. "I'm sorry to go."

"Liar," I told myself.

I got on the mule and rode off, looking back once to wave.

I turned the mule onto the rocky, steep trail that led me out of the village. I'd been told it would take me to civilization.

Well, I'd done more than my share. I could be satisfied with that. After all, what had begun as a weeklong visit had lasted four months.

Boy, would it be nice to get out to civilization and talk to someone who understood English. And food. My mouth watered for a Coke or a hamburger. The Yuko food was awful. Day after day, always the same. Corn and chicha. Chicha was an alcoholic drink made by chewing corn and spitting it into a big gourd, then letting it ferment. It tasted about as good as it sounds.

It was a cold and misty day. The peaks around the village were obscured by clouds. I'd never expected to want to go back to the warmer, wet jungles of the lower elevations. But four months of constant shivering were getting to me.

"It's stupid to feel guilty about leaving," I thought to myself. I was sick. For two months I had been passing blood. I needed medical attention.

The mule kept plodding along, taking me further from the Yukos.

Boredom had become my greatest enemy. I could take having arrows shot at me. At least that was over quickly. But getting up each day to the same food, to the same filthy smell, to the same people with whom I had no rapport: that really got me. So it was time to leave. I'd done my part. So what if no one had come to know Christ? I had learned enough of their language to tell them about Him. I had done what I could.

The mule took me slowly down one slope and up a high ridge. The man who had sold it to me hadn't lied. It was a good, sure-footed animal. If this trail really went out of the jungle, as the Indians said it did, we would get out.

Suddenly the mule reared. I tried to hold on but couldn't. I was thrown into the air. My hands clawed for something to grab on to, but the mule was gone from underneath me. I landed heavily on my right shoulder as I heard the mule galloping off through the underbrush.

I stood slowly. My shoulder had been wrenched in the fall. It hurt. My pack had broken open, and my belongings were strewn along the trail. I was only an hour out of the village, but I hated to go back. I could go ahead on foot, hoping to make it, but I really needed that mule, and he was on his way back to the village. I would have to go there, too.

It was a long walk back, and my shoulder hurt badly. Even worse was the emotional difficulty of returning to a place I'd just abandoned. Somehow I didn't want to see those Indians again.

My worst fears were realized when I came into the village. The people had seen the mule long before I got there, so they knew what had happened. They came to meet me, laughing! The great white man had been felled by a mule. No one helped me carry my pack.

I was tired from the walk, and my shoulder was stiff, but I wasn't going to stay and be laughed at. I saddled the mule, packed him up, and left again.

This time things went better. It was odd that the mule had bucked and thrown me. Mules weren't supposed to do that. And this one was particularly good-tempered.

I went along for about three hours and was feeling better. Soon I would be in civilization.

Suddenly the mule stopped dead and put down his head. I tightened up on the reins, as I had been told to do. But the mule kicked up and threw me over his head. I landed in a cold, mucky puddle. The mule hadn't run, however, so I stood up to try to catch him. He reared up and kicked at me, his hoof hitting

my arm and then my face. Blood spurted out of my mouth, down my neck, and onto my clothes. The pain was blinding. I wished I could pass out, but the pain just built up and up into a solid wall that seemed like a vibrating shell all around me.

When the pain subsided enough so that I could see, the mule was gone. I put pressure on my mouth to stop the blood.

I couldn't go back to the village. I had to leave this jungle. I would walk out. But not now. It was late. I could spend the night here and go on in the morning.

That night I shivered and slept only fitfully. The whole side of my jaw was swollen out of shape.

In the morning I felt terrible and knew I would have to go back to the village. I wondered what God was trying to tell me through all this.

The Yukos did not like me. They were as happy as I was when I left. So why couldn't I leave? Why had God twice let me be thrown from the mule?

Then I remembered the mission board and the lesson I had learned from it. The mission had rejected me, but God hadn't. Now it was happening again. The Yukos didn't particularly want me to stay, but God did. And I would have to follow God.

The sun was bright that day. I felt feverish and dizzy. Before long the sun seemed to be baking me. My clothes were stiff with mud and dried blood. My head felt light.

I stumbled along. When I reached the bottom of one valley I found a stream that I had barely noticed before. I lowered myself into it and lay in the cool water, letting it soften my clothes and skin. I stayed there without moving for at least an hour.

When I got up, it was late afternoon. I knew I had to make it to the village before nightfall. I felt weak, too weak even to stand. Time after time I fell down and lay still for minutes before gathering the strength to get up again.

As I neared the village, I began to yell, "Help me! Please help me!" By that time I didn't care if they laughed.

Suddenly a few Yukos did appear. The chief was with them. They didn't laugh.

The chief himself carried me up to the village and helped take care of me. It was a week before I felt well enough to get up. When I did, I no longer wanted to leave. The Indians had become people to me. They had cared for me when I needed help. Now I would stay and see if I could help them.

Not that it was any easier. Life was still boring there. I still had amoebic dysentery, and I still passed blood every morning. But I did make progress with the language and soon was able to speak reasonably well. That helped greatly. The more I spoke the more I began to understand these people, and the more I understood the more I wanted to help them. What had seemed like ignorance or stupidity didn't seem like that now.

I would need to remember this lesson many times: before you really understand a people, don't judge.

But I still wanted to get to the Motilones. Of course, it was too late to help with the measles epidemic. But that didn't mean I shouldn't go there. Gradually that desire, which had been so strong before I had met the Yukos, reasserted itself.

I asked the Yukos about the tribes around them. One tribe stood out in their minds, a tribe that they warred with. The Yukos knew them as the "people of the oil." That made sense; the Motilone region was so rich in oil that there were natural seepages in parts of it. From that and their other descriptions I soon was convinced that the "people of the oil" were the Motilones.

I asked the Yukos if they would take me to the Motilones. Their eyes opened wide with horror.

"Oh, no, we don't go near them. They'd kill us," one said.

I insisted.

"Well," he said, "there is a Yuko tribe south of here. Maybe they will take you. You can try there."

This time leaving was not so hard. God really did want me to go, even though I still hadn't accomplished anything great. Not one of the Yukos had come to know Christ. I hadn't been able to offer any improvements in their way of life. I hadn't even been able to feel at home in their culture. There was unfinished business there, but I felt an urgency to be with the Motilones—an urgency that could come only from God.

So I said good-bye and went down to live with the southern tribe. I didn't expect to be there long, but the moment I tried to speak with one of them I found that I was in for a bit of trouble. These Yukos spoke a different dialect. I couldn't understand them.

But they were friendly. They took me in and let me eat and sleep with them. After a month I had learned enough of their language to ask them about taking me to the Motilones.

They looked terrified. "Oh, no, we don't go near them. Maybe the tribe east of here will take you to them."

I began going from tribe to tribe, trying to get someone to take me. Sometimes I thought of striking out by myself, but I had learned enough about the jungle not to try that again.

In each tribe it was always "someone else" who might take me. Once I did get a group to go with me, but after just one day on the trail I got violently ill and had to go back. At first I thought that perhaps I was going against God's will, as I had when He'd used the mule to make me go back. On second thought I knew that this time I was right. I wasn't going to the Motilones for the sake of my own comfort. I was going because I had felt the call of God. So I persisted.

I had my eye on one young Yuko. He was strong, a great one to laugh and have a good time. He had a reputation for being willing to do anything if there was something he could get from it.

I had a card up my sleeve. The Yukos love bright things, and the first tribe I'd stayed with had been fascinated by my zippers. My Western-style clothes had long since worn out, and I was wearing the traditional poncho of the Yukos. But I had saved the zipper from my trousers and kept it in the bottom of my pack.

After two months of waiting, I got it out and tied it to a piece of string. Then I drew the young man aside. I led him secretively into the jungle, then pulled out the zipper. I let it dangle from the string so that the sun caught it and made it sparkle.

He grabbed for it, but I pulled it away. "I'll give you this if you take me to the Motilones," I said.

I watched the conflict. Every time he thought about going near the Motilones he frowned and drew back. But every time he looked at the zipper he wanted it more.

Finally he shrugged. "Sure. Why not?"

I grabbed him by the shoulders. "Great! We leave tomorrow?" He nodded glumly.

## **CHAPTER 10: A TERRIFYING RECEPTION**

Seven of us set out early the next day at a fast trot. The sun was just coming up over the mountains as we left the village, and the air was fresh and cool.

We seldom spoke. We pushed on all day, following almost invisible trails over mountain ridges, choosing forks in the trail without consultation. We didn't stop to eat.

When the sun went down we walked until we could no longer see the trail. The next morning we were traveling before the sun came up.

We went at that grinding pace for six days. Gradually the landscape and climate changed. The sparse trees of the high Andes became the tall, close

trees of the tropical jungle. Vines hung from trees, some as thick as ropes. Even the sounds were different. Parrots screamed at us. Sometimes a monkey screeched as it swung from tree to tree to avoid us.

Each day I collapsed on the ground when we finally made our stop. Each day it became harder to get up in the morning dark. The Yukos, however, showed no sign of tiring. The heat annoyed them, and sweat streamed down their faces as they walked, but they didn't slow their pace.

We were heading for a ridge in the Motilone territory that they told me overlooked a Motilone home. There they would leave me to fend for myself. As we drew closer to the home, the Yukos became more and more quiet.

Once I started to comment about a brightly colored parrot I had seen and immediately felt a hand clapped across my mouth. It was one of the Yukos. There was no smile on his face. Only when he was sure that I wouldn't say anything did he take his hand away from my mouth.

We no longer had to climb the towering Andes, only small bluffs and ridges. The trees were so thick we seldom saw the sky. Rivers were the problem. Often the ground was swampy near the banks, so that it sometimes took hours to work out a safe route across. On the seventh day of the trip we woke up and began to walk without a word. I knew that we were near the Motilone ridge, and, tired as I was, there was a little more spring to my step. This was what I had come to the jungle for. I soon was going to see my first Motilone.

Suddenly all the Yukos stopped and raised their heads as if to sniff the wind. They stood like statues. I hadn't heard a sound, but I stood still, too, listening to my breath come hard and loud—too loud, I thought. I heard nothing else.

Then, as if in one motion, all the Yukos broke into a run, back the way we had come. I stood stunned for a moment, then, clumsily, ran after them, wondering what I was running for. I ran straight into some vines, tripped and fell flat on my face, scrambled up and got tangled in the vines again. Then a searing pain bit into my thigh, and my whole body went limp. I fell.

Everything seemed to move slowly—even my huge, gulping breaths. I looked down at my thigh. A long shaft was sticking out of it, with a neat little punch-hole where the arrow had gone in. The hole was bright red from the blood, my blood, oozing out and down my leg. I couldn't take my eyes off the arrow. It seemed unreal. It had to be sticking out from someone else's leg. But it wasn't.

Then I looked up, and my heart almost stopped. I was encircled by dark-skinned, naked men, with huge bows drawn taut. Nine little dots of arrowheads pointed right at me. I forgot all about my leg.

"Don't shoot! Don't!" I said in Yuko, pleading also with my eyes. Their eyes, like little black chunks of coal, made no response. Their arms did not relax at their bows.

"Oh, please," I said in Spanish, "I come as a friend.

"Friend," I said in Latin.

Without taking their eyes off me, they removed the arrows from their bows. One of the men walked over to me. I cowered. He reached down to my leg and grasped the arrow by the shaft. Putting his foot on my thigh, he yanked out the arrow. I saw little red, dancing stars. I couldn't breathe. I looked down at my leg and saw a bit of my muscle trailing in the blood from where the arrow had been pulled. Every second the pain seemed to be more than I could stand, and then, unbelievably, it got worse.

The man took the arrow and poked me in the back. I tried to ignore him. I wanted only to lie there and die. He insisted. He wanted me to stand. I did. Then he poked me in the back, and I stumbled ahead. The other men formed a file, and we began to walk back into Motilone territory.

The march lasted three hours. My leg pained beyond description, but every time I slowed down I felt the arrow point in my back.

We went up a long, steep hill, and I knew I couldn't go much further before I fainted. A dark throb in the corner of my eyes threatened to take over my whole field of vision. My leg felt as though it had been cut almost in half.

Finally we broke into sunlight at the top of the hill, and I saw a huge brown mound in the middle of a rough clearing. It looked like a beehive, planted unnaturally on the ground. It stood about forty feet high, and there were dark, rectangular holes at the ground level.

We went straight to it and entered one of the dark holes, stooping to get in. It was too dark to see at first. I heard little woman-screams, scuffling, and the cries of children. Gradually my eyes got used to the dim light. I was shoved down onto a little mat.

The women and children were gone. Only men stood over me, looking fierce and dangerous in the shadows. Suddenly the statistics of murdered oil company employees seemed very real. Had they brought me here to kill me?

The men talked, then backed away and left me alone. I looked around at the building. It wasn't round as I had thought, but oblong. There were six doors. Palm tree trunks had been bent in from the ground and tied to form a beautiful, simple arch framework, then covered with brown palm leaves. My eyes went back and forth across them. They seemed to get lighter, then to move gently, as though a breeze was swaying them. I felt relaxed. I couldn't feel the hurt in my legs. Just before I passed out I realized what was happening, and I laughed.

"I'm delirious," I said aloud. "How about that?" And I laughed again.

I think I awoke the next day. There was no way of knowing how long I had been unconscious. The women and children were paying no attention to me.

I felt hot and feverish. My thigh was swollen, and ugly yellow pus surrounded the place where the arrow had gone in.

I propped myself up on my elbow, but I began to feel dizzy, so I lay back down and looked at the ceiling. The high arches were almost like those of a cathedral. The quiet murmur of the women doing their work sounded like prayers.

I had diarrhea. The first time I felt its urging I tried to stand up by myself to walk outside. I was quickly shoved back down to my mat. We finally worked

out a series of signals so that one of the women could accompany me just outside the door where the Indians defecated. I did the same, red-faced, because the woman watched me carefully. Out of necessity my trips became more and more frequent.

I lay on the mat all day, half-awake. The glands under my arms were beginning to swell. No food was offered me. Late in the afternoon I was awakened from a doze by what sounded like war whoops. I sat up, expecting the worst.

The men streamed in, yelling and holding up monkeys and parrots that they had shot. Excited conversation filled the air. They held the animals over the fire to burn off the feathers or fur. The house was filled with acrid, choking smoke. Then the women cooked the animals.

I was extremely hungry, even though my fever made me feel sick to my stomach. But I was offered none of the food. That night when all the Motilones had strung up hammocks and were sleeping, I lay awake, sweating, the room threatening to sway and turn over in my head. My thigh ached clear to the bone. It obviously was infected, and I couldn't even wash it. I started to cry from weakness. The tears were somehow comforting.

Then I began to pray, and I prayed as I hadn't for a long time. I spoke quietly to God, my eyes open and watching the slightly moving hammocks of the Motilones strung high off the ground. God comforted me. He let me know that I was doing what He wanted.

The next afternoon a little boy came up to me with a palm leaf folded in his hand. He smiled and held out the leaf. In it was a mess of squirming grubs. Each was about the size and shape of a hot dog.

I didn't know what to do. I shrugged my shoulders and put a puzzled expression on my face.

One of the grubs wriggled off the leaf and fell to the ground. The boy quickly reached down, picked it up, bit off its head, then chewed and swallowed the rest of the grub.

He held out the leaf again. I was supposed to eat the grub. A wave of nausea swept through me. But I was hungry, and if I refused to eat these, who knew when I would be offered food again.

I reached out tentatively and picked up one of the smallest grubs. It writhed in my hand. I shut my eyes, put its head between my teeth, bit it off, and quickly spit it out. The insides of the worm pushed up out of its body. I knew that if I looked at them I wouldn't be able to eat, so I popped the whole thing in my mouth and chewed. It was like rubber. The flavor wasn't bad: a little like bacon. I picked up another and ate it, then another.

My stomach revolted. My skin went cold. I could feel the worms churning in my stomach. Suddenly they came up the way they'd gone down.

When I finally looked up, the boy had left. Later he brought me some smoked fish, and I was able to eat them and keep them down. From then on I was given plenty to eat, and no more grubs.

I got sicker. The days seemed to float by. I was still not allowed to leave my mat, but I doubted whether I could have stood up to leave anyway. The glands under one of my arms were so swollen I couldn't put my arm all the way down. My thigh was not healing.

When I could stay awake, I watched the women doing their chores or the men making arrows. Most of the men seemed cruel. They poked me and laughed when I jumped.

One fellow, though, seemed to have taken it into his head to protect me. Whenever he came up, the others would move away. He had a loud, distinctive laugh and was funny to look at, too. He walked pigeon-toed, and there was a little scar by the side of his mouth. Every day when he came back from hunting, he smiled and said something to me. Often it was he who brought me food.

I was there a month, living a kind of half-life. My diarrhea got worse. I was so weak that I could hardly sit up. I had to be helped outside.

One day I knew that I had to leave. God wanted me to, I felt sure.



But that meant losing my contact with the Motilones. How could I give that up after all it had taken me to get it? On the other hand, what good would it be to me if I were dead?

That night the moon was out. I could see it shining outside the house. I stood up quietly, teetering a little because of my dizziness. No one moved to stop me. Everyone was asleep.

I tiptoed to the door. Still no one stirred. I stepped out into the night air, my heart beating hard from fear. For a moment I even forgot I was sick.

A path led downhill from the door. I wanted to get to water to disguise my tracks. My leg hurt where the arrow had struck it, and it was stiff, so I had to drag it along. The path was rough; rocks jabbed into my feet.

When I got to the bottom of the mountain I stopped. There was a small river. I bathed my leg. The water stung, bringing tears to my eyes. I listened for sounds of being followed. There were none.

I had to follow the river, either up or down, or I would get lost. Upriver, I knew, I would come to the mountains. On the other side would be settlements. Downriver, I didn't know what I would find. So I went upriver.

For four days I walked without food. I saw nothing from the bank that I was sure was edible, and I was afraid of the many poisonous plants in the jungle. Fever burned in me. I felt alternately hot and cold. It was a terrific effort just to lift my feet. Sometimes I waded. Other times I walked the rocky bank.

The river snaked its way up into the mountains. Often I had to cross it to find a way up over the rocks. Sometimes the icy current would catch me, pick me up, and bang me against rocks and boulders before I could struggle out of it. It would have been easier to let the river carry me away.

My feet were swollen from climbing on the jagged rocks. Several times I was blocked by a waterfall with cliffs on either side, and I had to climb up the slick, mossy boulders, pawing for handholds to keep me from falling.

On the afternoon of the fifth day I wearily dropped into a seat between two huge boulders. I leaned back, resting my body against the damp, cold rock.

I looked at my fingernails, blue from the cold water, and at my hands and fingers, pale white. My whole body groaned with pain; my stomach ached with hunger. I started to shake and couldn't stop. I stared at the water, my gaze out of focus. The rushing water seemed to stand still.

Could I go any further? I didn't see how. I needed food, rest. Something bright yellow seemed to be waving up and down on the surface of the water. I couldn't make my eyes focus on it. I thought I was delirious. I rubbed my eyes. The water came into focus. Bobbing along in the current was a stalk of bananas. I grabbed them as they floated by. I couldn't believe it. They were ripe, too; unripe bananas are terribly bitter.

I had a hard time keeping them down, but as I began to digest them I felt them giving me strength and new hope.

I got up and began to walk upriver. In a few hours the river reached a high basin, where it petered out into several little streams. I climbed up the wall of the basin and finally reached the top of the mountains.

I could see down the forested slopes of the area ahead. Nowhere was there a sign of life. Nowhere was there a break in the trees—only miles and miles of the same jungle that I had just come through.

I collapsed on a fallen log. What was the point of going on? Even if there was a settlement somewhere out there, how would I ever find it?

Every day since my escape I had thought, "If I can just get to the top of the mountains I will be safe." Now I saw that I wasn't any better off than before. There was no safety anywhere.

Then I thought about the bananas. Had God given them to me to mock me, to make me think there was hope and then take it away?

I remembered the words, “Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.” God had given me a table in the middle of the jungle, a table of ripe bananas. Would He forget me now?

Somewhere out there, I thought, looking at the miles of unbroken trees, there must be people who can help me. God showed me the banana stalk when I needed it. He can surely take me to those people.

I won’t say that I had complete confidence that He’d do that. But I did pull my aching, sick body off the log and start walking again.

I found a streambed in the valley below and began to follow it down. I was in a daze. I seemed to be having a bad dream from which I couldn’t wake up. All day I walked down the riverbed. Sometimes I would rather have let the water carry me away. But I kept going.

I didn’t recognize the sound at first. It was high, sharp—like that of a woodpecker, only louder and slower. I listened carefully. I thought it was an odd sound to hear in the jungle. Something deep in my mind told me it was important. Some memory stirred, but I couldn’t give it a name. It was a noise I’d heard before.

I decided to investigate. As I got closer I remembered. It was the sound of an axe on a tree. A human being! Had God done it? Had He brought me to some civilization?

I trotted toward the sound, stumbling, my legs barely working in a loose, shambling run. Then I saw two men cutting at the base of a huge tree. As I shouted at them, I lost my balance and fell into the dirt.

## **CHAPTER 11: IN AND OUT OF CIVILIZATION**

“Who’s that?” one of the men yelled, probably thinking I was an Indian. I had fallen behind a bush, so they couldn’t see me.

“Help me!” I cried. “Please help!”

They stopped their work and came over to look at me.

“What’s the problem here?” one of them asked.

“Doctor,” was all I could gasp out.

They looked at each other with puzzled expressions, then picked me up and propped me against a tree. They gave me a corn patty and some sugar. I opened my mouth to thank them but found I couldn’t talk. It took a long time to eat the corn patty. I was too weak to chew well.

The men got a mule, put me on it, and took me to a nearby house. One of their wives brought me some good red beans, two more corn patties, and a cup of rich, sweet coffee. I began to feel stronger. While I stuffed the food in my mouth, I asked them how far I was from Machiques.

“Machiques? Never heard of it.”

I was surprised. Machiques was a well-known town.

“What is the nearest town?” I asked.

“Tamalameque.”

“How far is that?” I’d never heard of it.

“A good two days... walking.”

“And what’s the next largest town?”

“Rincón Hondo.”

“What? Colombia? I’m in Colombia?”

I didn’t take time to ponder it. A few minutes later I fell asleep. I woke up in a bed, the first bed I had seen in more than a year. The sun was coming in the window at about the same angle as when I had fallen asleep. “I’ve slept only a few minutes,” I thought. Then I realized that it must be the next day.

I got up, washed, and dressed. I felt better, although I was still weak. I looked in the mirror. I was like a scarecrow! My clothes—which I had gotten from the Yukos—were in tatters. No wonder the men had been a little frightened.

That day I rested quietly. My body wasn't used to food, so I ate only small amounts. Otherwise I started to feel sick. I got a map and tried to figure out where I had been during the last year.

The next day the colonists took me to Tamalameque. I had some Venezuelan money that I had managed to keep the whole time I was in the jungle. I exchanged it for Colombian pesos, went to a clothing store, and bought a good pair of shoes, khaki slacks, and a shirt. Leaving my filthy, tattered clothes in the store dressing room, I walked out into the street feeling like a new man.

I wanted to get out of the frontier and go to Bogotá, the capital of Colombia. There I could get my bearings. I didn't have enough money to get there, so I bought a train ticket for about half the distance. That left me penniless. But I didn't worry about how I would get the rest of the way. Somehow it would work out.

It was great to sit on the train and let it carry me, without effort, without worry. I had never appreciated a train before. The speed seemed incredibly fast. I put my legs on the seat opposite me and relaxed.

Halfway through the trip the train was stopped, and some military men got on. They started moving through the car I was in, checking everyone's papers.

"Hey, what are they doing?" I asked a man across the car from me.

He shrugged. "They're looking for communist guerillas. Sometimes they catch them on the trains."

A short, stocky soldier with a large, bushy moustache came up to me. "May I see your identification, please?"

I shook my head. "I haven't any. I'm sorry."

"You haven't any? Why?"

"I just came out of the jungle."

Heads turned to stare at me. The soldier looked stern. "You'd better come with me," he said.

He took me to his commander, who didn't believe my story either. I was taken off the train. The commander wired Bogotá that he had captured a suspicious expatriate who appeared to have been in the jungle.

I was escorted to a military post where I was fed a good square meal. Then the commander told me that he would have to send me to Bogotá for questioning.

All I did was shrug. Underneath I was laughing. I had no money and a train ticket that went only halfway to my destination. Now the military was feeding me and sending me to where I wanted to go! I had a Friend in high places.

In Bogotá I told my story to a number of top-ranking officials. They didn't believe all of it, but I did convince them that I had been in the jungle. They wired the U.S. embassy, which, of course, had never heard of me, since I wasn't registered in Colombia. I couldn't convince the officials that they should check in Venezuela. They were sure that part of my story was false. "No one," they said, "enters Motilone territory and comes out alive."

In an attempt to trip me, they sent me to Dr. Gregorio Hernández de Alba, head of the Indian commission in Colombia. Dr. Hernández had read an article by a Colombian anthropologist on the Yuko Indians, so he questioned me about their culture. What I said checked out, of course.

"OK," he said. "I believe you. You've been with the Yukos."

"But what about the Motilones?" I asked. "You don't believe I've been with them?"

He shrugged and grinned. "No one has ever contacted the Motilones before, so there's no way to check your story."

He put out his hand. "Still, that doesn't matter. I believe you."

He took legal responsibility for me so that I could get official papers to stay in Colombia. He also gave me money and helped me find a boardinghouse in which to stay.

A few days later I met an American couple, the Martins, at a Baptist church in Bogotá. They invited me to stay with them, gave me money for clothes and other necessities, and introduced me to many of their friends.

I spent most of my time just walking around Bogotá. Every day I felt better. It was great to be able to communicate freely. I felt at home, and the more I thought about it the less I wanted to go back to the Motilones. Life was hard in the jungle. I'd spent nearly two years there, sick most of the time, eating terrible food when I ate at all, unable to communicate well. Why should I go back? What was there to draw me back?

"Well," I thought, "I'm supposed to be telling the Indians about Jesus. That's what God sent me here to do."

How was I going to do that? I wasn't about to go back into the jungles and convert them into Americans, as some of the missionaries seemed to do. And with all the Indian myths and stories, legends and strange rites, where was Jesus Christ ever going to have an appeal?

But a man does not desert his wife because it's troublesome to feed her. As much as I wanted to stay away from the jungle, I knew I was going to go back. I had to go back. That was where God wanted me. He had affirmed that too many times to doubt it. And, more importantly, He had given me a love for the Motilones that, in view of what I'd been through while I was with them, was unbelievable. I knew that it didn't make sense, but when I was asked about my adventures I found myself more and more describing the Motilone people and the way they lived, and spending less and less time telling what had happened to me. I loved those people. I was proud of them.

However, Bogotá was appealing. I loved being there. I wanted to stay as long as I could.

"All right, Lord, I'll go back," I said. "But I don't have any way to go there. When You want me to go back, You can open up a way of getting there."

The people I was staying with, the Martins, worked for Texaco Oil. They were quite interested in my story, and Mr. Martin wanted me to tell it to the general manager of the Colombian Petroleum Company, which is jointly owned by Texaco and Mobil. I agreed to do it since the Martins had been so kind to me.

Frank Lerory, the general manager, listened attentively to my story. When I finished, he leaned back in his chair and frowned, as if he were going to give me bad news.

"Mr. Olson, we have hired two excellent anthropologists to contact what is known as the Motilone tribe. As you've no doubt heard, it's supposed to be the Motilone Indians who attack our employees.

"The anthropologists, however, on both occasions made contact with the Yuko Indians and affirmed that these were the people known as the Motilones." He shrugged and put up his hands. "Why should we accept what you're saying?"

I mentioned some of the differences between the way the Motilones and the Yukos live.

"Oh, well," he said. "I suppose you've flown over the area in a plane. Anyone can do that."

That made me angry. "I'm not interested in whether you believe me or not," I said. "I just came in because Mr. Martin asked me to."

He looked bored. "So what do you hope to get from us?"

"I don't want a thing from you," I said. "I just came in at the request of a friend."

He waved his hand. "OK, you came. Thanks a lot."

I got up and started out of his office without stopping to shake his hand.

“Wait a second,” he said. “Do you want to go back to Motilone territory?” I turned. Immediately I thought of what I had prayed only a few days before. “Yes,” I said shortly.

“We have a DC3 going to the River of Gold the day after tomorrow,” he said. “I think I can get you on it if you’d like. That’s as close as you can get to their territory.”

I nodded slowly. “Thank you. I know it is. I would like very much to go.”

## CHAPTER 12: AN IMPATIENT WAIT

The jungle seemed strangely quiet and serene after a month in Bogotá. I established a camp near the bank of a small stream and waited for the Motilones to find me. The camp was near the juncture of three different Motilone trails, and I knew that I wasn’t far from a Motilone home. But it would have been dangerous to go walking up to it. Instead, I left gifts on the trails for the Motilones to find.

My supplies were luxurious compared to my previous jungle equipment. I had a plastic tarp to keep off the night rain and enough food to last me a week or more. I even had three books: a Bible, “Doctor Zhivago,” and “Red Cloth Green Jungle,” an anthropological adventure with the Yuko Indians. I was quite pleased with myself. Soon I would be back with the Motilones, I thought. In the meantime I could enjoy the jungle, do some reading, and rest.

Civilization was far behind me. From the River of Gold, where the oil company’s territory ended, a farmer had guided me upriver as far as he dared. Then I had walked back into the jungle, repeatedly losing my way, backtracking and trying to make sense out of the indistinct, tangled Indian trails. Finally I had settled on my camping place.

Every day I checked the gifts I had laid out on the trails. I had draped a long piece of red cloth across branches on one trail, tied small bags of sugar and

salt to trees, and left three machetes lying flat on another trail. They lay flat because the Motilones declared war, I had been told by one of the oil company executives, by sticking their arrows point down in the trail. I wanted no confusion: I came in peace.

Checking on the gifts took a good part of each day, since it required fighting through the branches and vines that covered the trails. After doing that I would return to my camp. It was on a knoll, underneath a mahogany tree whose roots jutted out like the flying buttresses of a cathedral. It was a comfortable place, except for the bugs. I usually fished in the afternoon, cooked some food on the fire I kept going, then read.

A week went by, then two weeks. There was no sign that the gifts had been touched. The weeks stretched into a month. My food was gone. The jungle began to seem oppressive. The scream of animals often kept me awake at night. I knew that tigers were stalking prey out in the dark. Sometimes, hearing an animal scream, I would shiver. During the day the high trees dripped water and looked dark and somber. I wished I could see the sun through the jungle growth. There was a frightening sense of quietness, as though my approach made all the jungle hush up, as though any spoken word would echo endlessly in the stillness. Sometimes, to relieve the silence, I would stand and yell phrases in all the languages I could think of.

I began to doubt whether my gifts would ever get results. Each day when I rounded a corner on the trail I expected to see some change. Each day they were just the way I had left them. I grew impatient. After struggling several hours to get to the gifts, I would merely glance at them with disgust and leave. I had read my books over and over and was tired of them. I wanted something to happen.

My impatience seemed ridiculous. Here I had committed my whole life to the Motilones, and I couldn’t stand a few weeks waiting comfortably in the jungle. What was the hurry?

All such rational considerations aside, however, I was ecstatically happy when, after two months, I found that my gifts were gone. I could hardly

believe it. I checked to see that it was really the same place. But there was no doubting it; I knew the location as well as I knew my hand. I could describe every branch of every tree. The gifts had been taken.

I put out more gifts. The next day they were gone, too. Again I set out gifts. That day they were replaced by a bow and arrow. That was a great step forward: they were willing to exchange gifts.

This time I decided to put out gifts and stay nearby to see if they would take them from me personally. I felt sure that there were eyes in the jungle watching me. I wanted to see them.

So I sat down on the trail and waited. Hours went by. I saw and heard nothing. I had my fishing equipment with me, and there was a stream nearby, so I decided to fish. I probably would hear them if they came to take the gifts.

When I got back from fishing, the gifts were gone. In their place were four long arrows stuck into the ground, point down.

It was the Motilone warning. I should run for my life. But if I ran now, I probably would never see them again. My months and years would be wasted. My commitment would be an empty phase of my life.

I got down on my knees and prayed. It seemed the logical thing to do. When I stood up, I got an idea. I pulled the arrows out of the ground, one by one, and lay them flat. Then I took some gifts and lay them on top. Perhaps that would convince them that I came in peace.

I started walking back to my camp along the trail. As I went I found more symbols. There was a white shirt, cut and torn to shreds. Further along the trail I found a manioc root, cut open, with dirt rubbed inside.

What did these things mean? Would the Motilones cut my body open and rub dirt inside? Would they cut me up in ribbons?

I heard a rustling in the underbrush. I stopped and listened. The rustling stopped, too.

"It's my imagination," I thought. I started walking again. But there were definite sounds near the trail. I was being followed.

I searched the thick, green vegetation with my eyes. I could see nothing. I continued to walk, looking around me constantly, expecting to feel an arrow sizzle into my back.

I remembered a Motilone phrase I had learned while I was with them before. I was fairly sure that it meant "Come here." I yelled it at the Indians.

"Guaycaba dobu cubi! Guaycaba dobu cubi!"

After I shouted several times, I heard the rustling noises again, this time retreating from me, back into the jungle. Then there was silence.

Later I learned that "dubu cubi" means "you lazy ones of no value," so that I was yelling, "Come here, you lazy, worthless people!" But I didn't know that then. I didn't know what I had done. Two months of waiting had been turned into nothing by a stupid mistake that I couldn't even identify. I felt horribly frustrated. My hopes, that had been so high that morning, disappeared. I began to run on the trail back to my camp, slashing through thornbushes and vines. All I wanted to do was to get out of that place. I had had it with the Indians. They were stupid and irrational.

So I ran, panting furiously, but not even feeling the fatigue. All the loneliness of the past two months came out. I felt the bushes tear my hands and face, but it almost felt good. I wanted to leave, to forget the Indians.

I broke into the clearing of my camp and stood panting for a moment. Then I seized my axe and ran down to the water. I began to chop at a balsa tree. I would make a raft and float out of there.

I worked at a frenzy. Soon the tree swayed and came crashing down into the river. Immediately I moved to a second, driving the axe bite deep into the tree. It too fell. I moved to a third.

Then I looked up. There were the Motilones—six of them, their bow strings taut. Without thinking I dropped my axe and hid behind a tree. I peered out at

them. They didn't seem to have any inclination to kill me. They were just waiting, holding their bows ready.

I stepped out from behind the tree. I held out my hands, showing that they were empty. My anger was gone. I watched their faces for some sign, my hands shaking slightly.

Slowly they relaxed their bows. One of them stepped forward. He was pigeon-toed. I looked more closely at his face. He had a small scar on the side of the mouth.

I smiled at him, hoping that he'd recognize me. He returned my smile. I smiled more broadly. So did he. He knew me. He spoke a word to the other men. They relaxed. Then he broke into the big, long laugh that I had known him for on the other side of the mountains. He had been the only friendly person there, and now I found him here hundreds of miles away.

The men began talking to each other. I could tell they weren't angry. They didn't even seem to watch me too closely. Then the man with the laugh motioned to me to follow them, and we set off. This time there were no spears in my back.

When we reached the communal home, I caused a great commotion. Motilones crowded around me, poking, rubbing. They seemed most interested in the hair on my arms and legs. I had noticed before that Motilones didn't have any. One young fellow touched my arm, then took some of the thick blond hair between his fingers and pulled it out.

"Ouch!" I said. The pain was excruciating. But he just laughed, and all the others laughed with him. They pulled on my shirt and shorts as though they weren't sure whether they were part of my body. They punched me and kneaded my muscles.

More of my hair was pulled out. It hurt, but they obviously were having a good time. Soon I had to laugh myself. I was exhilarated. They weren't going to hurt me. I had made contact again. Once again I had an opportunity to reach the Motilones. That night I was given food, then a hammock in which

to sleep. The hammock hung so high in the rafters that it took several tries to get up in it. The first time I tried, I fell, and everyone laughed. But I made it up and, feeling a little insecure, tried to relax. The hammock swayed slightly.

Looking at the ceiling, I studied the familiar curved rafters. Then I saw what looked like a small mouse coming down one of the hammock ropes toward me. It had an odd, flat shape for an animal. When it ran to within an arm's length, I saw that it was a huge cockroach, perhaps five inches long. I gave a little shriek and knocked it onto the ground. No one seemed to notice. I lay back in the hammock and laughed nervously.

The house became quiet. I heard only an occasional fragment of the singsong, explosive language of the Motilones. "Soon," I thought, "I'll understand that."

### **CHAPTER 13: DISCOURAGEMENT**

The next day we traded names. I pointed at myself.

"Bruce Olson," I enunciated clearly.

Most of the people around me looked confused. One of the men tried to say it. "Bruchalonga."

I shook my head. "Bruce Olson. Bruuuuce Ohhl-sun."

He tried again.

"Bruchko."

"Bruce Olson," I

said

He smiled and nodded. "Bruchko," he said. He turned and happily told it to one of the other men near him. "Bruchko." The fellow repeated it tentatively. "Bruchko." Soon the entire group had spread it around. "Bruchko," they repeated, pointing at me.

So I was Bruchko.

I also was a celebrity. They mimicked my speech, squeezed my arms, and/or rubbed my stomach. Sometimes when I was in my hammock, two or three children would climb in with me, jabbering away and crawling over me as though I were a large piece of statuary.

I got plenty of good smoked fish and boiled manioc root. It was delicious. The man who had first recognized me, whose name was Arabadoyca, usually brought it to me in a big banana leaf. I would get out of my hammock and eat while he stood, grinning along with the usual crowd of other curious onlookers. Everything I did seemed to interest them. And they were always laughing, singing, or talking.

In the early morning the men would go out hunting, and the women would begin their work for the day. The children would play tag or would make little arrows and shoot them at targets. Later the men would come back with their kill, and there would be a meal, with everyone enjoying the aroma of the roasting meat, shouting back and forth across the center of the community home. Each family cooked its own food and ate it with obvious pleasure. When they were full, their stomachs bulged, and they would walk around patting each other's stomachs almost like proud mothers comparing babies.

Everyone seemed to have taken a liking to me, and I was excited. Already I was working hard to learn the Motilone language, but I could see that it would be a long, slow process.

In Minnesota I had worked with a boys' club, and I'd mastered a little act of removing my eye and cleaning it off. Several little boys were in my hammock with me when I thought of the trick. I picked each one up, set him on the ground, and prepared to do my act. Several other children came up to watch.

I put my fingers around one eye and twisted them back and forth, making a grinding sound with my teeth. Then, closing my eye, I pretended to take it out of the socket, breathe on it, then polish it on my shirt. I put it back up to my eye socket, twisted it around a little to get it back into place, and then opened it. Ah! That was much better. I could see much more clearly.

The children loved it. They wanted me to do it with the other eye. So I did. Then I pretended to take both eyes out. In putting them back, I crossed my hands. When I opened my eyes, they were crossed! That was a great sensation. Most of the children ran off to get other children or to get their parents so that everyone could see this wonderful performance.

I was pleased at being so well received. But as the people were gathering, I realized that this act might have some practical significance in learning the language. So I reached up to the shelf that ran around the inside of the home and got down a notebook and pencil. While I was doing my act, I listened to what the people said and copied it down as well as I could.

When I took both eyes out, the kids said something like, "Now he will put them in cross-eyed," and I got the future tense.

When I put one of the eyes in my mouth and, gulp, swallowed it, there was an expression of surprise. "He swallowed it!" one of the boys gasped. That gave me the past tense.

When I burped the eye back up, I got a past tense that has continuing significance in the present.

I gave the presentation for every Motilone in the home dozens of times, until it seemed that my eyes would turn black and blue. But I was filling my notebook with Motilone words.

Other games that I remembered were helpful, too. I would chop at my arm above the shirtsleeve with my hand, then pull my arm out of the sleeve as though it had broken off. The Motilones would laugh, then chop at their own arms and pull. Nothing would happen. They'd look perplexed, and I'd say, "Why don't you let me do it to you?" They'd laugh and say, "No, you'd break our arms," and run away from me.

Or I would tense my arm and swing it in a circle, as though it had been broken at the elbow and was hanging loose. Of course, the Motilones were mystified, because they didn't know the trick.



They had unbelievable tolerance for seeing these acts again and again. But everyone gets tired of games. After a few weeks most of the Motilones lost interest in them, and I did, too.

I tried to interest myself more in the adult life of the home. I watched Arabadoyca make arrows one day—even tried to make one of my own. I did it all wrong, of course, but Arabadoyca was a patient teacher. It was interesting, but it took a great deal of practice. After a few days I looked for something else to do.

I began to watch the women weave. Ordinarily they would never let a man sit and observe, but since I was an outsider they put up with me, though they giggled self-consciously while I was there. Weaving was an old hobby of mine, and I got quite engrossed in watching them spin thread from the wild cotton they had picked, then weave it into a rough cloth for their skirts. It was a social time for them, and there was a lot of conversation to listen to. Of course, I didn't understand any of it, but just getting used to the sounds of the language would help me, I thought. I began to wish that I had a loom of my own to work with. But I knew it wasn't a good idea. If I spent time weaving, the men soon would be put off, since that was women's work.

Like making arrows, watching weaving is interesting for a day, two days, and even three days. But after that you can't stand it anymore.

I began to wish that the day would last about three hours, and that the rest of the time would be filled with sleep. I would lie up in my hammock for hours at a time during the day, staring at the high ceiling, wishing that I would fall asleep. I started going to bed early, immediately after eating the evening meal. But then I would wake up at two in the morning, so I made myself stay awake at night. I would stare at something or try to make myself listen to someone's meaningless talking until it was late enough to go to bed.

A fog of depression began to cover my days. It seemed that the sun didn't move across the sky at all, that each day lasted forever, and that it was like every other day.

I shouldn't have been unhappy. The Motilones were a cheerful, gentle people. One day I watched a mother weaving with her little girl in her lap. The girl put her hands into the cloth and tangled the thread until it was a complete mess. But the mother didn't even scold her. She merely put her to one side, patiently repaired the damage, then showed her how she could help card the yarn.

And once I saw two brothers fighting. Their mother, upset, picked up a chicken's head and gently pecked at one of the boy's legs. She hardly touched him, but the boy broke into tears because he had grieved his mother. That was the strongest form of punishment I ever saw used, or needed.

But there were things that I was not attracted to. The communal home, housing approximately eighty Motilones, should have been a perfect place for cooperative living. But each family lived a life of its own. If one family happened to have too much food on a particular day, they would throw it away, regardless of whether the family next to them was starving or not. There were no close ties between families. One family might live next to another for some time without even exchanging names.

And the population of the home changed constantly. A family would just get up and leave, without warning. Other days families would appear and settle down with us, without anyone taking notice of them or seeming to care whether they came or not. Often weeks would go by before anyone even knew who they were.

No tears were ever shed, no sign of pain or sadness ever shown. The Motilones didn't seem to have those emotions. The smiles and constant laughing began to seem pointless.

"When you get right down to it, these are uncivilized Indians, with none of the feelings I can relate to," I thought.

I had read my Bible through again and again, until it too seemed almost stale. I knew what verses were coming next. I knew the thoughts I'd thought about those passages and the prayers I'd prayed. True, there was clear evidence

that God had heard those prayers. After all, I was there, living peacefully with the notorious Motilone Indians.

But the excitement was gone. I had come to communicate Jesus Christ to the Motilone Indians. Was I doing that? I didn't know the language beyond a few rudimentary phrases.

I thought about some of the great missionaries whose biographies I had read. Nothing about them seemed to help my situation. Great obstacles I could face, but what could I do about the terrible, flat boredom? I started thinking about missionaries like the ones I had met in Minneapolis and the missionaries I had become so critical of who worked on the Orinoco. After four years they got to go home on furlough and tell about their converts.

It was that silly thought that started me feeling really low. I had been in South America for three years. Where were my converts? There were my friends at the university, of course, but I couldn't think of them as converts. They were just friends with whom I'd had an opportunity to share.

And after three years I had no money, no mission board to buy my ticket home. In fact, the only place in the world where I was sure of getting something to eat was in the jungle, with the Motilones.

So I became discouraged. Each morning I dreaded the thought of eating. The food had grown as dull or duller than the Yuko food. With no salt or sugar, there was a limit to how good it could taste. And often, when there was only monkey meat or grub worms, I would vomit it all up. My fleas were getting worse, and I had a skin rash from being dirty constantly.

And why was the language so hard? I had thought I was making progress the first few days, but it seemed now that it was harder than learning Yuko. I didn't want to spend three months completely without communication, as I had with the Yukos. I was always looking for shortcuts, but there were none.

One morning, completely disgusted with the endless store of time on my hands, I got out of my hammock and went outside. As I ducked out of the door, I slipped and almost fell. I had stepped in a pile of human manure. I

scraped it off my shoe as well as I could, then walked over to a stump and sat down. It was about eleven o'clock. The sun was coming almost straight down, making it hot and steamy. There were no trees near the home for shade or comfort. Flies buzzed in the sun over other piles of excrement.

Why did they have to do it right outside the door? Couldn't they go somewhere else to do it, where it wouldn't bother anyone?

Just then one of the wives came to the door and threw out a bunch of garbage: banana and pineapple peels and all sorts of things le<sup>2</sup> over from the fish and monkeys we had eaten.

By their standards, of course, she'd been hygienic. One woman hadn't thrown out her garbage for a week. It had lain on the floor until toadstools grew on it.

What a filthy place! My chest felt tight. I closed my eyes to make it all go away.

An old lady came out of the house and walked over to me, grinning a big toothless grin. She rubbed up against me in a friendly way, jabbering. She smelled bad. I looked at her tangled, thick black hair. Lice were crawling through it. Her breasts hung down flabbily.

I stood up and walked from her, feeling sick. She followed, put her hands around my waist and hugged me. Then she laughed—a stupid, lunatic laugh. I looked down at her hands. They were filthy. I gingerly took each one off me and walked a little way into the jungle. She followed at a distance, giggling.

I couldn't even tell her to get lost. A simple thing like that, and I couldn't say it. There wasn't a soul there who understood me.

How long would it take? Three months? Four? Would I be able to communicate well in a year?

There's an old gospel song that says, "If you can't bear the cross, then you can't wear the crown." I realized I didn't want the cross. I wanted the crown, with all its jewels, without ever carrying the cross.

Looking again at the old woman, I wasn't even sure I wanted the crown.

#### CHAPTER 14: A PACT BROTHER

I lay in my hammock, watching the cockroaches crawl across the ceiling. What was I going to do today? Would I be able to contribute anything, do anything at all to help these people?

A boy brought me some food. I eased down out of the hammock. I didn't feel like eating.

The boy looked at me with a big smile—a sweet smile—and I realized I'd seen him before. In fact, he often was assigned to bring me food.

I squatted down to eat, and he lingered. I motioned to him to sit down, and he did. Dark and muscular, he appeared to be about thirteen, for he did not yet have the loincloth that is the sign of a Motilone man.

I offered him some food, but he refused.

"What is your name?" I asked.

"Cobaydrá," he said.

That was about as far as my vocabulary would take me. I had been with the Motilones for nearly a year. We sat and looked at each other while I ate. The entire time he wore that smile. I almost wanted to throw my arms around him and hug him.

It was the day for a Motilone fishing expedition. I had never gone along on one, but this time, as the men and women were leaving the home, Cobaydrá came and took me by the arm. "Come on," he said.

It was about four miles to the river. By the time I got there I was tired. The river was broad and shallow, divided in the middle by a long sandbar. It was a hot day, and a swim would feel good. Besides, I was dirty! But no one stopped. The men went upstream, and the women downstream. I hesitated, then followed the men. They were already out of sight. I fought through the

brambles to get to where I could hear them shouting. When I saw them again, they were already carrying huge rocks out into the stream, beginning a dam.

I thought I would help, so I stepped into the stream and tried to pull up a rock that looked about the size of the ones they were carrying. I couldn't budge it. I strained and pushed but couldn't move it from its place.

"Well," I thought, "this must be heavier than the rocks they're lifting."

As I looked around for a smaller one, I jumped; standing right behind me, with the same sweet smile, was Cobaydrá. He walked past me, easily lifted the rock, carried it over, and put it in place. I was chagrined, but he smiled at me, flexed his muscles and laughed. I laughed, too. We began to work together.

It took most of the morning to build the dam. When all the rocks were in place, we got big leaves from the trees and covered the rocks with them. That diverted the water to the other side of the sandbar. Meanwhile, downstream, the women had been building a small dam to keep the fish from swimming downriver.

Then, brandishing long, pencil-thin spears, the men dashed up and down the river, aiming inerrantly at the fish. They yelled and laughed, charging through the water and coming out with huge fish wriggling at the end of their spears. I sat on the bank, watching—and drying off.

Cobaydrá came over and offered me his spear. He wanted me to try.

I shook my head no.

Cobaydrá nodded his head yes. His smile was beguiling. I couldn't refuse him.

He followed me into the water, which was now thick and brown from all the splashing. I couldn't see a fish anywhere.

Cobaydrá grabbed my arm and pointed into the stream. I looked but saw nothing. He kept pointing. Finally I spotted the fish. Carefully I raised my spear, aimed, and let it fly. The spear went off balance and glanced sideways

into the water, making a splash but missing the fish. Disgusted, I retrieved the spear and handed it to Cobaydrá. Still smiling, he handed it back.

“Take it,” he said. “Try it again.”

I had a friend. From that day on, things went better. Cobaydrá brought my food almost every day, and I looked forward to sitting with him and eating. He made me go with him when the men went hunting, so I had more to do.

I also became familiar with the projects and pastimes of the men. Hunting was fun, particularly with Cobaydrá to run the trails with me.

I wanted to show Cobaydrá and the rest of the men that I really was interested in hunting. I couldn't tell them directly because I didn't know the right words. So I made a great show of shouting when they did, following after them and mimicking their phrases.

One morning I had a sore throat from yelling. I could hardly talk at first. Later, my voice was lower than usual. That afternoon I got hungry, so I went to Cobaydrá and asked for a banana. He went out and came back with an ax. I was puzzled. I was sure I had the right word for banana. So I asked for it again, and again Cobaydrá handed me the ax.

Then a crazy thought came into my head. I pinched my nose and asked again in a high voice. This time Cobaydrá got me a banana.

The Motilones had a tonal language! According to all the linguistic books, tonal languages did not exist in South America. Now I was trying to learn one, and without my flute I couldn't even carry a tune. How would I ever manage?

But in Cobaydrá I had someone I could talk to without feeling embarrassed. We spent hours lying in hammocks or squatting inside the house. I wrote down the things he said, and gradually my store of words increased.

Cobaydrá's father was a distinguished member of the tribe. He was the only Motilone with white hair. Sensitive to our friendship, he encouraged us to spend time together.

He came up to me one day and told me to follow him. We went outside. Cobaydrá was waiting there, looking nervous.

Two other Motilone men were with him. They walked into the jungle without exchanging a word. I followed. What was going on? We walked for about fifteen minutes, then stopped in a little clearing.

Cobaydrá's father solemnly produced a loincloth, and I realized with a little chill of excitement that this was the ceremony for Cobaydrá to become a man. I had no idea what took place. All I knew was that one day a Motilone boy was a boy, and the next day he was wearing a loincloth and was considered a man.

There was a short ceremony, then Cobaydrá slipped on the loincloth. He was smiling, almost laughing—and really proud.

His father turned to the three of us who were looking on. “His name is Bobaríshora.” Then, turning to me, he said, “Now that he is a man, he will no longer be called Cobaydrá. He will be called Bobaríshora.” Trying to repeat the name, I got it all tangled up on my tongue.

“Bobaríshora,” his father said again, slowly.

I looked at Bobaríshora. He was smiling. I tried the name again. “Bobbishow.” That's the way it sounded to me. “Bobbishow.” Then I shortened it.

“Bobby,” I said and laughed. The name seemed to fit his pleasant, lighthearted personality.

The others repeated it. They liked it, and later the whole tribe adopted it. Bobaríshora became known as Bobby, though Bobaríshora was still his full name.

Being invited to Bobby's initiation ceremony was significant, because only the closest family and friends ever were allowed to observe the rites. However, I knew enough of the Motilone culture to realize that something was missing. Usually a pact was established with anyone invited. In my case there was none.

The Motilone social system is based upon pacts between families. If you form a pact with someone, you agree to share everything: food, shelter, and family. But it goes even deeper than that. You become brothers.

I had seen pacts formed before. Part of the ceremony required that the people involved exchange arrows. I wanted to establish a pact with Bobby, and I felt that he wanted it, too. But I couldn't make arrows well enough, and the exchange of the arrows was an important beginning of the whole relationship.

I asked Bobby's brother to make some arrows for me and to arrange the pact. As the time for the pact ceremony approached, I actually became quite nervous. I wanted very much for Bobby to be pleased with it, and I was afraid of making a mistake.

But it went well. I held out my arrows to Bobby, and he took them and made a show of carefully examining them.

"These are beautiful arrows," he said solemnly. "I accept you as my brother."

I took his arrows from him. They were long, heavy things, with beautiful markings. I could see that Bobby, who had been making arrows all his life, had taken extra care with these.

We sang the traditional song of brotherhood, and my body relaxed. "We are brothers," I sang, looking at Bobby, my face breaking out into a smile that was as broad and free as his. "We are brothers, and there is nothing in the world that can take us apart."

More and more of our time was spent together. When I went out of the communal home to walk the Motilone trails, Bobby followed me without a word. That had deep significance. It meant that he was accepting me as his leader, as his personal chief. Often we went hunting together. One day I stepped on a five-inch jungle thorn. As I pulled my foot out of my tennis shoe, blood spurted everywhere. Bobby ran around and around, making little crying noises, until I could stop screaming and get the blood stopped.

Motilones never show pain, yet Bobby had given me sympathy and had wanted to help.

A few weeks later, when we were walking in the jungle, Bobby stopped behind me without saying a word. For a moment I didn't realize that he had stopped, because he walked so quietly. When I did, I turned around. He looked a little shaky, and his mouth was open, as if he were trying to speak.

"Bobby," I said, "what's the matter?"

"Nothing," he said in a low mutter. I shrugged and turned back to the trail. We kept on, neither of us talking. The silence was unnerving. I wondered what was wrong.

Then I heard his voice behind me. "Bruchko, I am named 'In the Heavens.'"

I turned, puzzled. He was standing quite still, with his mouth open a little bit, as if he'd seen a ghost. I could see that whatever he meant was extremely important. But I didn't understand.

"That's my name," he said.

"But what about Bobarishora?"

He shook his head. "No, my real name is 'In the Heavens.' That is my secret name."

Then he explained that every Motilone Indian has a secret name that is his real identity. Only his father and sometimes a few others know it. It is secret because, if someone knows it, he has complete power over that person.

"And you are telling me?" I asked. "You are telling me your secret name and giving me power over your life?"

He nodded. We stood looking at each other. It was one of the most serious moments of my life.

Then Bobby's face broke into a smile again. I reached out and took him by the shoulders. I was crying. I had come all the way to South America, to Colombia, and now to the jungle, needing something I hadn't really expected

to find: a real friend. Someone who would be a brother. A blood brother. I had found him. Our ages were different; our language, our skin color, our beliefs—everything. But we had one thing together: a deep, brother love. I didn't know where it would take us. But God had placed it in our hearts.

## CHAPTER 15: MISTAKEN FOR A CANNIBAL

After Bobby and I became brothers, the dirt was still there, the fleas still bit, the bugs still carried disease, and I still got diarrhea. But those things seemed less and less significant.

I had been accepted. I had a family.

Bobby and I began to visit in the various communal homes. Our times on the trail were great! The jungle seemed even more beautiful as Bobby and I walked, talked, and sang together.

The Motilone communal homes are spread over a wide area. It sometimes took several days to get from one home to another. Bobby was one of the strongest young Motilone warriors, and his pace on the trails was far too fast for me. When he noticed I was exhausted, he stopped without a word, and we rested.

But he was proud. He wouldn't accept anything from anyone. When we arrived at a communal home, he sometimes would wait days before accepting food. To eat was a sign of weakness, and no weakness could be tolerated.

"Bobby, why don't you eat?" I would ask.

"I'm not hungry," he would reply.

Bobby was so determined to be stronger than anyone else that he wasn't always popular with other Motilones. He was merciless with himself. But with me he was kind and gentle.

We came back from one trip to find that Bobby's father had died. Bobby told me, showing no emotion. I was hurt and puzzled. He had been such a fine old

man. He had taken me into his own family. He had encouraged my friendship with Bobby. Now he was dead. He had died during the night. His body was still in his hammock.

No one seemed to care. It was the first Motilone funeral I had ever seen, and I couldn't believe how callous everyone was. His body was wrapped in his hammock and taken by a few men out to the jungle. It was hung high up in the trees. Soon the vultures came swinging down out of the sky to devour it. There were no tears. It seemed as though nothing had happened. I wrote in my journal, "These people are iron hard. To them the death has no great significance. They aren't struck by any spiritual dimension at all. The fact that he will not walk the face of the earth again seems to have no impact on their lives. And how will I reach them with Jesus' message of love if they don't even try to love each other?"

Everywhere I went in Motilone territory I heard the name Abaratatura. It always was spoken with awe and respect. In the Motilone language, the name has a special lilt that gives it an almost magical quality. Finally I asked Bobby who he was.

Bobby wrinkled his forehead. "He is a great warrior and hunter, highly respected by all the Motilones. I suppose you could say that he's a chief over the chiefs."

"Where does he live?"

"In Corroroncayra. That's a long way from here, in the mountains."

"Bobby, why don't we visit him? I'd like to meet him."

Bobby laughed and shook his head. "You want to get killed? He hates white men."

The thought of it was rather chilling. I had almost forgotten that the Motilones killed people, that I might have enemies.

I was talking to Arabadoyca one day, lying in our hammocks, and it popped into my head to ask him about Abaratatura. "Why would he want to kill me?"

He must know by now that I'm not dangerous. Surely he's heard about me living here."

"He thinks you're the cannibal with the magic flute," Arabadoyca said. "So he'll kill you before you kill him."

"What?" I said. "What do you mean?"

Arabadoyca stretched. "The time will come, it's said, when a white man will come to the Motilones with a magic flute that he will play. He'll lead all the Motilones into a trap, and they'll be eaten alive."

I knew that the Motilones had extensive traditions, but I had heard only a few of them. This one was new to me.

"And that's why Abaratatura hates me? He thinks I'm a cannibal?"

"Well, you play the flute, don't you?" He laughed. "Anyway, the rest of us don't think you are the cannibal. At first we thought you were. In fact, Abaratatura was on his way to kill you when you disappeared the first time you came to us. The day after you left, he arrived."

I remembered the night when I was sick and had slipped out of the house, wondering what on earth I was doing. Now I could see that God had given me that compulsion to save my life.

"When no harm came to us because of you," Arabadoyca continued, "most of us believed that you were all right. In fact, some thought that you might be bringing God's banana stalk."

"What's that?"

"There is another prediction that a tall man with yellow hair will come with a banana stalk, and God will come out of the banana stalk."

"And do you think that might be me?"

He shrugged. "You don't carry a banana stalk, do you?"

"Well," I said, "what about Abaratatura? I would like to see him."

Arabadoyca shook his head. "You can't go there. He'll kill you."

Once I had the idea in my head, though, I couldn't get it out. A few weeks later a contingent of men were going up to call on Abaratatura, and I asked to go with them. I was turned down, but I insisted. Reluctantly they agreed.

It was a long trip. We set a fierce pace, not stopping to eat. We lived on raw manioc roots, lizards, and beetles. After eight days I had shooting pains in my chest and began to vomit every time I tried to eat. My mouth felt as though it were filled with cotton. At every stream I drank water until my stomach felt ready to burst, but still my mouth had no saliva in it. That ninth day stretched out interminably. Finally, when there were still hours of walking left, I had to ask my companions to stop for the day.

I tried to eat some of the food that Arabadoyca brought me, but it wouldn't stay down. I couldn't imagine what this sickness could be. My mind went over my medical books, trying to match my symptoms.

Arabadoyca came up and took me by the shoulders. His crooked smile seemed stretched and far away, like a figure in a dream.

"Bruchko," he said, "your eyes are beautiful! How did you make them such a pretty color?"

It took me a moment to comprehend what he was saying. His face seemed to sway before me.

"What color?" I asked.

"Why, they're yellow, a beautiful yellow. Can we make our eyes like that, too?"

Yellow eyes. Hepatitis! I needed more than rest. I needed medical attention.

But it was eight days back to the river, then another week to make a raft and float downriver to civilization. I wouldn't make it alive.

But could I go on? I wouldn't be any closer to help in Corroroncaya. And there I faced the possibility of being killed outright. I certainly didn't have the strength to fight.

Either way there was no hope. The trunks of the jungle trees seemed to swing back and forth in front of me. I was sick, and now, I thought, with my stomach sinking, I am going to die.

I remembered the promise I had made God when I was a captive of the Yukos. I had promised to lead a God-directed life. What was His direction now?

I decided I had to go on. My life was in God's hands. He would have to do with it what He wanted.

The next few days were trance-like. My skin turned dark yellow. Each step was a struggle. I would feel my body reel and fight to keep balance. Once I fainted and woke up lying on the trail, with Motilone faces surrounding me. I got to my feet and kept walking.

A few hours later I fainted again. When I woke up, one of the men—a witch doctor—was howling and chanting over me. I was frightened, but too weak to move. His face came closer. It seemed huge and inhuman. He took a knife and cut my forehead. I could feel the blood dribbling across my face, but I couldn't move to stop him.

He took a gourd, spilled out a light powder, and rubbed it into the cut, constantly chanting his incantations.

I lifted my arms over my head and managed to make him stop. I told them I didn't think the medicine would work on me, since I wasn't a Motilone. I begged them to make him stop. The witch doctor continued to lean over me, and my hands, up over my head, shook while I talked.

They discussed it. The witch doctor wasn't happy with my attitude. But they decided he had better stop, as long as I didn't want to be treated.

Two Motilones took me under their arms and carried me. My legs dragged along the ground. Sometimes I would faint. The trail seemed endless. Day after day we went on, the Motilones taking turns carrying me. I was barely conscious of what was going on. Occasionally I would sit down on the ground, and my body would sprawl itself out, as if it had a mind of its own. Then hands would grasp me at the armpits, and I would be pulled up and begin to bounce along again. It hurt. I would open my mouth to cry, and nothing would come out. At the end of the second week we arrived at Corroroncaya. A few miles from the home, we were met by a little band of men. They had orders to kill me. The chief had learned that I was coming, and he was infuriated.

I heard the discussion, but it seemed far away. I listened to each opinion objectively. I didn't care if I died.

"He's sick," Arabadoyca told them. "You can't kill a sick man. And, anyway, he's a good man. He'll do you no harm."

They inspected me. There was no doubt that I was sick. "OK," one of the men said, "let's take him to Abaratatura."

Once again I was taken by the arms and pulled along the trail, up a hill. At the top of the hill we came into a clearing. I saw the Motilone home. A man came out of one of the doors. "Drop him," he said. "Drop the cannibal!"

It was Abaratatura. Arabadoyca stood between him and me. "You can't kill him," he said. "He is dying."

The Motilones will never shoot any animal or a man who is soon to die a natural death. They think it will put a hex on their arrow that will make it break in flight, and they will starve to death.

The thought stopped Abaratatura. "What do you mean, he is dying?" he said. "He will certainly die when I put an arrow through him."

"And your people will starve to death," Arabadoyca said. "It will put a hex on all their arrows. This man is dying."



Abaratatura walked over to me. He couldn't disagree.

He spat on the ground, looked disgustedly at me, then ordered them to put me in a hammock. He did not speak to me. He had a regal air, and his orders were obeyed instantly.

For two weeks I stayed in his home. I slept hours on end. When I did wake up I prayed to be able to sleep more. Pain seemed to cut into my bones.

"I am going to die," I thought. I wasn't scared. It seemed interesting. "I am going to die. I wonder what it will be like." The thought tumbled over and over in my mind.

One afternoon I woke to a sudden commotion. Children were running; women were screaming. "The flute is coming! The cannibal will eat us!" I heard someone shout.

People streamed out of the doors, pushing against each other, running to hide. Abaratatura picked up his bow and came toward me.

"We should kill the cannibal before the flute arrives for him," he said.

I could hear the sound they were running from. It took me minutes to recognize it. It was the flub-flub-flub of a helicopter. What was it doing here?

The noise got closer and louder. Abaratatura hesitated, frightened, but wanting to kill me. Then he ran out the door. Only Arabadoyca was left in the house. His eyes were big, and he looked ready to run, too. He thought I had betrayed him.

"Please take me outside," I said. My voice could barely be heard.

He hesitated, then—with great difficulty—lifted me out of the hammock, got me outside, and set me down in the clearing. Then he ran into the jungle. I saw the helicopter but couldn't raise my arm to wave for help. I could only hope that a blond head would surprise the pilot enough to bring him down for a closer look.

"Please, God, have him land," I prayed.

The helicopter hovered overhead, swung around, then settled on the clearing, whipping leaves and rubbish aside with its wind. A man got out and walked over to me.

"Olson," he said, "you look terrible, like a skeleton." It was Dr. Hans Baumgartner, whom I had met with Dr. Christian on our trip up the Orinoco years before.

I could barely smile. He and the pilot carried me onto the helicopter and headed for a hospital in Tibú.

After I had been in the hospital four days, I began to hemorrhage internally. The doctors said that if I had stayed another six hours in the jungle without medicine I would have died.

Dr. Baumgartner and the pilot came to see me.

"You can't imagine what a surprise it was, Olson, to see you. The helicopter belongs to the oil company, you know, and Manuel is the pilot. It wasn't being used the day I was here, so we went out joyriding. We thought we'd take a swing over Motilone territory to see if we could get some pictures.

"Man," he said, shaking his head, "can you imagine going to take pictures of a fierce, Stone Age tribe and finding a blond-headed American in front of the tribal home?" He laughed. We all did. But I knew that Someone had prompted them to come my way.

My doctor at the hospital was Alfredo Landinez. We became good friends. He was interested in the Motilones—he had even written a thesis on the extraction of the Motilone arrow, a thesis that had been presented to the Harvard School of Tropical Medicine.

After I had been in the hospital several weeks, I asked Dr. Landinez when I could go back to the jungle.

"You'll be in treatment for another six months," he said. "You've just about destroyed your liver. Then you'll need to spend another year in convalescence."

“What?” I said. “A year and a half before I can go back to the jungle?”

He shook his head. “You’ll never be able to go back to the jungle. Your liver is permanently damaged.”

I looked at my hands. They were the color of an orange. I was getting blood transfusions because I was still bleeding internally.

“You’re wrong,” I said. “I’m going back.”

“That’s a boy,” he said, smiling wryly and patting me on the shoulder. “Keep up your attitude.”

Three weeks later when they released me from the hospital, Dr. Landinez couldn’t believe that I was well. “Bruce,” he said, “please don’t go back into the jungle.”

I was already preparing to leave. “Why not?” I asked.

“You’re not well enough. You could have a relapse and die out there with no one to care for you.”

I shook my head and smiled. “I told you, I’m not going to die. God is going to heal my body better than you ever could.” He shrugged.

“Now I have a request to make of you,” I said. “You know that I know quite a bit about medicine. I need some drugs to take back to the Indians. They have no care at all. I know it’s illegal to give them to me, and I don’t have any money to pay for them. But the Motilones need them.”

Although he was risking his job and his career to do it, he took a quantity of the oil company’s drugs and gave them to me.

“What is the value of my job,” he asked, “if I’m not helping people? Maybe these will never help anyone. But you don’t take chances with medicine. You give it out and hope it won’t be wasted.”

A week later I walked back into the jungle. I had a compass, and I knew where I was heading: straight toward the home of Abaratatura.

On the third day I began to feel dizzy. The chest pains had returned. My urine was dark. I fell asleep that night feeling terrible.

“Father,” I prayed, “You brought me here to work with the Motilone Indians. I have medicine that can help them. Please, God, heal my body.”

The next morning I woke up feeling fine. There was no more pain, and my urine was clear. I got up and continued walking.

When I reached his communal home, Abaratatura met me on the trail. Someone had seen me coming and had reported it to him.

## **CHAPTER 16: USING THE WITCH DOCTOR**

I was frightened. Would he try to kill me? I looked more closely. Abaratatura wasn’t carrying any weapons. “We thought you had died,” he said, “and that the vultures had come to take your body. But God has preserved you.”

“Yes,” I said. “He has indeed.”

I stayed at Abaratatura’s home. He had concluded that I wasn’t going to try to deceive him and his people. As a result, I found acceptance for me on the part of the Motilones. I got word to Bobby, and he came up to be with me.

My brief stay in civilization had convinced me more than ever that I belonged in the jungle. And I had brought back one product of civilization that made life more comfortable: a flea collar. They had been introduced in Colombia shortly before I arrived at the hospital. I noticed one on a dog and asked Dr. Landinez about it.

“That’s a flea collar,” he said. “It’s the latest thing. You put it around your dog’s neck, and it kills all his fleas for the next six months.”

“Great,” I said. “I’ve got to get one of those.”

Dr. Landinez looked puzzled. “You have dogs in the jungle?”

“No, no,” I said and started to laugh. “No, we don’t have dogs, but we sure have fleas!” I laughed again, and that was the last sensible word he got out of

me on the subject. Now I had one around my neck, and I was doing a lot less scratching.

My mind, however, was occupied with thoughts of the medicines I had brought with me. Motilones were constantly dying from disease, and I knew that the medicine would cure many of them. But the Motilones already had their own system for curing people, and they had no reason to believe that mine was better. Several times I offered my medicines to sick people, but they wouldn't take them.

"Leave it to the witch doctor," they said. "She knows our customs and our ways."

And sometimes they got well. Then they'd come around and smile at me, as though to say, "You see, we are not as stupid as you think."

But when an epidemic of pinkeye hit them, I had a perfect case, because pinkeye is cured easily with antibiotics. In no time almost all the Motilones had it and were going around scratching their eyes, feeling miserable. The witch doctor began to sing incantations day in and day out: up to twenty hours a day. She was tremendously dedicated to her people.

After a week it was obvious that her incantations weren't helping. I went over to talk to her. She was lying on a mat, resting. Her face was lined with fatigue.

"I have a potion called Terramycin," I said. "It will cure this disease if you put it in the people's eyes."

"I already used potions," she said. "They didn't work."

"But this is a different kind of potion," I said. "It will work. I have seen it work many times before."

She looked slightly interested. "Where does this potion come from?"

"It is one that witch doctors of my people use."

Her interest left. She shrugged. "You are white. Your ways are different from ours." She got to her feet, turned her back on me, and began to sing again.

I went for a walk to think it over. Pinkeye itself wasn't dangerous, but the infection could lead to other more serious things. It needed to be cured, and I had the cure.

The only thing I could do was to try to convince someone to let me try the medicine on him. Then I would have proof that my methods worked and those of the witch doctor didn't.

But then I would be in competition with the witch doctor. Either I would destroy her and her role in the tribe, or she would have to get rid of me.

I knew missionaries often had felt that the witch doctor was a demon element and had to be eliminated. But it didn't seem to be the case here. The Motilone witch doctor didn't pray to demons. She tried to help her people by praying to God in the best way she knew. I didn't want to destroy what she was doing. I wanted to help her.

I got an idea. I strode back to the home and over to a man who had a bad case of the disease. I rubbed my fingers in the corner of his eye, then smeared his pus in my own eye.

In five days I had developed pinkeye. I went to the witch doctor and told her that I needed her help. She sang incantations for me, just as she had for all the others. Naturally, it didn't help me any more than it had them.

So I went to see the witch doctor again. I told her that I wanted her to try putting Terramycin in my eyes while she sang incantations. She looked doubtful, but by then she was willing to try something new. She took the tube of Terramycin, smeared some in my eye, and sang her prayers that God would heal me.

In three days my eyes had cleared up, and I felt fine. Everyone else, of course, still was miserable. The witch doctor kept singing her chants and prayers.

I waited for the right time to talk to her again. I didn't want to insult her in any way. One evening I saw her walk out of the home, her shoulders stooped with fatigue. I followed her outside into the dark and caught her arm. She turned around.

I held up the tube of Terramycin. “Why don’t you try this potion?” I said. “You cured my eyes with it. Perhaps it will work with your people as well.”

Within three days she had cured everyone. It increased her stature in the home. She was proud of having been effective with her chants and her new potion, and she became a good friend of mine—also a channel for other health measures.

Being able to use simple antibiotics through the witch doctor was a giant step toward my goal of helping the Motilones. But there were so many germs in the filth that surrounded the houses and in the other unsanitary Motilone practices, that more trouble with disease was inevitable. Some would be sure to go beyond the reach of the medicines I had.

“What’s the cause of all these sicknesses?” I asked the witch doctor. “There doesn’t seem to be any end to them.”

She was surprised that I didn’t know. “It’s the evil spirits showing their power. That’s why we use the chants. We call on God to cast the evil spirits out.”

“And why doesn’t He always do it?” I asked.

Her face fell, and she turned aside. “We have deceived God,” she said in a low, sad voice.

I stood behind her, puzzled, feeling as though beneath what she said was something I needed to understand.

“How did you deceive God?” I asked.

“A man came who claimed to be a prophet,” she said. “He said that he could take us over the horizon to a land where there was a better hunt. His name was Sacamaydodji. We left God and followed him.” “When did all this happen?” I asked softly.

She said nothing for a moment, then swept her arm out. “Many, many years ago. We have only heard the story. But we know that he has deceived us. We are far away from God.”

Later I went to her and told her that I wanted her to see some of the evil spirits that led to disease and death. I took out my microscope and put a lump of dirt under it. I had her look into the eyepiece.

“Oh, yes, I can see them dancing around,” she said and began singing her chants.

Then I put some disinfectant on the dirt and told her to look again. She saw that the disinfectant had killed the germs. It shook her. She had seen that the germs didn’t die when she sang her chants.

Over a period of time she introduced disinfectants into the normal ceremonies of the Motilones. For instance, there was a cleansing ceremony when a new communal home was built. All the Motilones who are going to live in the home gather, sing chants, and strike the walls with sticks to make any evil spirits leave. At my suggestion, the witch doctor had them use disinfectants with the ceremony, and people noticed that health measurably improved. She also had the midwives use disinfectants when mothers gave birth, and the mortality rate declined.

Health measures spread to other homes, and I was increasingly thankful for Dr. Landinez’s willingness to supply us with medicine. Motilone food also improved because of the introduction of crops. The Motilone people had relied only on hunting and wild plants for their food. Working with Abaratatura, however, I was able to show them how to raise corn and cattle.

In a few years there were eight health stations (one in each home) that gave shots, antibiotics, and other medicines. These stations also were in charge of seeing that the Motilone homes were kept free from germs. Each home developed its own agricultural system as well, and eventually schools were established.

The health centers, the farms, and the schools were not set up or staffed by civilized white people. They were staffed by the primitive Motilone Indians. I was the only outsider in the Motilone area. The shots were given by the Motilones. The correct medicines were chosen by the Motilones.

It is considered by many to be the fastest example of development that has ever occurred in a primitive tribe. How did it happen? How was this possible?

There are two reasons. The first is simple. The Motilones were not asked to give up their own culture and become white men. Everything introduced was built on things they already knew. For instance, vaccination was introduced by the witch doctor as a new form of the traditional bloodletting that the Motilones practiced when someone was sick, because, like blood-letting, it gave a pain that overcame the greater pain of disease or death. Explained in that way and administered by the witch doctor, who was known and trusted, it quickly was accepted and spread through the tribe as soon as needles and vaccine could be provided. And because the witch doctors had seen germs and understood their danger, correct sanitary procedures were followed.

Agriculture wasn't as much a new idea as medicine, but it would not have been accepted if it had opposed the traditional way of doing things. But because Abaratatura and the other chiefs, who traditionally were responsible for providing food, introduced the idea, it was accepted readily and without the disruptions of society that often go with economic development. There were no revolts against the old way of the elders; it was the elders who introduced the new ways.

But I said there were two reasons. The second was the Holy Spirit. Without Him there would have been no real or lasting development.

As I have mentioned, it seemed that the Motilones did not care for each other in any deep way. Each man was responsible for himself and his family, and no one else. This was particularly hard for me to accept in Bobby.

I wanted to see that all the tribes got the medicine they needed and that they knew how to care for the plants that had been introduced. Bobby went with me on my inspection tours. We had delightful hours on the trails, visiting many of the places we had been before. We talked deeply about life and about what we desired for ourselves and each other. Bobby hoped to be a warrior-leader of the Motilones like Abaratatura. I hoped to help lead the

Motilones to the true way. We shared these things, hunted together, and sang together. We could sense each other's feelings without saying a word.

But Bobby didn't share my concern for the other tribal members. At one point there was serious disease in two widely separated communal homes. They both needed medicine quickly.

"Bobby," I said, "you go to Iquicarora with some medicine, and I'll go up into the highlands. We'll meet again here."

He looked hurt. "I want to go with you, Bruchko."

I frowned. "Bobby, you can't. There just isn't time to go to both places together."

"So let's go to just one place."

Finally Bobby went by himself because I told him to. He wouldn't have done it of his own free will. It hurt me, and I couldn't understand it.

Everyone else shared Bobby's attitude. People would die in one home because the next home wouldn't bother to take them medicine. A cow would die because its keeper was sick and couldn't care for it, and no one else would. It became more and more of a struggle for me to be everywhere help was needed. Bobby would pitch in if I asked him, but only because of our friendship.

I got tired. I had been with the Motilones four years. Some of the things I had managed to introduce were good. But I had to work to keep them going. I began to question the point of it all. Why should I care if a few Motilones got sick? What were their lives worth? To the rest of the world they could die to a man and never be missed.

Yet, as I pondered one day while seated in front of the communal home, I knew that the answer had to be the same as it had been four years before. The significance of Motilone lives, and of what I was doing, wasn't in what people thought. I remembered what God had told me: "Everyone may reject you, but I will not reject you." That had to be true for the Motilones, too. God

would not reject them. He loved them. That was why I had come into the jungle: to let them see and experience the love of God.

But I still could not see how to do it. I knew too much about Motilone beliefs. Nothing I could say about Jesus Christ would make sense to them. It would be “the white man’s way.” It would never be the Motilone way. What if some committed their lives to Jesus? Would they end up like the Orinoco Indians, bringing divisions among the Motilones, destroying their social structures?

But they needed Jesus. How could I introduce them to Him for who He really was, independent of my own personality and culture?

Jesus would have to do it for me. There was no other way. Nothing I could say would have the right message, the right force. But Jesus could speak through me, and He could show me the right time to speak.

I bowed my head. The sun was hot on the back of my neck. “O Jesus, these people need You. Show Yourself to them. Take me out of the way and speak to them in their own language, so that they see You for who You are. “O Jesus, become a Motilone.”

## **CHAPTER 17: JESUS, THE MOTILONE**

We had been on the trail three days and were nearing Norecayra. It was late afternoon. Bobby and two other Motilones were ahead of me, their dark brown bodies hidden from view by the thick vines and bushes of the jungle. It was a beautiful time of day. The approaching darkness made the greens of the jungle soft and velvet-like.

We were walking fast. In a few miles we would reach the communal home. I began to hear loud shouts ahead of us, excruciating yells that sounded as if they came from many different mouths. I had never heard anything quite as agonizing. My steps quickened, and I began mentally to sort out the medicine in my pack.

The cries seemed more desperate as we approached. I had never heard Motilones cry out like that. They never even whimpered under the greatest

pain. But Bobby and the other Motilones kept walking straight ahead on the trails, as though nothing were wrong.

“Stop!” I said. Bobby and the others turned around.

“What’s that shouting?” I asked. “Shouldn’t we see if there’s anything we can do?”

Bobby looked down at the trail. One of the other men, who was a witch doctor, shook his head. “There’s nothing we can do.”

“But what’s going on there?”

None of the three said anything. They stared at me with dark, quiet eyes.

As the cries continued to echo through the jungle, I got a little agitated.

“Well, look,” I said, “maybe you don’t care about whoever that is, but I do. I want to see if we can help.”

They still didn’t answer me. “They’re sad,” I thought. There’s something over there that is too sad for them to bear.

“You don’t have to come with me,” I said, “but I want to see.”

They stood motionless until I turned and walked off the trail into the jungle, toward the sounds. After I had gone a few yards I heard noises behind me. They were following.

The shouting men were closer than I had thought. And there were only two of them. One I knew well. He was a leader in his communal home and a fierce warrior. He had killed oil-company employees just to get their safety helmets to use in cooking. He wore a necklace of buttons from his victims’ clothes and another necklace of jaguar teeth from a jaguar he had killed with his bow and arrow. Now, standing in front of a hole that he had dug—a hole that was a good six feet deep—he was shouting in a desperate, searching voice, “God, God, come out of the hole.”

The other man was in the top of a high tree. He was stuffing leaves into his mouth and trying to chew them, while shouting, "God, God, come from the horizon!"

It was the strangest sight I had ever seen. It could have been laughable, but something kept me from seeing any humor in it.

My three companions came up alongside me, looking sad and embarrassed.

"You knew about this?" I asked Bobby.

He nodded.

"What's the matter?"

He explained that the brother of the man shouting into the hole had died in a region that was not his home. He had been bitten by a poisonous snake and had died before there was time to get him back. According to their traditions, that meant that his language, his spirit, his life, could never go to God beyond the horizon. Now the man was trying to look for God, to get Him to bring his brother's language back to life, to live in his body.

"And what makes him think he can find God by calling into a hole?"

Bobby shrugged. "It's as good a place as any to look." The hopelessness of his expression was transmitted to his words.

This was why God had let me live. I was there to tell them where they could find God. Perhaps this was an opportunity God had arranged. My body tightened at the thought of having a chance to share Christ after five years of waiting. Yet it seemed too much to expect. Inside I was praying.

The man stopped shouting into the hole and came over to us. His hair was disheveled, his body covered with dirt. His eyes were holes into black space. "It's no point," he said. "We've been deceived."

"How long have you been here?" I asked quietly.

"Since the sun came up this morning."

"And why do you say that you've been deceived?"

He told me again the story of the false prophet the Motilones had followed, whose false promises had led them away from God. "We no longer know God," he said quietly.

Then the other men tried to explain a Motilone legend that confirmed why this brother's death had such terrifying implications. I didn't understand it all. Motilone legends are as complicated as any theology. But I did understand something new: their great sense of lostness. I had wondered again and again what Christ had to offer them. Their way of getting along with each other was far superior to that of Americans. But there was more to life than that.

I thought of the night Jesus had entered my life. It had been so many years before, such a small point in time. Yet it was the root out of which everything I was had grown. Through it God had brought me peace and real purpose.

And here were the Motilones in a search for God. But how could I explain things like grace, sacrifice, and the Incarnation? I could tell a simple story, and they would understand. But how could I communicate real spiritual truth?

A lively discussion started. The man who had been in the trees came down and joined us. He reminded us of the legend about the prophet who would come carrying banana stalks and that God would come out of those stalks.

I couldn't quite understand the idea behind the legend.

"Why look for God to come out of a banana stalk?" I asked.

There was puzzled silence. It made sense to them, but they couldn't explain it. Bobby walked over to a banana tree that was growing nearby. He cut off a section and tossed it toward us.

"This is the kind of banana stalk God can come from," he said. It was a cross section from the stalk. It rolled at our feet.

One of the Motilones reached down and swatted at it with his machete, accidentally splitting it in half. One half stood up, while the other half split off.