

Angel on the Trail

By Elizabeth Buhler Cott as told to Vinnie Ruffo

All night Joseph, the witch doctor, sent his eerie chants crashing through the jungle. "Ah-eeeeeeee, ah-eeeeeeee, ah-eeeeeeee, ah-booommm, ah-booomm."

Inside our two-room house deep in the heart of the jungles of South America, chills were running up and down our spine. Alfred, my husband, and Joyce, our little girl, stirred in our beds. I knew that they too could not sleep. How could we ignore the creepy cries of Joseph, the devil worshiper? He always became very angry whenever we treated the sick Indians who came to our mission station.

"Alfred," I whispered in the dark, "what do you suppose he is up to now?"

My husband sighed and turned in bed. "Quiet, dear. Try to get some sleep."

Sleep? It was like listening to the devil's midnight carnival. I couldn't wait until the morning sun poured through the trees to chase the creeps away. Night in and night out Joseph filled our hearts with dread.

One morning whoops of excitement filled the air, and Indians came running toward the mission house. Two of them came quite close. We hurried outside, then gasped when we saw that they were Luti and Leo, the two men who assisted Joseph in his witchcraft. They waved a pistol and some guns in our faces. On the ground they had a Dictaphone.

"Luti, Leo, where did you get those things? My husband asked.

Then came the awful story.

A look of horror and anguish came over my husband's face. He asked, "But why? Why did you kill him?"

Luti whirled and showed his black teeth. "Him not have enough barter to pay us for carrying packs on trail."

We shivered at the attitude of these men. And we prayed, "O God, help us to make Christians out of these heathens." It seemed impossible at the moment, but we believed that God could do anything.

Shortly after this terrible happening, our family left the mission station on a Friday afternoon and walked along the trail that led to civilization. We wanted to find a secluded spot where we could worship God at sundown. We walked about a mile down the trail and stopped in a little clearing in the jungle. As we talked to God

about our troubles, the fiery rays of the setting sun painted a flaming rash across the sky.

All at once it was dark! We realized that in the tropics nighttime does not come gradually. It comes without being ready for it.

“How are we going to get back?” Joyce asked. “There isn’t even a star in the sky.” She sounded scared.

All around us came the buzzing and droning of countless insects. We knew, too, that there were wild animals that attacked at night. And snakes always filled us with horror, day or night.

My husband reached for my hand and Joyce’s and pulled close. “We didn’t even remember to bring a lantern! Let’s stay together and try to feel our way back.”

The three of us crept along, trying to stay on a trail we couldn’t see. The blackness was as thick as tar. We turned to the right and to the left, hitting bushes and trees and getting nowhere. The cry of a baboon startled us. The night noises suddenly began to form a jungle orchestra. For what seemed like hours we batted around in the dark.

Finally we admitted that we were lost. Lost in the jungle! We crouched in the darkness, whispering to one another. Joyce said, “Daddy, Mommy—remember the verse in the Bible that says ‘*The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them*’?”

“Yes, Joyce,” I whispered, thankful for the promise.

“Let’s pray,” she urged.

Dropping to our knees, we asked God to protect us from the dangers of the dark thick jungle. All at once my husband remembered that somewhere in his pockets he should have a box of matches. He fumbled around, and sure enough, he found them.

“We need some tall grass for a torch,” he whispered. We reached around in the darkness until we found some. Soon we had enough light to find the narrow trail.

Gratefully holding our grass torch, we moved slowly and cautiously ahead. In the distance I saw a flame moving. Two men were out walking! I thought my heart would pop right out of my mouth. A little cry escaped my lips. I knew who those men were!

"Look," I cried. "There are Luti and Leo!" Luti was leading and carrying a large firebrand.

"They must be on the warpath," my husband replied. He tightened his hand on mine.

Who was to be their next victim? Both of us put an arm around Joyce and called God for protection. We increased our pace, and at last in the distance we spotted our house. We ran the last few yards and stumbled inside. Our fear now turned to relief and gratitude to God for seeing us through.

But we had hardly entered when a sharp rap shook our door. A new wave of fear came over me. Suddenly the door swung open, and Luti stood before us. There was something else on his face besides the horrible war paint. There was a look of terror. We noticed that he was trembling.

"What is it, Luti?" snapped my husband. "Why do you come here?"

The painted Indian gasped only two words, "Kenaima! Kenaima!" (Kenaima means "enemy.")

"An enemy?" the three of us echoed.

"Who is the *kenaima*?" my husband asked. "Where did he go?"

Luti pointed in the direction of the trail. "Him make big fire. Him come in house. We must find him."

He pushed past all of us and began searching our two-room house. He crept under our springless cowhide bed while Leo poked and probed under our camp table and behind our folding organ. The two men searched through boxes and clothes, until every inch of our house had been combed. We watched in great amazement. We dare not try to stop them.

At last Luti spoke breathlessly, "No me got." With that he went outside looking for the intruder. In the meantime Joyce and I, in our bedroom, had dropped to our knees in prayer. I sensed that we were in great danger. These Indians were much too aroused over the little fire we had lighted on the trail and over this so-called *kenaima*. We felt very uncomfortable.

Luti entered the house again. My husband went to him quietly and placed an arm on his shoulder to calm him. "Did you see the *kenaima*?"

Luti pointed to the fire on his firebrand. "Him big white man. We see big fire and four people. Papa Cott, Mamma Cott, child, and big white man."

A look of amazement came over my husband's face. "Big white man?" he repeated.

"Yes, all dressed in white. Man was guarding you and family. He walked on trail with you. He come inside house with you."

I looked at my husband, and he looked at me. We were both thinking the same thing, and we felt very humble. Luti had seen our guardian angel.

"Luti," my husband spoke reverently, "the big white man you saw was not *kenaima*. He was our guardian angel. God sent him to protect us on the trail."

Luti's mouth fell open.

My husband told Luti and Leo that we were going to kneel in prayer and thank God for sending our guardian angel to protect us when we were in danger. "Will you kneel with us?" he invited them.

The two men knelt just as we did. Three missionaries and two devil worshipers smeared with war paint must have made a strange sight in that prayer session. Luti and Leo heard our little girl give thanks to God for keeping His promise, "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about those that fear him, and delivereth them."

After this, experience, a marvelous thing happened. Luti and Leo, no longer our heathen enemies, became our Christian friends. Instead of giving us trouble, they helped us many times.