

Bruchko

by Bruce Olsen

Part 3

Leaves that were still inside the stalk, waiting to develop and come out, started peeling off. As they lay at the base of the stalk, they looked like pages from a book.

Suddenly a word raced through my mind. "Book! Book!"

I grabbed up my pack and took out my Bible. I opened it. Flipping through the pages, I held it toward the men. I pointed to the leaves from the banana stalk, then back to the Bible.

"This is it!" I said. "I have it here! This is God's banana stalk."

One of the Motilones, the one who had been in the tree, grabbed the Bible out of my hand. He started to rip out pages and stuff them in his mouth. He thought if he ate the pages he would have God inside him.

When nothing happened, they began to ask me questions. How could I explain the gospel to them? How could I explain that God, in Jesus, had been like them?

Suddenly I remembered one of their legends about a man who had become an ant. He had been sitting on the trail after a hunt and had noticed some ants trying to build a home. He'd wanted to help them make a good home, like the Motilone home, so he'd begun digging in the dirt. But because he was so big and so unknown, the ants had been afraid and had run away.

Then, quite miraculously, he had become an ant. He thought like an ant, looked like an ant, and spoke the language of an ant. He lived with the ants, and they came to trust him.

He told them one day that he was not really an ant, but a Motilone, and that he had once tried to help them improve their home, but he had scared them.

The ants said their equivalent of "No kidding? That was you?" And they laughed at him, because he didn't look like the huge and fearful thing that had moved the dirt before.

But at that moment he was turned back into a Motilone and began to move the dirt into the shape of a Motilone home. This time the ants recognized him and let him do his work, because they knew he wouldn't harm them. That was why, according to the story, the ants had hills that looked like Motilone homes.

As the story flashed into my mind, I realized its lesson for the first time: if you are big and powerful, you have to become small and weak in order to work with other weak beings. It was a perfect parallel for what God had done in Jesus.

But there were so many unknown factors in the way the Motilones reasoned. How could I be sure that I would convey the right thing?

I couldn't. Yet I felt sure God had given me this time to speak. So I took the word for "becoming like an ant" and used it for incarnation. "God is incarnated into man," I said.

They gasped. There was a tense, hushed silence. The idea that God had become a man stunned them.

"Where did He walk?" the witch doctor asked in a whisper.

Every Motilone has his own trail. It is his personal point of identity. You walk on someone's trail if you want to find him. God would have a trail, too. If you want to find God, you walk on His trail.

My blood was racing, my heart pounding. "Jesus Christ is God become man," I said. "He can show you God's trail."

A look of astonishment, almost of fear, spread over their faces. The man who had been shouting into the hole looked at me.

“Show us Christ,” he said in a coarse whisper.

I fumbled for an answer. “You killed Christ,” I said. “You destroyed God.”

His eyes got big. “I killed Christ? I did that? How did I do that? And how can God be killed?”

I wanted to tell them that Jesus’ death had freed them from meaninglessness, from death, and from the powers of evil.

“How do evil, death, and deception find power over the Motilone people?” I asked.

“Through the ears,” Bobby answered, because language is so important to the Motilones. It is the essence of life. If evil language comes through the ears, it means death.

“Do you remember,” I said, “how after a hunt for wild boars the leader cuts the skin from the animal and puts it over his head to cover his ears and keep the evil spirits of the jungle out?” They nodded, listening closely.

“Jesus Christ was murdered,” I said. “But just as you pull the skin over the chief’s head to hide his ears, so Jesus—when He died—pulled His blood over your deception and hides it from the sight of God.”

I stood looking at them, hoping desperately that they would understand. Then I saw on their faces that they did.

I told them Jesus was buried. A wave of grief swept over them. The man who was searching for his brother’s language began to weep. It was the first time I had ever seen a Motilone cry. But the thought that God was dead, that they were lost, brought tears and sobs.

I picked up my Bible, opened it, and said, “The Bible speaks that Jesus came alive after death and is alive today.”

One of the men grabbed the Bible from my hand and put it to his ear. “I can’t hear a thing,” he said.

I took it back. “The way the Bible speaks does not change,” I said. “It is like the papers of your speech that I have. They say the same word one day to the next. The Bible says that Jesus came to life. It is God’s banana stalk.”

I showed him the page and told him that the little black markings had meaning.

“No one has ever come back from the dead in all Motilone history,” he said. “I know,” I replied. “But Jesus did. It is proof that He is really God’s Son.”

They asked many more questions. Some I didn’t fully understand. But I was sure that God had spoken through me. That night I prayed, “God, give validity to Your Word. Make it touch these lives.” I claimed God’s promise that His Word would not return to Him without any response.

Yet there didn’t seem to be any response. I continued to walk the trails with Bobby, giving medicine to the witch doctors, and showing them how to do their work more effectively.

One evening, though, Bobby began to ask questions. We were sitting around a fire. The light flicked over him. His face was serious.

“How can I walk on Jesus’ trail?” he asked. “No Motilone has ever done it. It’s a new thing. There is no other Motilone to tell how to do it.”

I remembered the problems I had had as a boy, how it sometimes appeared impossible to keep on believing in Jesus when my family and friends were so opposed to my commitment. That was what Bobby was going through.

“Bobby,” I said, “do you remember my first Festival of the Arrows, the first time I had seen all the Motilones gathered to sing their song?” The festival was the most important ceremony in the Motilone culture.

He nodded. The fire flared up momentarily, and I could see his eyes, staring intently at me.

“Do you remember that I was afraid to climb in the high hammocks to sing, for fear that the rope would break? And I told you that I would sing only if I could have one foot in the hammock and one foot on the ground?”

“Yes, Bruchko.”

“And what did you say to me?”

He laughed. “I told you that you had to have both feet in the hammock. ‘You have to be suspended,’ I said.”

“Yes,” I said. “You have to be suspended. That is how it is when you follow Jesus, Bobby. No man can tell you how to walk His trail. Only Jesus can. But to find out you have to tie your hammock strings into Him and be suspended in God.”

Bobby said nothing. The fire danced in his eyes. Then he stood up and walked off into the darkness.

The next day he came to me. “Bruchko,” he said, “I want to tie my hammock strings into Jesus Christ. But how can I? I can’t see Him or touch Him.”

“You have talked to spirits, haven’t you?”

“Oh,” he said. “I see now.”

The next day he had a big grin on his face. “Bruchko, I’ve tied my hammock strings into Jesus. Now I speak a new language.”

I didn’t understand what he meant. “Have you learned some of the Spanish I speak?”

He laughed a clean, sweet laugh. “No, Bruchko, I speak a new language.”

Then I understood. To a Motilone, language is life. If Bobby had a new life, he had a new way of speaking. His speech would be Christ-oriented.

We put our hands on each other’s shoulders. My mind swept back to the first time I had met Jesus and the life I had felt flow into me. Now my brother Bobby was experiencing Jesus himself, in the same way. He had begun to walk with Jesus.

“Jesus Christ has risen from the dead!” Bobby shouted, so that the sound filtered far off into the jungle. “He has walked our trails! I have met Him!”

From that day our friendship was enhanced by our love for Jesus. We talked constantly about Him, and Bobby asked me many questions. But he never asked the color of Jesus’ hair or whether He had blue eyes. To Bobby, the answers were obvious: Jesus had dark skin, and His eyes were black. He wore a loincloth and hunted with bows and arrows.

Jesus was a Motilone.

CHAPTER 18: THE NIGHT OF THE TIGER

I was lying in my hammock after the morning hunt. The women were cooking, and the acrid smoke of the fires, mixed with the smell of roasting monkey, made me drowsy. Soon it would be time to eat. I was hungry.

I heard a commotion in the other end of the home and lifted myself up on my elbow to see what was happening. A little knot of men and women had gathered around Abacuriana, a young, slender man. I caught a few of his words.

“Tiger... I couldn’t move...” He was talking excitedly.

Two men in hammocks near me got up and started toward the cluster of people. “Hey, Chanti,” I called to one of them. “What’s going on?” He came over to my hammock. He seemed nervous.

“Didn’t you hear?” he asked hoarsely. “The tiger spoke.”

“What tiger?” I said, confused. “Spoke what? What are you talking about?”

“The tiger spoke! He spoke!”

I shook my head. “Chanti, tigers don’t speak. And if they did, who would care what they said?”

“Oh,” he said, “when the tiger speaks, we are in big trouble. Big, big trouble.” By this time his eyes were rolling.

“OK, thanks,” I said and let him go.

The whole house was in an uproar. All work stopped. Those who couldn't get close to Abacuriana stood on the perimeter of the crowd and talked or walked swiftly to the door and stared outside.

I got out of my hammock. The chief was standing at one of the doors. I drew him aside.

"I want to talk to you," I said. "What does it mean that the tiger spoke?"

"It means we're in for big trouble," he said.

"But what kind of trouble? What could a tiger say that would be dangerous?"

"I'm going into the jungle to talk to the tiger. He'll tell me."

"But Chief," I said, "tigers don't talk. This is nonsense."

He gave me a quick, hard glance. "Look," he said, "you don't know anything about the jungle. You don't know how to hunt; you don't know what to eat. You can't keep up on the trail. What makes you think you know anything about tigers?"

There wasn't much I could say. I looked at him in nervous astonishment, while he stared coldly into the jungle. Then, with monumental effort, he squared his shoulders and walked out of the house. I watched him cross the clearing and disappear, alone, into the trees. I turned. Everyone in the home was looking at the area where he had disappeared.

He was gone until late afternoon. Everyone waited for him to return. No one worked. A few men tried to carve arrows, but they would stop often and stare into space. There was very little talking. People walked restlessly around the house, and their restlessness was transferred to me. I couldn't sit still. What was going on? I had never seen anything like this. The house seemed to be pressed down by a huge, invisible hand.

When the chief came back, people immediately huddled around him. He waited to speak until everyone had gathered. His face was tired and drawn. He seemed to have aged ten years.

"The tiger says that the spirits will come out of the rocks tonight. They will attack this home. Lives will be snuffed out. Languages will cease. There will be death."

In profound silence the chief walked off and got in his hammock. People wandered off by themselves.

"What on earth is going on?" I wondered. "Where did all this fear come from? What does it mean, that the tiger speaks and spirits come out of the rocks?"

It was obvious that something really terrifying was happening. These people were not normally superstitious, and I had never, never seen them really frightened before. They routinely faced poisonous snakes and dangerous animals and never showed a trace of fear. If they were afraid now, there must be something worth being afraid of. But what was it? How could they fight it?

I found Bobby outside the home, staring off into the distance. He glanced over at me when I came up.

"Bruchko, can Jesus be taken out of my mouth?" he asked, a tense edge of fear in his voice.

"Bobby, what is this all about? What does it mean that the tiger speaks? What does it mean that the spirits will come out of the rocks?"

"The spirits come out of the rocks," he said. "They try to kill. Sometimes only one dies. Sometimes many die. In Ocbabuda two months ago seven died."

"How do they die?" I asked. "What kills them?"

"The spirits kill them, Bruchko," he said. "They die in their hammocks because the evil spirits tear their language away from them."

"Bobby, does someone always die?" "Always," he said.

The air seemed thick. What did this mean? Why did I feel under so much pressure?

“Can Jesus be taken out of my mouth?” Bobby asked again, looking out into the jungle.

I didn’t know how to answer him. I had never before dealt with demon powers. I felt frightened, too.

“Can the devil kill me now that I walk in Jesus’ path?” he continued.
“Bruchko, what am I to do?”

“I don’t know, Bobby. You’ll have to talk to Jesus yourself. He is the only One who has the answer to your questions. He will speak to you in your heart.”

He hesitated, then walked off into the jungle. I immediately felt regret. Why hadn’t I given him some advice? What kind of spiritual father was I?

But I didn’t have any advice to give.

I went for a long walk into the jungle. I was not only frightened, but I was also confused. “Tigers can’t talk,” I told God. “What is happening here?”

When I got back home it was nearly dark. As soon as I entered the clearing I heard strange, high wailings and incantations. The house was swaying back and forth, as if possessed by the devil himself. The incantations were jumbled. They went up and down, gathering force, then dropping. The air seemed electric. I was almost afraid to enter.

Inside, the fires cast an eerie red glow. I saw that the house indeed was swaying. All the men, high up in their hammocks, were swinging and chanting to ward off the devil. The women were on the floor, clapping large rocks together. Their eyes—like the eyes of the men—were closed tightly.

Where was Bobby? Was he in this place? Suddenly I was afraid for him. He was the only Motilone who had begun to walk Jesus’ trail. Had he given in to this fear and superstition?

Then I saw his hammock. He was in it, swinging. I almost turned back and into the jungle. But something restrained me. He was my brother.

I grasped one of the poles that supported the house and began to shinny up toward Bobby’s hammock, which was almost twenty feet above the floor. The bamboo bent under my weight, and I wondered if it would hold me. But Bobby’s welfare was the most important thing in the world to me just then. Hand over hand, I pulled myself up. When I got high enough, I looked into Bobby’s hammock. His eyes were open. He had a big smile on his face. The song he was singing was different: Jesus is in my mouth; I have a new speech.

Jesus is in my mouth;

No one can take Him from me.

I speak Jesus’ words.

I walk in Jesus’ steps.

I am Jesus’ boy;

He has filled my stomach, and I am no longer hungry.

As I clung to the palm tree pole, Bobby looked straight at me. He was safe. He knew Jesus. He was doing the thing I should have had the vision to suggest. He was keeping the evil spirits away by singing a song of Jesus.

I joined him in the song. All that night we sang. When dawn came, no one had died. It was the first time in anyone’s memory that the spirits had walked and no one had died.

No one commented on Bobby’s song, yet I could sense that the other Motilones had a new interest in him and in his relationship to Jesus. It wasn’t particularly outward; that wasn’t the Motilone way. But the evidence was clear.

And Bobby began to change. In the months that followed his commitment to Jesus, he became less proud. When he visited other homes, he accepted food immediately instead of forcing himself to go without it to demonstrate his strength. That stubbornness had not made him very popular among the other men, though they respected him for it. Now they noticed his new attitude and wondered what caused it.

I was eager for Bobby to tell them. I was sure he could do it more effectively than I could. I tried to encourage him to share his experiences and was upset when he didn't. Was it because he didn't care enough about the other Motilones? I couldn't be sure. But I was trying to squeeze him into "the mold" and didn't realize it. News has no real significance to the Motilones until it's given in a formal ceremony. In my excitement over Bobby's spiritual experience, I wanted him to do things the way they would have been done in North America. I wanted him to call a meeting and tell about Jesus, or corner his friends and explain what Jesus now meant to him. But thank God he waited until he could do it the Motilone way.

Word spread that there was to be another Festival of the Arrows. There was excitement in the home. The festival was the only time all the Motilones gathered together.

Pacts would be formed. Arrows would be exchanged, and the men forming the pact would have a singing contest. They would climb into their hammocks and sing as long as they could, relating legends, stories, and news of recent events. Often their songs would last twelve hours, without interruption for food, water, or rest.

People streamed into the home. There was a lot of noise and food. Old friends greeted each other and swapped stories. People were looking at Bobby in a new light. Word had spread about the night the spirits had walked and no one had died. He was looked on with respect and some curiosity. He had married and was accepted as a man.

An older chief named Adjibacbayra took a special interest in Bobby. His reserved air made him appear dignified. However, he had a lot of curiosity, and on the first day of the festival he challenged Bobby to a song. Bobby was pleased and immediately accepted.

They both climbed into a single hammock twenty feet off the ground and began to swing back and forth. Bobby sang first, and Adjibacbayra imitated him, following line for line. Other men also had challenged each other to songs and were singing.

Bobby's song was about the way the Motilones had been deceived and had lost God's trail. He told how they had once known God but had been greedy and had followed a false prophet. Then he began to sing about Jesus. As he did so, the other men who were singing stopped. Everyone became quiet in order to listen.

"Jesus Christ was incarnated into man," Bobby sang. "He has walked our trails. He is God, yet we can know Him."

The home was deathly still except for Bobby's wailing song and Adjibacbayra's repetition. People were straining their ears to hear.

Inside me, however, a spiritual battle was raging. I found myself hating the song. It seemed so heathen. The music, chanted in a strange minor key, sounded like witch music. It seemed to degrade the gospel. Yet when I looked at the people around me and up at the chief swinging in his hammock, I could see that they were listening as though their lives depended on it. Bobby was giving them spiritual truth through the song.

Still I wanted to do it my way—until I heard Bobby sing about Jesus giving him a new language.

"Can't you see the reality that he is giving to them?" God seemed to ask me.

"But Lord," I replied, "why am I so repulsed by it?"

Then I saw that it was because I was sinful. I could love the Motilone way of life, but when it came to spiritual matters, I thought I had the only way. But my way wasn't necessarily God's way. God was saying, "I too love the Motilone way of life. I made it. And I'm going to tell them about My Son in My way."

I relaxed, able at last to find real joy in Bobby's song. It continued for eight hours, ten hours. Attention didn't slacken. It got dark inside the house. Fires were built. Finally, after fourteen hours, they quit singing and climbed wearily down from their hammock.

Adjibacbayra looked at Bobby. “You’ve communicated a true news item,” he said. “I too want to suspend myself in Jesus. I want to pull His blood over my deception.”

That night a spiritual revolution swept over the people. No one rejected the news about Jesus. Everyone wanted Him to take them over the horizon. There was tremendous jubilation. Sometimes it was quiet, and people would talk to each other in little groups. At other times the joy would break into spontaneous singing. It went late into the night.

God had spoken. He had spoken in the Motilone language and through the Motilone culture. He had not even had to use me.

CHAPTER 19: EVERYDAY MIRACLES

It seemed a miracle that the Motilones had accepted Jesus at the Festival of Arrows. A song of praise filled my heart for days.

Then I heard news from other Festivals of Arrows. The words Bobby had sung had been repeated there and had been accepted joyfully. It was almost more than I could believe.

As people began responding to the Word and obeying God, other things happened that I also called “miracles”—things that were clearly supernatural. But the Motilone idea of a miracle wasn’t necessarily mine. Some things that astounded me they took in stride.

Medicine, for instance. After the Motilones began to walk with Jesus, there was a tremendous expansion in that field. But whenever shots, pills, or ointments were administered, they were accompanied by a chant that called on Jesus to heal. For the Motilones, the healing that the medicine accomplished was a miracle from Jesus. It was something He did for them. Their prayers were a part of the healing process.

Sometimes that brought surprising results. One day I arrived at a home to find a man who had been bitten by a poisonous snake the week before. He had almost recovered.

“I thought you were out of snake antivenin,” I said. “Where did you get some?”

“We didn’t have any,” the witch doctor replied.

“What, in heaven’s name, did you do to make him recover?”

“Well, all we had was some antibiotic. So we gave him that and prayed that God would heal him. As you can see, He did.”

I was astonished. The antibiotic was absolutely no good for snake poisoning. God had healed the man, not the medicine.

But wasn’t that what the Motilones said about all healings? What difference did God’s method make? Whether a person used the proper medicine or not, it was still His healing.

But I was glad that God chose to work in visibly powerful ways among the Motilones, if only to show me that He really was changing their hearts. Otherwise it would have been impossible for me to believe the almost total acceptance of the gospel on the part of the Motilones. Sometimes I would think, “Is this really true conversion, or is it just one more legend for the Motilones to draw on?” Then God would let me see the powerful changes in their lives so I could not doubt that He was working in and through them.

One day I returned from a trip to find that Atabadora had been brought in with a fractured back. He had fallen from a tree during a monkey hunt. We had no facilities for helping him there, so we carried him over trails for three days, then floated downstream with him to the hospital in Tibú. They x-rayed him there, and the doctor told me that he had a broken neck. He would have to lie perfectly still for months. Because I was the only person who spoke both Spanish and Motilone, I was to relay this news to him. Atabadora was lying on his back in bed. They had put supports under him so that his back curved up in the middle. He was uncomfortable. The nurses, he complained, wouldn’t let him move.

“The doctor just told me that you’ll have to lie still for three months,” I told him. “If you don’t, you will never get well.”

“No, Bruchko,” he said. “I can’t do that. I can’t lie here that long.”

“Atabaccora, you have to. If you don’t, you won’t get well.”

I made him promise to obey the doctor’s orders, but he wasn’t happy about it. And I wasn’t sure how long his promise would last. Bobby and I discussed it, but neither of us thought of a solution. He might lie quietly for a week, if he really tried. But three months? Impossible!

“Look, Bobby,” I said, “sometimes the men who knew Jesus when He walked the trails would anoint a sick person with oil and pray that he’d be healed. I think maybe we should do that with Atabaccora.”

“And does it work, Bruchko?” Bobby asked. “Does God heal in this way?”

“I don’t know, Bobby. I’ve never tried it.”

I didn’t have much faith that it would really help. But I knew Atabaccora would never be able to lie still for three months, and I couldn’t stand the thought of seeing him crippled for life.

We got some oil and went into his hospital room. He was in pain. The sedatives weren’t having enough effect, but he still smiled at us. “We want to pray for you,” I said.

Bobby dipped his finger in the oil, then I did the same. We stood there for a moment. Bobby was waiting for me to go ahead.

“I don’t know where to put the oil,” I said. “Somewhere on his head, but I don’t know where.”

“Let’s put it on his forehead,” Bobby said.

We did that, then put our hands on his head. Bobby prayed.

“God,” he said, “Atabaccora has a backache. He needs to be well again so that he can run the trails and fish and hunt with his brother Motilones. You can make his backache go away. We want You to do that, and we ask You to do it in the name of Jesus.”

We said a few more words to Atabaccora and left.

I had some business in Cucuta, so I put Atabaccora in Bobby’s hands. The business took three days. I spent most of them worrying about Atabaccora. When I got back, I immediately went to Bobby. He was annoyed.

“Atabaccora won’t even try to stay still, Bruchko,” he said. “He says he’s uncomfortable lying on his back, and he won’t stay flat.”

We went to the hospital room to see him. His bed was empty. I was alarmed. Had he hurt himself by moving around and been taken to the operating room for surgery?

Then Atabaccora walked into the room. When he saw us he got a guilty look on his face, like a child who’s been caught stealing cookies. Quickly, without a word, he got into bed and made a show of lying correctly, with his back curved up in the middle. He had no sooner assumed that pose than a red-faced nurse came in behind him, huffing. Pointing at him and sputtering, she reprimanded me loudly for letting him get out of bed. Atabaccora lay quite still, with a beatific look on his face. When the nurse finally left, threatening all kinds of evil, he grinned.

It was my turn to scold. “Atabaccora, don’t you care about getting well? If you don’t lie still, you may never be able to hunt again.”

He pouted. “Bruchko, I just couldn’t stay in the bed any longer. It’s uncomfortable. I did what you said for three days, but that was enough.”

“Bruchko,” Bobby said, “if he doesn’t have his backache anymore, why should he stay in bed?”

I hadn’t thought of that. I found the doctor and asked him if he would take another X-ray of Atabaccora. He didn’t want to, but I wheedled him into it. “All right,” he said. “If it will make you happy, I’ll do it.”

The next day he came up to me with a puzzled look. “Is that the same Indian you brought in originally?”

“Of course,” I said. “Do you think we play checkers with your patients?”

“Well, if it is the same man, his back has mended. It’s quite amazing. There’s no sign of even a hairline fracture in his back now. It’s some kind of a miracle.

“Boy,” he said. “I want to find out what his exact treatment was. I’ve never known our treatment to be so effective.”

I laughed. “You don’t think that there was something more than medicine working here?”

“Like what?” he asked.

“Like God.”

He went off shaking his head.

I was tremendously elated. I found Bobby and told him what had happened. “Bobby, do you realize that it’s a miracle?”

Bobby wasn’t excited. To him it was just a backache that God had healed. Lots of people got backaches, lay in their hammocks for a day, then got up and went about their business. This one was a little worse than usual.

“But Bobby,” I said, “the X-ray showed that his neck was broken.”

“What’s an X-ray?”

“Well, I can’t explain that, Bobby. But the point is that God healed him.”

“But Bruchko, why is that a surprise? We have seen too many people healed to be surprised at it anymore.”

In 1967, about a year after the first Motilones had become Christians, Arabadoyca and a small group of other men came to talk to me. They had decided that they wanted to tell the Yuko Indians about Jesus. I had had the same desire earlier and had made a trip back to the Yuko village where I had spent nearly a year.

I hadn’t been there more than an hour before I saw that something had changed. I soon discovered what it was. One of the women whom I had tried to tell about Jesus when I was there the first time had had a vision. As a

result, most of the village had accepted Jesus. They had given up the chicha, the drink they had gotten drunk on so often, and there was a noticeably different quality of life in the village. Instead of telling the Yukos about Jesus, as I’d set out to do, they told me about Him. However, I was surprised to learn that the Motilones wanted to talk to the Yukos about Jesus. The two tribes had been bitter enemies for years. The Yukos had a game they liked to play. They would braid the long, five-inch jungle thorns and lay them on the Motilone trails. Then they would hide in the brush and wait. When a Motilone ran along the trail, he would step on the thorns. The Yukos would laugh at his agony and run away.

Now Motilones wanted to tell Yukos about Jesus. At that time they didn’t understand that there were languages other than the Motilone language. They thought that the Yukos spoke just as they did. But the languages are totally different. I couldn’t see how they would manage to communicate anything about Jesus.

But I wasn’t going to try to restrain them. I suggested that they go to the lowland tribes, who hadn’t heard about Jesus. A few days later they left. I prayed that it wouldn’t be a shattering experience for them, that God would comfort them in any disappointment at being unable to communicate.

They were gone for several weeks. When they got back I went to see Arabadoyca, curious about what had happened.

“How did it go?” I asked.

He was making arrows, and he looked up at me with his familiar crooked grin. “Wonderful,” he said. “They had not known about Jesus before.”

“And did they understand?”

“Oh, yes, we told them a great many things about Jesus.”

“You spoke to them?”

“Of course.” Arabadoyca was a little concerned about my surprise. “How would you have told them?”

“Oh... in the same way. But how do you know they understood?”

Again he looked perplexed. “Why, they told us that they did. They were very excited to hear the news, Bruchko.”

“You mean you opened your mouth and spoke to the Yukos, and they understood you and talked to you, and you understood them?”

“Yes, of course.”

The Yuko language is not a dialect of the Motilone language. It is a totally different language. You could never understand one from knowing the other. Yet I am sure that Arabadoyca and the others were not lying. Lying is almost unknown among the Motilones. And they had no reason to lie. There is also the fact that there now are Christians in the Yuko lowland where there were none before.

I can only conclude that God’s Holy Spirit made the Motilones speak and understand Yuko. It was a miracle to me. But to the Motilones everything that God does is a miracle.

I have learned, with the Motilones, to expect God to provide what we need, regardless of the circumstances. On one occasion, when we were fighting a measles epidemic, I ran out of drugs. Measles is one of the deadliest diseases for the Indians, and without antibiotics I was helpless. There already were ten cases of measles, and it was spreading fast.

But I felt sure that God would provide the drugs somehow. I never doubted that, even though I had no funds in the bank and no credit.

I went into Tibú, sure that there would be some money. I opened all my mail. There wasn’t a cent. I still felt that God had an answer to the problem. He had before in similar circumstances, and His Spirit was comforting me about this particular case.

I went into Cucuta, opened my post office box there, and found a check for five hundred dollars.

It didn’t shock me. I merely said, “Thank goodness, it’s come.” I cashed it, then bought the medicine I needed. The bill came to five hundred and sixty-five dollars.

“I have five hundred dollars here, and if you wait, I’ll pay the rest,” I told the clerk. He agreed. It was a big sale, and he didn’t want to pass it up.

The day before I left Cucuta I checked the post office box again. There was a check for one hundred dollars. I paid the drug supply house its money and had some left over to buy a good meal and some things I would need in the jungle. The drugs were enough to stop the epidemic and control its complications.

The greatest miracle I have seen, though, has been the changed lives of the Motilones. They have found their purpose in Jesus Christ. As a result, they have broken down the individuality that prevented them from helping each other. There is real caring for others, real self-sacrifice. That has made their economic development possible as well as their spiritual development. Without it their programs always bogged down. With it their problems are being solved.

I have spoken before the United Nations. I have spoken to the Organization of American States. I have been a personal friend of the last four presidents of Colombia. My experience with the Motilone Indians has taught me how to deal with other cultures and how to promote positive change without tearing social structures apart at the seams. I try to share these things. But the most important thing that I can say to those who want to help primitive people is this: they will not be helped very much unless they find purpose in life through Jesus Christ. Without Him, whatever development takes place always will be twisted or corrupted. It will embitter those who try to hold it together, and those who don’t care about it will be ruined by apathy and alienation.

But with Jesus there can be real change. Not just spiritual change. Not just change by and by. Real change, now, with visible power. He is the source of all change. He is the God of everyday miracles.

CHAPTER 20: LIKE DAVID AND JONATHAN

George Camibocbayra met me outside the home and took me aside. "You had better go and see Bobby right away," he said. "His daughter is very sick, and they've taken her to the hospital at Tibú."

I ducked into the home and found Bobby sitting on a mat, looking down at his feet. His face was sad. I put a hand on his shoulder. He looked up, then back down at his feet.

"I heard that your daughter is sick," I said.

He nodded. "We took her to Tibú three days ago."

"Why did you come back here?"

"I have my wife to care for. She is pregnant, you know. And I have duties to carry out, bringing in supplies and taking out things to sell. And what good could I be in Tibú?"

"And yet," I said, smiling slightly, "it doesn't look as though you're much good here, either."

He looked up at me again. His face seemed tired and aged. "No, that's true," he said. "I can't stop thinking about her."

He stood up beside me. I glanced over at Atacadara, his wife. She was standing, watching Bobby with great concern. Her stomach was swelled out in pregnancy, but she still had the slender face and dark eyes of a beautiful woman. She loved Bobby. Even with her daughter sick and taken away from her, she was most concerned about Bobby.

I looked back at Bobby. "Let's pray together about your daughter," I said. "Then I'll go down to Tibú to see if I can be of any help. You should stay here to care for Atacadara."

Four days later I was standing over the little girl's bed. Her body seemed deflated. Her skin hung on her bones, and her eyes had a thin film over them.

The doctor was standing beside me. "What disease does she have?" I asked.

He was a young fellow just out of medical school. "We don't know," he said. "It may be a combination of several things. I don't know if we're going to be able to do much for her."

A cold chill ran down to my fingertips. "You mean she's going to die?"

"Who knows?" he said. "If we can't find out what's the matter with her, she probably will."

I walked out of the hospital thinking of how Bobby used to lift her up to my hammock. I would set her on my stomach and sing songs to her while she smiled and made googling noises.

I remembered when Bobby had married Atacadara. It was soon after he had accepted Christ. Atacadara had been the prettiest and most intelligent girl in the home. Bobby had let her know through a friend that he liked her. They had blushed every time they had seen each other. Atacadara was infatuated with Bobby. He was a handsome, strong young warrior, the prize catch, you might say, of the tribe.

One day she had moved her hammock next to Bobby's, and they had been married. Her father had been angry. He wasn't at all interested in a son-in-law. He wanted his daughter to stay in the family. But she had refused.

I laughed when I thought about how I had felt then. I had been afraid that Bobby's marriage would interrupt our friendship, that we'd never be really close again. But it had worked just the opposite. Atacadara and I had become brother and sister, and when their first daughter was born I was her second father according to Motilone custom. We had become a family.

Bobby was a devoted father and husband. It wasn't common for Motilone men to share much with their wives, but Bobby and Atacadara were close from the beginning of their marriage. It was Bobby's talking that, even before the Festival of the Arrows, brought her to know Christ. They weren't just man and wife; they were friends. Often they would lie in the same hammock and talk for hours. You would hear their low voices murmuring across the communal home until late in the night.

Now their little girl was on the edge of death. But God had to heal her. She meant too much to Bobby and Atacadara.

The next day, when the doctor told me that she had died in the night, it was like a slap in the face.

I had to tell Bobby. When he heard, his face went pale. Without saying a word, he walked into the jungle and didn't come back until that night. Even then he didn't speak or show any sign of affection for Atacadara or for me. Two days later Atacadara gave birth to another girl, but Bobby mustered only a weak recognition. Every day he took long walks in the jungle. When he returned he wouldn't mention where he had been. If I spoke to him, he usually didn't respond.

It was his first real trial as a Christian, and it was a hard one. He continued to show no sign of love for Atacadara or for his new child. We prayed for him, but for two long weeks there was only heavy remorse.

Then he began to notice his new daughter. I took her over to him and placed her in his arms. He held and rocked her. Within a week he was carrying her everywhere, and he and Atacadara were closer than ever. Everyone noticed their oneness. Bobby's father-in-law, who had stayed quite bitter about the marriage, began to eat meals with them. He could see that he had been wrong. Later he became a Christian mainly because of the marriage relationship his daughter had found.

Bobby's family grew, too. Within another year he had his first son, and that made him very happy. But he wasn't selfish with his family. I had thought he might spend all his time working for them instead of for the other Motilones. The opposite seemed to happen: his love for his family seemed to overflow to everyone else, so that he was more interested than ever in helping others.

On one of our trips to the higher Motilone territory we met a boy of about five years of age named Odo. The boy's entire family had died in an epidemic, so he had no one and was developing into a juvenile delinquent. He went

from communal home to communal home, always finding something to eat, but never being really accepted.

He wasn't a pleasant boy. He took it for granted that he should be fed and taken care of, and he wasn't thankful when someone did. He also upset things and frequently got into trouble.

Bobby and I had both noticed him, but since we were just passing through, I didn't think much about him. Bobby, however, did. He told me one day that he would be bringing Odo along when we left.

"What for, Bobby? He'll just get in our way."

"He needs somebody," Bobby said. "Maybe if he comes with us he can help us, and we'll be able to help him."

When we suggested that Odo come with us, he got suspicious. "Why do you want me to come?"

Bobby ignored his suspicion. "We need some extra help. There's a lot of work to be done, and it's too much for the two of us. You're smart, anyone can see that, so we figure you'll catch on quickly."

Odo looked back and forth at us, trying to see what we wanted from him. Finally he nodded his head. "All right," he said.

It wasn't easy to put up with him at first. Bobby's patience amazed me. He never got angry or visibly upset. Within a few weeks I began to notice a change in Odo's attitude. He stayed near Bobby constantly. Instead of being in our way, he actually began to be a help. When we returned to our communal home, Odo came with us and became part of Bobby's family. Whereas before he had been filthy, he began to wash, even though Bobby had never said a word to him about it. Within a few months he was being noticed by people, not for his bad behavior, but for the fact that he was a precocious young man. In imitating Bobby, he became concerned for others.

This period was one of the most relaxed and enjoyable I had ever had. Bobby and I were constantly together. There were no secrets between us. I could see

that he was becoming the outstanding young leader of the Motilones. I never had to tell him what to do. In fact, when he came to me for advice, I would tell him that he had to decide for himself. Other young men who had come to know Christ and who had a concern for others began to work with us. A system of leadership developed. It was great to see the work progress. Crops were developed, sick people were cured, and more and more Motilones found their real identity in Christ.

Best of all was the time that I spent with Bobby. The Bible says of David that his love for Jonathan was “more than the love he had for any woman.” I had never understood that. But there is a perfect brotherly love, and as this love for Bobby grew, I stopped worrying about where it would lead. I just wanted to spend time with him and with his family and enjoy the things that God had given us together.

Perhaps our best times came after the evening meal, when we would sit around the fire or lie in our hammocks, Bobby and Atacadara close together, Odo and me nearby, with Bobby’s children passed from one person to the other, chortling and giggling. We would sing the Motilone songs and talk about the things that had happened during the day. If we had a good meal we would rub our stomachs, and I might walk over to Bobby and pat his stomach and laugh. There were jokes, and legends of the Motilone past, and always stories about Jesus and the things He had done when He had walked the Motilone trails as a man. Sometimes I would take out my Bible and tell them about a passage. Eventually the fires would die down, the air would grow quiet, and the nightly rain would begin to fall. One by one we would drift off to sleep.

One day Bobby asked me whether we could make the Bible so that the Motilone people could understand it for themselves. They wanted to know more about Jesus. By then I was spending quite a bit of time just telling them about Him and answering their questions. I knew that I couldn’t translate the Bible into their idioms by myself, because I still didn’t have a complete understanding of the language and of the Motilone legends. But with Bobby’s help it was possible, because there were no barriers to our communication.

So we began to translate the Book of Mark. It is one thing to learn to speak a new language, quite another to put a complete book like a Gospel into that language. During my trips out of the jungle I got volumes on linguistics and translating and met a young man from Corscas who became interested in using a computer to help in the translation. Since my long-term interest had been linguistics, it was exciting to be involved with it.

The most exciting part of the work, however, was the actual translation that I did with Bobby. Once a written Motilone language was established, there still was the problem of making biblical phrases understandable. That is where Bobby helped.

How do you tell a primitive tribe about things like grace when they have no such word in their vocabulary? Sometimes I would try to adapt a Christian idea to the Motilone culture. I already had had success with the word faith, which I had related to suspending your hammock from Christ, and the word incarnation, which I had related to the legend about the Motilone who became an ant. If my new effort was a good one, Bobby would say so. Other times he would say, “No, that’s not right, Bruchko. Jesus is not like that,” and I would have to try again.

He also filled me in on some of the aspects of the culture that I hadn’t fully understood. The Motilones, for instance, always use names that have a meaning. There are no names like Kent or Kim that are names and nothing more. So Bible characters had to be given names that made sense. Abraham became the “Man Who Knows God,” John the Baptist became the “Announcer” and “Jungle Dweller,” and Jesus became “The Only Son of God With Us.” Every time a name had to be given, we spent long hours around the fire discussing the person and what kind of name would be best for him. Often other Motilones would join us and would help with the decision.

Some parables didn’t seem to fit the Motilone culture, either. For example, take the parable of the man who built his house on rock so that it would be firm. When Bobby first heard it, he suggested that it be deleted.

“That’s not right, Bruchko. A house that is solid must be built on sand.

Otherwise the poles won't go deep enough, and the house will fall apart."

So we adjusted the parable. After all, Jesus had chosen it to clarify a truth for His listeners. Wouldn't He want the Motilones to understand also?

We were both proud when the translation was finished. However, our work was just beginning: I was the only one who could read it. Bobby began to teach some of the children. We held class each afternoon outside the home, a little way into the jungle where it was cool.

But we began to hear grumbling from the older men. About a month after we had started teaching, Bobby told me we would have to stop.

I was shocked. "What for? We have just begun," I said.

"It's the older men, the leaders. They feel that it's not right to teach the children things that their elders don't know." For an instant I was angry.

"We should stop teaching the gospel just because of a bunch of jealous old men?" I snapped.

Bobby didn't answer. He just looked sad.

I could have shot myself for saying that. It wasn't my gospel. It was the Motilones' gospel. No good news should tear their social system into shreds.

We stopped teaching the children and asked the older men to learn instead. There was great competition among them. They didn't learn as quickly as the children, but they tried.

After a month or so, they felt comfortable enough to have their children learning, too. Instead of living in totally different worlds, as is so often the case between generations elsewhere, the older men and women shared their new knowledge with their children. It added to the unity of the tribe instead of destroying it.

Before long, a number of Motilones could both read and write. They rattled off the Gospel of Mark like a machine gun, the staccato syllables of the

Motilone language coming out of their mouths as fast as they could speak. But there was no comprehension.

So an elderly chief suggested a rule. It was adopted and now is used wherever classes are taught. Every time someone reads a verse, someone else asks a question about it.

For instance, a Motilone might read, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish "

Another Motilone might ask, "Who loved the world?"

If the first man can't answer, he reads the verse again, trying to understand it. When he understands it, he begins to ask himself, "How does this affect me?"

So the work progressed. But I was getting restless again. How long would God keep me here?

CHAPTER 21: GLORIA

During my first five or six years with the Motilones, I had almost no contact with the outside world. However, while working on the translation of Mark with Bobby, I bought a transistor radio and brought it back to the communal home. For several nights I lay awake listening to the announcer talk about things that seemed almost unreal. I could remember what the other world was like, all right, but it seemed very far away.

One night I lay in my hammock, with bows and arrows for killing tomorrow's dinner nearby, and listened to the broadcast of the first men walking on the moon. Part of me wanted to pack up and go where cars, planes, and streetcars ruled instead of panthers and wild boars. At the same time, I was strangely pleased with myself. It was as though I had a secret that the world did not know, a secret place that no one else had been allowed to enter.

Few people believed that I had contacted the Motilones when I first reentered the outside world. Nevertheless, some newspapers heard what I was doing, and the next time I went out to civilization, several reporters

found me and questioned me about my work with the Mutilones. Their reports attracted quite a bit of attention. Before long the Mutilones were the heroes of Colombia. Several Mutilone men accompanied me on one trip out for supplies, and one of them, Axducatsyara, was named the Colombian "Man of the Year." Up until that point all newspaper accounts of the Mutilones had stressed the fact that they killed oil-company employees. Gradually, however, the newspapers began to understand that, on the whole, the Mutilones had simply been defending their territory against people who wanted to steal their land and destroy their way of life. Public sentiment shifted, and, as so often happens, it got carried away and indiscriminately blamed all of the land settlers who lived in the area instead of seeing the difference between those who were interested in farming and those who had actually invaded Mutilone territory.

The land settlers retaliated by calling me a fake. I was in the jungle, and by the time I came out again for medical supplies, newspaper headings were claiming that I was exploiting the Indians, making them mine gold and diamonds for me. I laughed. I could picture myself lounging in a highbacked rattan chair, dressed in a white suit and Panama hat, sipping a drink while Mutilones waited on me.

I talked to Dr. Landinez about it. "What should I do?" I asked.

"Listen," he said, "don't do a thing. It's just natural that there'll be a lot of talk. The Mutilones are a fascinating group, and no one has any way of proving or disproving anything that's said about them. You do your work, be honest with the Indians, and let everyone think what he wants to think. If you spend time worrying about what people think of you, you'll never get anything done."

So I went back into the jungle. Interest in the Mutilones continued, but since there wasn't any way of getting information about them, the whole affair quieted down.

Then, in 1970, a government commission was flown into the area in a helicopter to solve boundary problems between Colombia and Venezuela.

They were surprised to find, at one communal home, a health center and a school staffed by Mutilones. Newspaper accounts hadn't prepared them for anything like that. They managed to ask the Mutilones who had been responsible—a difficult task, since they didn't speak Mutilone.

Naturally the Mutilones said, "Bruchko."

That proved I was a fake. The real hero of the Mutilone development, the papers wrote, was someone named "Bruchko." A few months later another commission came into the region by helicopter. Fortunately, they talked to a Mutilone who had learned some Spanish.

"We want to see Olson," the commissioner said.

"We not know Olson," the Mutilone said in broken Spanish. The commissioner was surprised. "Olson doesn't live here?"

"No," the Mutilone said, shaking his head. "Mutilones live here."

"Olson, a tall, blond fellow?"

"Oh, Bruchko!"

From that time on we had favorable publicity. Favorable publicity, however, doesn't cure sick people. It doesn't fill hungry mouths. It doesn't guarantee that no one will try to run you out of your family home. All it seemed to do was guarantee hostility with many of the land settlers.

At about this time there was a major prison break in Colombia. Many of the escapees came into the wild colonial areas near Mutilone territory, because they would be left alone there. They began to farm and, of course, saw the Mutilones as a threat both to their control of the area and to their freedom from government forces, since the Mutilones were happy to cooperate with the Colombian government.

Resentment built up, even though many bandits received medical attention from Mutilones. The regular land settlers went back and forth in their

allegiance. They didn't like the bandits. But then they resented the fact that the newspapers had cast them as villains in the struggle for land. And it was true that they wanted to get at the Motilone lands. Often their sympathies were with the bandits. Some open hostility developed.

Contact with the outside world, which totally destroyed the culture of many primitive tribes, certainly was a threat to the Motilones. It was a threat they would have to face. I could only pray that, when the time came, they would be strong in Jesus Christ to resist anyone who tried to change their customs.

For me, at least one precious thing came from the contact with the outside world. Gloria. Her brother, a lieutenant in the Colombian army, was in charge of the military outpost in Tibú. A husky, tall fellow, he was interested in the jungle, though he'd never spent time there. When he got a vacation, he planned to go as far into the jungle as he could. I had met him several times in Tibú and tried to discourage him. He seemed to think that the jungle was some kind of lovely state park that you might picnic in. It wasn't easy to convince him otherwise.

I met Gloria in 1965 after a particularly hard trip out to Tibú. Because I was in a hurry to get medicine for the Motilones, I didn't stop to hunt for food. And on the whole trip I didn't happen to see anything I could eat. I just kept going. Nor did I get much water to drink.

It was a mistake. I began to feel weak. On the third night on the trail I was so exhausted I had to stop early. I knew I needed food, but I couldn't even get up to look for any. I fell into a fitful sleep.

I dreamed about the jungle. It was beautiful and green and filled with butterflies. One flew into my mouth and got stuck, because its wings were wet. I could feel it beat its wings and struggle to get out. I half woke up. I was groggy.

"There's a butterfly in my mouth. How strange," I thought. "I'd better take it out."

I put my hand in my mouth—and I did grab something. I started pulling it out. The more I pulled, the more came out.

Then I really woke up. I could feel this thing struggling all the way out of my throat. When I got it out and looked at it, I felt sick to my stomach.

It was an intestinal worm, about a foot and a half long. He had gotten so hungry he crawled up my throat looking for food.

From that experience I learned always to eat something on the trail, if only to keep the parasites happy.

The next day I took time to hunt some food, and a few days later I arrived in Tibú, feeling exhausted. There I met Gloria. She was studying law in Bogotá and had come down to visit her brother for a few days. Slender and pretty, she was wearing jeans and a leather jacket. Her black hair was tied into a ponytail. I didn't pay much attention to her since I was in a hurry to get back with the medicine.

Her brother, however, hadn't given up his idea about seeing the jungle. He had five days' furlough coming up and wanted me to take him and Gloria with me. I was eating a meal with them when he popped the question. I looked over at Gloria. She was looking down at her plate.

"I don't think you understand," I said. "The jungle is not a picnic ground."

Gloria's head shot up. "I do understand," she said. "Whatever gave you the idea you were the only one who could survive in it?"

I sputtered at that. "The jungle is no place for women. You wouldn't last two days on the trail."

"Try me," she said.

I got a little angry. "All right," I said. "You can come as long as you keep up. But I don't have the time to play nursemaid. If you don't keep up, you go back. By yourselves."

The next morning, when we were getting ready to leave, I realized it was foolish to try to take them back to the Motilone home I had come from. So, instead, I took them to the Motilone home nearest Tibú. It was a two-day trip by boat. When I saw how game they were, I was ashamed of myself for not showing them how tough the jungle really could be.

We reached the communal home on a fishing day. The dams already had been built, and the men were beginning to spear the fish, charging up and down the river, yelling and splashing. Gloria wanted to join them. I had to laugh. I got her a spear. She went into the water up to her waist and walked downriver, peering beneath the surface like a pro. Half an hour later she came back, dripping wet, smiling, with a big fish dangling from her spear. The Motilones loved her for it. No other women had ever gone fishing, let alone speared a large fish.

That night we sat around the fire inside the communal home and told stories about the Motilones. One of the Motilone women came up to Gloria, felt her long hair, and complimented her on it. Then she smiled and said, "Are you Bruchko's wife?"

I blushed, and Gloria wanted to know what she had asked. I said she had asked whether she was a young woman. It was all I could think of.

"It's obvious that I'm a young woman," Gloria replied, laughing. "What did she really ask?"

I blushed again and refused to tell her, but the two of them teased me until I did. "She wanted to know whether you are my wife."

She looked at her brother, and they smiled. "Yeah," she said.

It was a wonderful week. Gloria helped the women weave and do all their work. She was infatuated with the Motilone way of life, and the Motilones loved her.

When the week was up, Gloria stood in the middle of the clearing and swung her arm around, indicating all of it.

"What can I do?" she asked.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, what can I do? How can I help?"

I didn't take her seriously. Everyone wants to help.

"You can study to be a doctor," I said flippantly, "and come in here and help with the health facilities."

I didn't see her again for five years, and I must say that I had quite thoroughly forgotten her. We had written a few letters; then, largely because of me, they had ended.

In 1970 I was in Bogotá, walking down one of the busy streets, when someone poked a book into my back. I turned around. It was Gloria. She was the same girl I remembered, but she looked older, more mature.

"Where've you been?" she asked with a teasing smile.

"In the jungle, of course," I said.

"Why didn't you write me?"

"Who has time to write? I've been busy."

"Nobody is that busy."

We started down the street. I asked her how her law studies were going. She stopped and nearly cried.

"What's the matter?" I asked, thinking maybe she had flunked out of law school and was ashamed.

"I'm in medical school now," she said. "You told me that if I wanted to help the Motilones I should go to medical school. I quit law school."

I could barely remember having told her; the advice had been so casual. But I suddenly realized that she was serious about helping the Motilones.

From then on, whenever I was in Bogotá, I stopped to see her and her mother. (Her father had died years before.) Gloria and I would go to a Hungarian restaurant that we both liked and would drink coffee and talk by the hour. When I couldn't go to Bogotá I would talk to her on the radio, mostly about the Motilones. We also talked about Jesus.

Gloria was excited that the gospel had given the Motilones hope, but she wasn't sure how that applied to her.

"My ideas aren't the same as those of the Motilones," she said one day while we were in a little café. "I can't understand Jesus. I don't feel I can really know Him."

"But can't you see how wonderful He is?" I asked. "Can't you see how much He loves you?"

She shook her head violently. "I can identify with His sufferings. I've suffered. I saw my father and my brother both die, and I think I know the feel of death. But Jesus—He rose again. Isn't that right? He rose again. I can't rise from my sufferings."

She put her head down on the table. I put my hand out and held it against her neck.

"You can," I said. "I don't know exactly how. It's always different. But you can rise. Anyone who wants to can, because God will do it for you and with you."

She just kept her head on the table and didn't say anything.

Later we went to one of the cathedrals in Bogotá. In the middle of Mass, Gloria, who had been praying, suddenly threw her arms around me and gave me a kiss. She was crying. "How wonderful! How wonderful He is!" she said.

A lady next to us was quite concerned. "What's the matter?" she asked.

I laughed. "Nothing's wrong," I said. "We're just worshiping God."

Not long afterward Gloria's mother also met Jesus, and there was quite a family scene, with both of them crying and hugging each other while I looked on, feeling a little embarrassed.

Gloria was going to graduate from medical school. In Colombia young doctors have to give one year of free medical service in the rural regions. I knew the Minister of Health in Colombia, and I asked him if there was a way for Gloria to serve for a year in Tibú at a small home that had been established there for Motilones who needed more medical attention than they could get from the health centers in the communal homes.

"I'm sorry, Bruce," he said, "there's no possibility that we could send a single woman there. It's just too rough an area."

I stood still for a second. It seemed as though the air around me and the cars on the street outside and even the world stood still. It was quite a moment. Then I knew, and it was easy to say it.

"That won't be a problem. We're going to get married."

I think I was more surprised to hear myself say those words than she was later when I asked her.

CHAPTER 22: ALMOST WIPED OUT

I was staying in Tibú, working on the house that Gloria and I would stay in, enjoying thoughts of living there with her and getting pleasure from the work of carpentering and roofing. Then word came from one of the Motilone homes that there was a widespread sickness that the witch doctors were not able to treat. I took all the drugs that I could beg or borrow and left the next day.

I reached the home several days later. No one came out into the sunny clearing to greet me. Inside the house I could hear groanings and crying. I stooped and entered the door.

Bodies were everywhere. The only sign that they were alive was the constant groaning and wailing that, once inside the house, seemed like a madman's chant. There was an incredible stench that made my stomach flip-flop.

I ran from one person to the next, recognizing friends, unable to stop and help any one person because the moment I stopped to help, a groan would pull me toward another person. People were lying in their own vomit, unable to clean themselves. Their dung was scattered around their hammocks. Some had fallen out of the hammocks and were lying on the ground in their dung.

I began to clean those who were most dirty and give medicine. I would no sooner get a man clean than he would have a bowel movement or would retch, and my work would be undone. I would try to give pills, and they'd be sprayed back in my face. In no time my clothes and skin were stiff with dried vomit.

Most of the people there had been without food and water for five days or more, so one of the most immediate dangers was dehydration. Their skin was loose on their bodies. Because they couldn't drink without vomiting, the worst cases had to have intravenous feedings.

The first night I did not sleep at all. I craved sleep, but I couldn't lie down while people were near death. I kept moving, my legs and feet aching, wanting to collapse under me.

The next day Bobby came with several other men. Among them was my old friend Adjibacbayra, the chief who had challenged Bobby to the song at the Festival of the Arrows where the Motilones had first heard about Jesus. I put my hands on their shoulders, welcoming them. It had been as though I were the only living person in a world of ghosts.

There were signs of improvement that day. The drugs and the IV feedings were taking effect. And having others to work with us was heartening. As it got dark inside the house, I began to look forward to sleeping. When we lit fires and worked in the flickering light, the idea became an obsession. The only thing that helped me keep moving was the thought that I soon would be done.

But the hours dragged on, with every minute as painful as a knife.

Time and again I set myself a limit. "At ten o'clock I'll quit." But ten o'clock would pass, and there would be more that had to be done. I reached my final limit at two o'clock in the morning. There was a momentary lull in the sickness, and I stood up and looked for Bobby. He walked over to me.

"Let's sleep," he said, and my heart said, Oh, yes! "And then at five o'clock I think we had better start for Iquiacarora."

My mind didn't register. "Iquiacarora?"

"Yes," he said. "It's as bad as this."

"Bobby," I said, "you mean this isn't the only home?"

"Oh, no," he said. "All the homes in the lowland areas have gotten the sickness. They're not all as bad as this, but they're pretty bad."

I closed my eyes, and the darkness seemed to whirl inside my eyelids. More sickness. More vomit. Maybe some had already died. "O Lord, deliver me."

The next thing I knew I was being shaken awake. I opened my eyes to find myself lying in a hammock with Bobby leaning over me. I shut my eyes again.

"You've got to get up, Bruchko," Bobby said. "We've got to go to Iquiacarora."

I dragged myself out of the hammock.

We took no time to wash. Bobby already had told several of the men and women who were recovered enough to get up and move around what they should do in order to help the others. Then we left.

The worst of the epidemic lasted three weeks. During that time I was able to get no more than two or three hours of sleep in twenty- four hours. Seven hundred people were treated for measles or its aftereffects.

Miraculously, only one person died—a little girl. When I first saw her I was with Adjibacbayra. She had shrunk to the size of a baby from dehydration. Adjii put his hand out and touched her skin. It hung loose like rubber. He

squeezed a little of it into a fold, and it stayed in that shape when he took his hand away. Two days later, despite everything we did, she died.

That night I couldn't go to bed. I was full of anger. I had to walk, to move. I started for another communal home, alone. I must have been half delirious, because I didn't feel tired. My anger burned like a fuel, forcing my sagging legs to move.

Coming up a hill, I saw a pair of eyes directly ahead, gleaming yellow. I thought it was a frog, since a certain kind of frog had eyes that color. Then I realized that the eyes were too far apart. So maybe there were two frogs.

Then I heard a hiss. The eyes moved. I saw a long, sleek form move slightly. It was a panther, the first I'd ever seen.

I stopped. All my anger transferred itself to the cold, steady eyes of that animal. I hated him. I groped around my foot and found a stick. I took it and ran at the panther, screaming. He growled and crouched. Then, when I was about ten feet from him, he turned and, in a quick, quiet hop, was gone.

I stood, yelling after him. Then I realized what I had done. My heart began to beat rapidly, and I suddenly was afraid that he would come back. "Thank You, Lord," I breathed into the darkness.

The next day I left the jungle. We needed more drugs, and the epidemic had subsided enough so that I wouldn't be missed. There were enough Motilones working under Bobby to keep up.

For a week and a half I fought paper work and credit ratings instead of panthers, and I wasn't sure which I preferred. I tried to get funds from the Colombian government and to borrow money from anyone I could reach. When I thought I had gotten all I could, I went back to the jungle.

I found Adjibacbayra near death. Because we had worked side by side for three weeks, I had assumed that he had a natural resistance to the disease. He not only had contracted the disease, but he also had gotten pneumonia as a by-product. He couldn't eat.

Two days after I reached him he slipped into a coma. His body was yellow, and flies were crawling across his chest where his vomit had hardened. His face was covered with little blue dots from the rash.

It was a horrible predicament for the man who had been strong enough to sing the Song of the Arrows for fourteen hours when God's Spirit had swept through the Motilones.

While I watched him, he blinked and woke up. I leaned over. His face was like a painted mask, lined and creased with pain.

"Bruchko," he said, "my body hurts. I hurt everywhere."

"Shh," I said. "You need to be quiet. We want you to be well. We want you to be strong."

He shook his head, barely moving it. "No, Bruchko. I'm not well and I'm not strong. I have closed my eyes."

His eyes did close, and he slipped off. I stayed near him. Later he opened his eyes again.

"Bruchko, I heard a voice like the spirits that talk when they try to kill you." I nodded.

"But this voice called me by my secret name, by my real name. No one alive knows my real name, but this spirit called me by my real name. So I called to it and said, 'Who are you?' and it said, 'I am Jesus, who has walked with you on the trail.'"

Several other men gathered around him, including Atrara, the father of the little girl who had died.

"So I told Jesus that I hurt all over, from my head to my toes. And Jesus said that He wants me to come home."

His breath was coming with difficulty.

“Help me, brother!” he whispered, looking at me. “Help me!” Then he turned his eyes away. “But you can’t,” he said. “I’ve been embraced by death. I’m leaving, Bruchko. I’m leaving. I can’t see. There’s only pain. God is here, and He wants to take me on the path we couldn’t ever find on our hunts, the path that goes beyond the horizon to His home.”

Then he smiled, and his face looked for a moment like the one I knew. “Not alone,” he said. “Not alone. I won’t walk it by myself. There’s a Friend who wants to take me. And He knows my name, my real name.”

Then his body sagged. He clutched my hand, and his fingers gradually went limp. I set his hand down beside his body and walked out of the home.

I stopped in the clearing. The sun was shining. How unbelievable. I walked into the jungle, where it was cool and dark, and I found a trail and began to walk it, without knowing or caring where it was going. Then I began to sing. I sang Adjí’s own song, the song he sang on the trail. I began by singing quietly under my breath, but soon I was bellowing out the tune at the top of my lungs, and I was crying. “God,” I sang, “I loved my brother; I long to sing his song with him again.”

A hand touched my shoulder. I looked around, frightened. It was Atrara.

“Don’t cry,” he said. “Don’t be sad. His language has walked beyond the horizon. It isn’t lost in the jungles. You don’t need to sing it here. It’s gone to another place.”

CHAPTER 23: THE WHIRLPOOL

I woke up to the soft plip-plop of rain. The communal home was filled with soft, early morning light, and everyone else was asleep. It must have rained all night, because no one had left to go hunting. I turned over in my hammock and went back to sleep.

I woke up again a few hours later. It was still raining.

“That’s odd,” I thought. It almost never rains during the day in the jungle.

It had been several months since the measles epidemic. I had been relaxing, looking forward to marrying Gloria and spending a lot of time with Bobby. I’d also been working on the linguistic materials I’d gathered during the ten years with the Motilones. There was interest in them among linguists, and I was planning to publish some papers about the Motilone language.

I decided to work on that. There wouldn’t be much point in trying to do anything else as long as it was raining. I went down to the health center—a walk of about six hundred yards. It was only drizzling, but there were puddles everywhere. I walked by the banana patch and saw that the young trees were doing well. None had been knocked over by the wind. I slipped on the mud and fell, laughing. I couldn’t remember when I had seen so much water.

At the health center I sat down at the desk we had made by cutting a section out of a felled mahogany tree. That and a waterproof, insect-proof file for my papers were my most precious possessions.

The water drummed pleasantly on the tin roof of the health center, and I settled down to work. An hour or so later I was disturbed by loud voices. Two Motilone men across the river were shouting for a canoe to bring them back. The canoe was filled with water and had to be emptied out. Because the water was high from all the rain, it was some time before the men got across and back with the stranded men. I decided to go up to the home to hear what they had to say. I knew they were from an area not far from Tibú, and I thought they might have a message for me.

When I got to the home everyone was watching them eat. They had been on the trail for several days and were tired and hungry. They were laughing about some of the things that had happened to them. Evidently it had been rough going. A lot of trees had been blown down, and some of the rivers had been difficult to cross. I squatted down to listen. A few minutes later Bobby came in. I waved to him and smiled. The two men talked about the hunting they had been doing, and one of them told a funny story about stubbing his toe on the trip. Bored, I got up to leave. They had nothing but small talk. I walked back down to the health center and began to write again.

About an hour later I looked up to see the two men standing in the door. They handed me a little packet of five envelopes.

"Where did these come from?" I asked.

They shrugged. "George Camiyocbayra gave them to us to give to you." George was in charge of procurement in Tibú.

"Thanks," I said.

They were telegrams. I opened the first. "She is buried," it said.

Who was buried? It must be Gloria's mother. But, no, her mother had sent it. She had signed it at the bottom.

I ripped open the others. Gloria had been in an accident. Her car had flipped over the edge of a cliff. "Come at once," one of the telegrams said. "We're waiting for you. You must come immediately." But it was dated two weeks before. Another telegram said that Gloria had died and that her funeral would be in three days.

I threw the telegrams down and ran to the house. Bobby was making arrows. He looked up at me with the same sweet smile he'd had as a boy. "Bobby," I choked out, "she isn't coming. She won't be coming here." "What?" he said.

"She isn't coming, Bobby. Gloria isn't coming. She died. She's dead."

Another Motilone came into the home and put his hand on my shoulder, not knowing I was upset. I shook him off.

"How do you know she's dead?" Bobby asked.

"The writing said so. Those letters that came today from Tibú.

"Bobby," I said, "I've got to go to Bogotá. We've got to go right now."

"Sure, sure," he said. "When the water goes down we'll go."

That was a long day. Sometimes the sadness was more than I could take. Other times it was unreal. I couldn't believe that it had really happened. I read the

telegrams again and again. Bobby talked and sang to me, telling about Gloria, remembering how she had been the first foreign woman ever to come into the Motilone region, recalling how she had speared fish.

My mind went over and over Gloria's death like a machine that wouldn't stop working. I couldn't cry and I couldn't pray, though I tried. But pray for what? She was dead. She'd been dead for weeks.

That night I lit a candle and lay in my hammock listening to the rain. It had continued all that day and now was coming down in buckets. Suddenly I knew I had to get out of there. I had to go to Bogotá. I had to at least see Gloria's grave and talk to her mother. If I didn't, I would never really know that it wasn't a bad dream.

I tossed back and forth all night, waiting for it to get light. At three o'clock in the morning I got up and shook Bobby. "Bobby, I want to go out now. I've got to go to Bogotá. I think it's getting light, and we can travel."

He told me to go back to bed. It was still dark, and it was raining. Then it began to pour. I prayed for it to stop. I heard the sound of the river rushing over rocks and boulders, then it quieted, and I realized it was over its banks. When it got light, the water was a good twelve feet over flood stage and only six feet from the home.

But I had to get downriver. It was a compulsion.

"Bobby," I said, "let's go!"

"Bruchko, we can't. We'll drown."

"But you're a good pilot, Bobby. I know you could get us down."

He shook his head. "It's impossible. The river is too high."

I wasn't asking him; I was telling him. He finally agreed, sadly. I packed my linguistic materials in their watertight packet and corralled the two baby wild bears I wanted to send to a friend in the United States. At about ten in the morning we finally got off. Although the river had dropped about four feet

from its crest, it still was high, brown, and ugly, with sucking swirls of yellow foam around the rocks. Bobby was worried.

“Are you sure you have to do this, Bruchko?” he asked. “The river is just too high to make it.”

I didn’t respond. I just kept packing the canoe.

We finally set out, Bobby, two other men, and me. Still other Motilones came down from the house and stood in the rain, saying good-bye.

“When you see Gloria’s mother, tell her that my stomach aches for her,” Atacadara, Bobby’s wife, said. “Tell her that when we heard Gloria was dead we couldn’t eat. We know how she feels.”

I took a last glance at the home and got in the canoe. We gave the boat a push, and the water picked up and pulled us downstream.

There was no fighting the current, even with the outboard motor on the canoe. All we could do was steer away from the bad spots. Bobby’s face was tense. He knew the river better than any person alive, but not even he could anticipate the logs when the muddy water was going at twice its normal speed.

Suddenly a huge tree trunk rolled up alongside us, on our left. We watched it closely to make sure it didn’t wheel around and hit us. As we came into a bend in the river, I realized that there was a whirlpool to the right of us. The log would push us into it if we weren’t careful.

“Bobby, look out ahead!” I yelled. But he was leaning over the motor. The nylon thread that controlled the throttle had broken, and he was trying to tie it.

Then another log came surging up out of the bottom of the river. It hit the big trunk on our left, bouncing it into our boat with a jolt that knocked us straight toward the whirlpool. Bobby tried to cut the motor, to slow the boat and get away from the log. There wasn’t time. We could see the whirlpool, very close and twice its normal size. Bobby tried to swing the boat around and go

against the current, but the current was too strong. The canoe hit the eye of the whirlpool sideways. It whirled about, then flipped over. We were all thrown out. I saw the gasoline tanks floating on the water. I had my papers in my hands and the two baby bears under one arm. I wanted to grab onto the boat to hold myself up, so I let the bears go. They immediately started swimming, and I grabbed the boat with one hand and held my papers up with the other.

Then I saw Bobby swimming in the eye of the whirlpool. Without a splash, he was pulled down and disappeared. I couldn’t see anything but the sloppy cone of dirty water. Then the canoe got closer to the whirlpool and started moving faster. All this time we were going around and around. Suddenly I was tossed off the boat and had to tread water. I was still holding my papers. The water took me around in a circle once, then again, pulling me closer to its eye. There was no avoiding it.

On the third time around I saw a tree limb stretched over the water. I wondered why I hadn’t noticed it before. I reached out my free arm and grabbed it. It was solid. Then I looked up and saw one of the Motilone men at the end of it. He pulled me out of the water, hand over hand, and I crawled up on the bank in the mud, gasping for air. Oh, praise God!

But where was Bobby? Then I realized what I had done by insisting on this crazy trip! Bobby was dead.

“Did you see Bobby?” I asked frantically.

“No. He disappeared into the whirlpool.”

I told the men I would jump into the river and float down until I found Bobby. But they said I couldn’t; the river would suck me in, and I would die.

A cliff bordered the river at this point, and we couldn’t get downriver without scaling it, so we began to scramble up. I was frantic. I fell down and cut my finger.

“I’ve got to find Bobby,” I said to myself.

I left the papers and kept climbing. Again I fell and got a long gash in my leg. When I reached the top, I got a thorn in my bare feet. It went in over an inch, and I had to stop for the pain. "All hell has been let loose against me," I thought. But I dragged on as soon as I could stand it and looked out over the river, scanning the banks.

I saw the canoe, like a fat needle along the bank. Then I saw Bobby holding onto it. O God! I ran down the hill, falling over the rocks. I reached Bobby and helped him pull in the canoe, then helped him out of the water. I placed my hand on his shoulder.

"I thought you were dead," he said.

"I thought you were dead," I said.

He was completely naked; the whirlpool had ripped off all his clothes. "Look," he said, "I lost all the clothes I was going to wear in civilization, and my money was in them."

"Who cares?" I said. "You're alive. Praise Jesus!"

Then the other men came up. I was so relieved that I couldn't say much. I smiled and touched them all. Then we bailed out the canoe and continued downriver.

The rest of the trip went without incident. When we were a few miles from the Rio de Oro, we stopped beside the river. Bobby made a loincloth out of a big leaf, and we went into town.

When I got on the airplane for Tibú, Bobby put his hand on my shoulder. "Tell Gloria's mother that we're hungry for her, that we're all sad that Gloria died," he said. "Take care of yourself, and come back soon." "I will," I promised.

CHAPTER 24: BEYOND THE HORIZON

I went first to Bogotá and spent three days with Gloria's mother. The close call on the trip downriver had given me some perspective on my grief. I had lost Gloria, but I still had Bobby.

Instead of going back to Tibú, I flew to the United States to discuss this book. I was there three weeks. When I returned to South America, Bobby met me in Tibú. I was sick of civilization and glad to be back in the jungle.

But civilization still needed me. The outlaws in the region were plotting to force the Mutilones further out of their territory. On our trip upriver we were threatened by Humberto Abril. I tried to dismiss it, but his words kept repeating themselves in my mind.

"For this cross I'll kill you," he had said. They were such strange words, cold and chilling.

More threats followed by letter—not only to me, but also to Bobby. One letter informed him that all the Mutilones would have to get out because they (the outlaws) were going to take over the land. They threatened force.

The next day Humberto Abril's associate, Graciano, and five other people arrived in Iquiacarora in a canoe. I met him at the bank of the river.

"Who are these people?" I asked.

"They're sick and need medical attention," he said. "One of them is pretty badly infected. The others need one thing or another, so they came along.

"Oh, yes," he added. "I brought you a letter, too." He handed it to me, then walked up to the health center with the others.

I got out my knife and cut open the envelope. The letter was from Abril.

"Get out of here," it said. "This land is for colonization, and we're going to kill you. Any Indian that gives resistance will be rubbed out."

Thoroughly angry, I charged up the hill to the health center. I stuck the letter in Graciano's face.

“Read it,” I commanded.

He shook his head. “I don’t read.”

“Well then, I’ll read it for you.” I read it aloud.

“Just how gullible do you think we are?” I asked. “You threaten us with death, yet you expect us to cure your people cheerfully. Now get your treatment, then get out of here. And don’t bother to come back.”

I threw the letter on the ground and pressed it into the mud with my shoe.

The Motilone leaders came to me that night to discuss the problem.

“We’ve decided that we’ll fight if they try force,” they told me. “We’re preparing for it now. We intend to get some guns and to use them and our arrows to defend the home.”

They asked me what I thought. “I don’t think anything,” I said. “I stand behind whatever you decide, as always.”

Two tension-filled months went by. More threats were made, particularly against the Motilones who had built small homes along the river.

Bobby and I worked on the translation of Philippians. It was one of the most intense, most wonderful times of translation we had ever had together. Our minds were preoccupied with death, it seemed, because of the inevitable conflict with the colonists. And Philippians spoke to us about this death!

As we worked through the first chapter, we came to verse 20, where Paul says that his great expectation is that he will not be put to shame, but that Christ will be exalted in him whether in life or death.

I needed the right word for expectation. A Motilone expects to go to bed at night, but that word doesn’t have much force.

The center of emotion for a Motilone is his stomach. To have a full stomach is to have a happy heart. What was the surest way of having a full stomach? Probably to have hunted and killed a large tapir. You eat tapir until you can’t eat any more.

So I took the verb for having a tapir in your possession, and I invented a new tense: I put it in a future tense that has already been completed, then I made it superlative.

I gave Bobby the word. It shocked him. “No,” he said, “that’s too big a word. It’s too forceful. How can you expect something as much as that?”

We let it drop, but it must have bothered Bobby. Two or three days later he said, “Bruchko, let’s go back to that word.” “All right,” I said.

He was quiet for a while, thinking, then said, “Bruchko, is Jesus Christ the expectation for you in your life? Really?”

That stopped me short. It’s one thing to figure out the right word to use; it’s quite another thing to be asked if it’s true of your own life. I thought of my conversion and of some of the crises I had weathered with the Yukos and the Motilones. Finally, after a long silence, I said, “Yes.”

Then I nodded vigorously. “Yes, Bobby, with all my strength and all my will I want to give myself to the expectation of Jesus Christ.” Bobby looked down at his feet. “Yes,” he said. “It’s a good word.” “Are you sure?” I asked.

He nodded.

Continuing with the translation, we came to the part where Paul says he wants to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ, through his own suffering or through his death. Bobby took the same powerful grammatical construction we had just used—something already done, yet lying in the future, in a superlative form—and applied it to the verb for conformity to Christ.

“I’ll be completed in conformity to Christ’s death,” he said.

I felt burdened, as though I were carrying both Bobby’s weight and my own. What had I done? I had brought Jesus to the Motilones, yes, but was I ready to bring them this kind of conformity—conformity to the death of Christ? Had I brought death as well as life? I was eager to pray. Bobby was even more eager. But Bobby’s prayer sent chills down my back.

“Christ Jesus, I want to be conformed to Your image. You are my expectation.”

In the danger-charged atmosphere, that prayer seemed audacious. Bobby was saying, “I don’t care whether I live or whether I die; I want to be like Jesus.” He was giving his life away.

For the next three weeks everything was quiet. We waited to hear from the outlaws, but no word came. Perhaps it had been a game, a useless threat that never would be carried out.

Bobby had to go downriver to sell some bananas. He took two other Motilones with him. He was expected back by four o’clock the following day. The river was at its normal height, the canoe was in good condition, and there was no reason why he should be delayed. But four o’clock came, then five o’clock, and still no sign of Bobby. I began to be concerned. I had hated to see him go at all. Now my mind was full of all the things that might have happened to him. Six o’clock came. The sun went down. Only the river shone faintly in the dusk. Night noises began to rise out of the jungle. They were so ordinary a part of life that I usually hardly noticed them, but that night each one seemed foreboding.

At six-thirty Abacuriana, Asrayda, George Camiyocbayra, and I got into a canoe to go downriver to look for Bobby and his canoe. The others weren’t eager to go. It isn’t easy to travel at night on the river. There was no moon, and rocks could appear in the path of our boat with no warning at all. After going through the first rapids, the canoe was swamped with water. We bailed out and continued. On the next rapids, we scraped our propeller against a rock but managed to clear it and continue on our way.

As we rounded a bend in the river, another canoe suddenly materialized out of the gloom. We nearly hit it. I threw the beam of my flashlight on it and saw Aniano Buitrago, one of Humberto Abril’s men, and some of his cohorts. I didn’t call out to them but kept my flashlight in their eyes so they couldn’t recognize us. In a moment the river had whisked us by them. But what were they doing on the river at night?

A little further down we passed another canoe going upriver. It was filled with more outlaws. Our flashlight beam probed the shore as we looked for Bobby or his canoe. There was no sign of him.

Two more canoes passed us going upriver, filled with men I didn’t know. Then we drifted by one of the land settler’s homes. At least ten canoes were tied to the dock. The night seemed alive with threats.

Then George whispered, “Look! Isn’t that Bobby’s canoe?” He was pointing at the dock. I strained to see but couldn’t tell. We floated on by. It couldn’t have been Bobby’s. He wouldn’t stop at one of the settler’s homes, especially when Saphadana, a small Motilone home, was located only a few hundred yards further downriver.

We considered going back for a second look.

“No,” I said. “Let’s go down to Saphadana and ask Aystoicana if he’s seen Bobby.”

We stopped the canoe on the bank near the communal home. There was no fire going inside, no sound. Then I heard a Motilone voice. “Bruchko?”

“Yes.”

Aystoicana came running down to the bank. I could barely see his face.

“Bruchko, they’ve killed Bobarishora. He’s dead.”

I couldn’t grasp what he had said. “That’s impossible!” I replied. “We’re expecting him in Iquiacarora. Has he passed by here?”

Aystoicana grabbed my arm. “Bruchko, listen to me. Bobby’s dead. He’s been murdered.”

Stunned, I fell onto my knees on the beach. “Where are the two men who were with him?”

“I don’t know,” he said. “They were badly hurt. They’ve gone.”

I reached out and grabbed Aystoicana's knee, steadying myself. The night seemed covered with red and blue blotches, like wounds. "What happened?" I whispered.

"Bobby was with Satayra and Akasara. They were coming upriver, passing by Israel's farm. Israel was on the bank, motioning and calling them to come over. Bobby was late. He didn't want to stop, but since he'd known Israel for a long time, he thought it might be an emergency."

"Israel was up for treatment two or three times in the last few months," I said hoarsely. "He had a broken arm that I sewed up and set for him. And he got the drugs he needed from us."

"Yes," Aystoicana said. "So Bobby thought he was a friend. He took the canoe over to the bank. While he was leaning over the motor to turn it off, Satayra looked up and saw a man standing behind a tree with a shotgun."

"Satayra yelled to Bobby and Akasara, telling them to jump into the river. Bobby didn't hear because he was too close to the motor. Satayra jumped up on the bank and grabbed for the shotgun. As he wrestled with the man for the gun, the man reached for his machete. Satayra let go of the gun to protect himself, and the man used his machete to slit Satayra's arm open from the wrist to the elbow. Satayra tumbled into the river, and Akasara jumped out of the boat to protect himself."

"Bobby tried to get out of the boat, but a blast from the shotgun caught him in the groin. He fell into the river. Some of the pellets hit Akasara in the leg, but he and Satayra swam to the other side of the river. They looked for Bobby, but all they could see was red in the water. Then they saw his body floating. They also saw swarms of colonists on the other bank. All had guns. They had been waiting for Bobby. Akasara and Satayra were frightened and ran. They came here and told us."

"Oh, no, no—oh, no," I whispered.

A Motilone whistled in the distance. Since their language is tonal, the Motilones don't always use words. This whistling said that two canoes were

floating downstream. There was no sound of motors. I realized that whoever was in them was trying to be quiet. They must be enemies.

"I want to go downriver to get the military," I said, suddenly angry. "George, you come with me."

I got into the boat. As I pulled the cord to start the motor, I heard little zinging noises on the water. They were shotgun pellets—fired from too great a distance to do any damage. The motor started on the third try, and we quickly left the gunshots behind.

It took several hours to reach the Rio de Oro military station. I woke up the commander of the armed forces. He came downstairs in his pajamas. I told him there had been a plot to kill Bobarishora and that he was reported to be dead.

He listened to my story, staring in space with sleep-glazed eyes. "OK, I'll check into it," he said and opened the door for me to leave.

"I don't want you to check into it," I said. "I want some help now. I need somebody to protect the Motilones."

"Sorry," he said. "I can't do anything tonight."

I went to the police. They wouldn't do anything either. I didn't think they were unconcerned about the problem. They were afraid of being attacked themselves.

I was angry and frustrated. At four in the morning I started back upriver with George. Dawn was just beginning to break. A pearly gray light on the water got brighter as we went upstream. The foliage took on a lush green color. It all looked so innocent. These were the trees and the river that I loved. This was home.

Bobby couldn't be dead. I refused to believe it. I kept thinking about the time a few months before when our boat had been pulled into the whirlpool. I had thought Bobby was dead then. But he had survived. Miraculously, he might even now be in the jungle, waiting for help, staying out of the outlaws' sight.

When we reached Saphadana the sun was shining. It didn't seem possible that we could have been shot at there. But Aystoicana told us that the settlers and outlaws had been coming by all night, shooting into Motilone homes near the river and shouting that the Motilones had to leave, that the land no longer belonged to them.

"Have you looked for Bobby?" I asked.

"We've looked, but we haven't found a trace."

"We've got to look," I said. "He may need our help. He may be wounded in the jungle."

Aystoicana looked down at his feet, as though a little embarrassed. We spent the whole day in the jungle, hunting for Bobby. The others wanted to quit, but I wouldn't let them.

I had not slept in a day and a half and was at the end of my strength. Sometimes my voice would fade, and there would be nothing but the sound of the birds singing faintly in the trees. There was never an answer from Bobby.

At five o'clock we quit. It would be dark by the time our canoe reached Saphadana. We didn't talk; we were too tired, too sick.

When we reached the point where the Cano Tomas River comes into the Rio de Oro, I saw something floating in the river. It looked like a log. We went over to investigate. It was Bobby, face down.

All hope drained out of my body. I felt empty—like a shell. I had convinced myself that this would be like the time we had nearly drowned. Bobby would be alive. We would be reunited.

The river was shallow. I got out of the canoe and turned Bobby over. His face, stark white, was crinkly from being in the water. I closed his eyes with my fingers. He had died at once. The shotgun blast had ripped open the lower half of his body. "God," I cried, "O God, why?"

He had been the leader of his people, the first to know Christ, the first to read and to build schools, the first to take a stand against the thieves of civilization.

George handed me a blanket. I wrapped it around Bobby's body, then helped lift him into our canoe.

The next day we took his body to Iquiacarora. My mind wouldn't let me rest. I had cried that night until no more tears could come. Still my thoughts went in circles. "Why all this death, Lord?" I kept asking. The river was death. The jungle was death. Death flowed down the valleys. Always it touched someone I loved... Gloria... Bobby. And woven through my thoughts were the chilling words of Humberto: "For this cross I'll kill you!"

The river was low, and we had to spend a lot of time getting through the shallow area. At one such place I heard the zip-zip of bullets hitting the water. They came from two canoes across the river. Suddenly a shot split the side of our canoe. We struggled frantically to get past the outlaws, but they were gaining on us.

I felt a burning shock in my leg. A bullet had hit me.

We finally got the canoe loose. As we started into the deeper water another bullet creased my chest. It actually felt good. I wanted to be hurt. I wanted pain. I wanted death.

But I received only surface wounds. We stopped the flow of blood; the pellets would have to be taken out later.

After many more hours of riding slowly upstream, we rounded the bend in the river that led to Iquiacarora. Several hundred Motilones were on the bank, armed. When they recognized us, they waited quietly until we disembarked. The news of Bobby's death had spread, and people had come from miles around. They crowded around the boat.

I saw Atacadara, Bobby's wife, standing above us on a little knoll. She was watching me, waiting. I looked at her, bowing my head to confirm that Bobby

was dead. She turned and walked away, one of her little girls clinging to her leg. She had Bobby's youngest son in her arms.

We got my hammock from the home and tied it to a twelve-foot pole. Lifting Bobby's body out of the boat, we put it in the hammock, then covered it with my blanket because he was my pact brother. Then we carried the hammock across the river and downstream and hung it far up in the highest branches so the vultures could eat Bobby's body.

Returning, I found Atacadara standing by herself on the edge of the jungle. Her eyes were dark and empty, as they had been when her daughter had died.

She looked up at me, and I broke into tears.

She grabbed my shoulder. "No, no," she said. I held her for a little while, then let her go.

All day I sat outside the home and watched the vultures swoop out of the sky. They began as high, dark specks. Circling closer with their huge, unflapping wings, they landed in the trees with short, stuttering flaps.

I remembered when I had thought the ceremony cold and cruel; I had thought sticking someone in a box and putting him in a hole was better than tying him high in a tree to be carried off into the sky. I knew now what it meant. It meant that Bobby was free to go beyond the horizon.

I only wished I could go with him.

Some Motilones tried to talk to me as I squatted outside the home, tried to cheer me. But I sat like a stone.

That night I could stand it no longer. I went out into the jungle to the trees that held Bobby's hammock. There I would lie down to sleep under the hammock that held Bobby's body, to say a final good-bye. But when I went, the whole home followed me. There were about two hundred people. It was dark under the hammock. There was no moon.

"Let's talk to God," I said. Odo, Bobby's adopted son, was the first to pray. He was only fourteen, but God gave him the most beautiful, prophetic prayer I have ever heard.

"O God," he said loudly, looking up at the silhouette of Bobby's hammock. "God, this is black. It's dark; I can't see. We're lost."

He was quiet for a moment, then continued in a new, quieter voice. "God, there is a tree, a tall tree, with its roots going very deeply into the ground. It's us. Lord, it's the Motilone people.

"We've lived in this land all our lives, generation after generation, and our roots are very deep, and we stand tall.

"We tried to follow God, but we lost Him while we were trying to follow. We tried to follow our own paths, and they never took us to the place they were supposed to; they only ended at another home, or at a river. They never took us beyond the horizon, where we would find You.

"Then Bobaríshora found Your path in Jesus Christ, and he walked it and showed us how to walk it. We were glad.

"But God! Where has it taken him? Why did that path lead to this place? God, it can't be."

He stopped. There was absolute silence.

"The tree is beautiful," he said. "It is beautiful. It is covered with large, perfect blossoms that have opened and shine in the sun. Each of us is a flower.

"But there is one flower bigger and more beautiful than all the rest. It made the most perfect fruit. That is Bobaríshora. He gave us agriculture, and our stomachs were filled. We were dying of sickness, and he brought us healing from Jesus Christ through medicine. He showed us the path to walk with Jesus Christ, so that we have reasons for life, for living. We were all excited by this new life.

“But, O Lord, it’s so black. A wind has blown, and the fruit, the most perfect fruit, has dried and withered and fallen to the ground. Its seeds have been kicked into the dark, dark ground. It has died—Bobaríshora has died and left us.

“God, don’t let the seed be wasted. Make our lives fertile soil so that his seed may grow in us. Make his death into a great tree growing in our soil, so that we can live as he did, to help each other and learn to love. Make this grow up in us because of his death. We ask this because we are all one this evening, born into Jesus Christ, Your only Son.”

That night I saw something I had never seen among the Motilones before: people were hiding their eyes and sniffing.

Ocdabidayna walked up to me, trying to smile. “Look at us all. Everybody has the flu!” he said.

“No,” I said. “It’s not the flu that I have. It’s no flu.”

Then Ocdabidayna, one of the leading chiefs, grabbed his head with his two hands and fell on the ground. “Oh, Bruchko,” he said, looking up at me. “I’m not a man. I’m a baby, a tiny baby. Only babies cry.”

His agony shook the Motilones as I have never seen them shaken. They ran into the jungle to hide their own tears from each other.

“Bruchko,” Ocdabidayna said, “Jesus Christ died for all the tribes of the world. Bobby is almost like Him. He died for the Motilones.”

I spent the next three weeks recovering from my wounds. I wanted to get out of the jungle, to leave the smell of death. I also wanted to inform the right authorities of the outlaw situation. But I couldn’t leave. The river was ambushed. Anyone who tried to make it out would have been killed. Hunters also found that the trails out of the jungles were booby-trapped with shotguns. One of the men did walk out to Tibú, carrying several letters. It took him a week, walking only at night, and always avoiding the trails.

The only sure way out was over the mountains—a journey requiring 140 walking hours. My leg had healed, so I began the trip. When I had gone halfway I heard a helicopter. The president of Colombia had sent it for me. I was soon out of the jungle.

I spent a restless week in Bogotá. What did it all mean? For the Motilones, Bobby might grow up into a flowering tree. But what meaning did the murder of my pact brother have for me?

As I talked to one of the head ministers in the Colombian government one night, I got my answer. He had known Bobaríshora personally and had a great interest in the Motilone people. I had just described Bobby’s death, and there were tears in his eyes.

“But Bruce,” he said, “you keep talking as though you wished Jesus would intervene and put an end to all this trouble. Can’t you see that it’s just the opposite? If it weren’t for Jesus, the Motilones would be pushed back into the jungle until they were slowly but surely eliminated! If it weren’t for Jesus, there would be no struggle; Bobby would never have had to die as he did. “No, Bruce. It’s not in spite of Jesus that Bobby died. It’s because of Jesus.”

He put his hand on my shoulder. “Where would the Motilone people be if Bobby had not been the sort of person whom the bandits felt they had to kill? Where would you be if Bobby hadn’t been that sort of person?”

“Nowhere,” I said. “I’d be nowhere.”

“So life has to be like this,” I thought. It has to be struggling and crying, even dying.

Suddenly, I saw my parents and all the pain we had gone through...

I saw the Yukos and the faces of the settlers...

I saw the faces of the Motilones, for whom the rest of the New Testament still had to be translated...

There was so much to do... so many things that Christ had called me to do. It would take more pain, more loneliness. Maybe death.

Why was it so hard? Why?

Then I saw Jesus. He was struggling up a hill with a great burden. His face was lined with grief, His back bent.

I steadied myself on the back of a chair and looked at the minister of government.

“I think I see,” I said. “It’s the cross.”

I held up my hand and put my thumb across my forefinger. “It’s for this cross.”

EPILOGUE by Janice G. Franzen

Bruce’s nine-month captivity and torture by the ELN in 1988–1989 worked for good. For years the Mutilones had shared their faith with the Barís, Cuibas, Yukos, and Tunebos (Indians of the Catatumbo region). But they never could get the tribes to work together even though Bruce begged God for this breakthrough. However, when he became prisoner, all five groups put aside their differences to plead for his life. Together they published open letters in national newspapers demanding his liberation. And in a special Sunday edition of Bogato’s “El Tiempo” [“The Times”], they cooperated in a full-page article, “A Norwegian Motilone Cry Out for Freedom.”

God does indeed do more than we can ask or think. The concern and support given Bruce by the entire indigenous population of Colombia made “Olson” a household word and a topic of numerous national editorials and television commentary. This, in turn, helped secure his release.

Bruce’s captivity also gave the Mutilones an opportunity to show that they could take over in his absence. They not only rallied the support of other tribes, but they also wrote letters to U.S. supporters, updating them on his situation. They maintained their organized system of farming, health care, and cooperatives, and they continued their study/translation programs.

Less than three months after Bruce’s release, a bomb was put in his car while it was parked in a public garage. The bomb destroyed the garage, but no one was injured. Because of threats like this, he has thought and prayed about whether it would be in everyone’s best interest for him to leave Colombia. But he believed that he had to continue the work God has called him to do and leave the outcome to Him.

There are many reasons why Bruce believed God wanted him to stay with the Mutilones.

The second generation of Motilone Christians are as dynamic as their parents... maybe more so. The Mutilones now are in direct contact with thirty other Indian tribes in Colombia. They share the gospel of reconciliation in twenty-two languages. Eighteen tribes have embraced the presence of Jesus

Christ and know Him as Savior and are growing in His grace and in the understanding of His written Word.

A Community and Health Center has been built. High school, trade school, and university students have received scholarships through Bruce and the Motilones. In 1992, for example, they sponsored more than eighty-two students for advanced studies in six different Colombian cities. These represented twenty-three different ethnic groups. All were preparing for service as “first generation indigenous missionaries.”

More than 250 former graduates today are dynamic tribal members and carriers of the gospel. They have learned how to weave the benefits of science with their traditional roots and values.

The Molitones are the first native Indians to achieve political status in the history of Colombia.

Through agriculture, nomadic tribes are producing improved staples and have eliminated the months of hunger when no wild fruits are available. This includes livestock supplies: beef and milk.

All of the 250-plus youth who have finished high school have continued specialized education in agriculture, animal husbandry, pedagogy, mechanics, mechanization of lands, lumber management, forestry, and forest management. All are residents among their respective tribes. None has abandoned the jungle for city life. All are serving in the example of Jesus.

When one of the former presidents of Colombia saw the dynamic advancement of the Motilones as they employed scientific solutions to their problems, he said, “This is true development in response to the needs of the community.” He assumed it was these factors that had brought peace.

But Kaymiyokba, who was talking with the president, became disturbed. He knew it wasn’t preventive medicine or tropical agriculture that had brought understanding and coexistence between tribes.

“It is because our tribe now walks in the footsteps of a new leader,” Kaymiyokba explained. To walk in a tribal member’s footsteps is to recognize him as chief.

Smiling, the president acknowledged that this was “Bruce, the missionary.”

“No, no,” said Kaymiyokba. “It is Saymaydodji-ibateradacura.”

“Who?”

“Jesus Christ,” Kaymiyokba said.

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