

## Chapter 1

### The Commitment

The small riverboat loaded with passengers and cargo, pushed against the current in the jungle river. The man at the front set the pace, singing out occasional changes. The Indian paddlers worked in unison: dip, swoosh, click. The horizontal paddles clacked on the side of the boat. Dip, swoosh, click; dip, swoosh, click.

The trees, some of them 200 feet high, came down to the very edge of the water on both sides of the river. Covered with vines, they formed a wall that echoed the sound of the paddles. Except for the streams coming into the muddy brown river, there were no landmarks anywhere.

A few passengers crowded together on the mound of cargo at the back of the boat. All of them were Indians but one. The one was a white man, his face almost hidden under a helmet to protect him from the sun. He nodded his approval at the skillful maneuvering of the crew. He watched the perspiration glisten over the rippling muscles of the oarsmen as they pulled hard around the rapids. Occasionally they glanced at this slender man, whose smile seemed to give them courage to pull harder. Something about those kind blue eyes behind the glasses drew them to him.

On April 21, 1911, Ovid Elbert Davis set out on a very special mission. Hardy miners entered the rain forests of British Guiana for gold and diamonds. But that which was far more valuable than precious metals or gems compelled this dedicated man to leave his beloved wife, Carrie, and his comfortable home and office in Georgetown, to go into such a forbidding deathtrap. Determined to press on toward his goal, he ventured into this vast, but in 1911 undeveloped country, so full of dangerous waterfalls, treacherous rapids, poisonous snakes, and deadly diseases.

But for the moment Elder Davis set aside his concerns for the future and just enjoyed the natural wonders of the jungle. As the crew paddled along he leaned back on his canvas prospecting bag and listened to the steady rhythm of dip, swoosh, click; dip, swoosh, click.

A bright-blue butterfly flitted overhead. He watched it disappear into the great trees that lined the river bank. One tree stood out. Its

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grooved bark ran the whole length of the trunk, as if it were made of a thick bundle of saplings.

The riverboat swung close to shore, and Elder Davis spotted a pale-green spider crouched on its web of golden silk. Bats clustered on the underside of a dead branch overhanging the water. Now and then along the bank appeared a slide where tapirs, the largest land animals in the South American jungle, came to drink.

A heron, gleaming white against the green trees, stood on a granite outcropping in the river eyeing a little fish that skittered near the water's surface. A flock of gaudy macaws scolded the boat and its passengers as they flew overhead. Watching them, Elder Davis saw high in the trees a cluster of lavender orchids. Near them hung an oriole's cocoon-like nest.

Elder Davis treasured these quiet moments, for he knew they would be few. Every dip, swoosh, and click seemed to say to him, "I press on." He shut his eyes, closing out the jungle, so he could think again of the goal that compelled him to take this long, dangerous journey deep into Guiana's forests.

He recalled how in 1906, when he became president of the British Guiana Mission, someone had shared with him the plea that had come from an Indian chief. This nomadic tribe lived near Mount Roraima, an area deep in the jungle where the countries of Venezuela, Brazil, and British Guiana met. Long before his arrival they had sent messages to the mission headquarters: "Please send the man with the black Book to teach us." Not once, not twice, but many times these urgent words had come, but always the call remained unanswered. There was no money' No one could go.

Recently they had added another sentence: "The angel said you would come."

What angel? When had he talked to these people? Was God actually communicating with this heathen tribe through an angel?

Elder Davis remembered how these urgent requests for help had kept him awake at night. Had God sent an angel to the chief of this tribe with a personal message for him? Was he chosen for this mission? Often when he fell asleep, Elder Davis dreamed of the chief. He'd see him with his hands stretched out, pleading with his eyes. "Please come!" he would say. "The angel said you'd teach my people from the black Book." Then in his dream Elder Davis would see the old chiefs eyes fill with tears as he sobbed, "Please come soon before I die."

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Elder Davis remembered how one night, just a year before, he woke up, crying, “I will come.”

His wife, Carrie, had heard him. “What’s wrong, Ovid? Have you had a bad dream?”

“Oh, Carrie, I have this dream so often! It’s about the Indians of Mount Roraima. I think of them during the day, and I dream of them at night. If only I had someone to send, someone who cared enough to make that long, dangerous trip and who could bring back a report of what’s really happening. I need to know their spiritual and physical needs in order to reach their hearts.”

Elder Davis and his wife lay in silence, each thinking. Finally Carrie asked, “Have you ever thought of going yourself, Ovid?”

“Carrie, do you realize what you are saying?” he asked. “That jungle is no place for an inexperienced man like me. What do I know about coping with all those dangers? We constantly hear reports of experienced explorers who never returned because of some disease or the poison arrows of hostile Indians. Should anything happen, I’d have no way to contact you. Such a trip could mean you’d be left a widow. Besides, who would care for the responsibilities of the mission here in Georgetown?”

Carrie didn’t answer for a long time. Finally she asked, “Do you want to go, Ovid? Do you feel that God is calling you personally?”

“Yes, Carrie dear, for many months now I’ve known that God has placed this burden on me, but I was afraid to tell you. I know that when God bids us go, He gives us the power to do His work. My chief concern is for you, Carrie. What if God permits some tragedy to occur? What if He says to me, as He has said to so many others, ‘Be thou faithful unto death? What then?’”

“My only answer comes from Romans 8:28,” Carrie replied. ““And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.””

Together in the quietness of that night they made a commitment with God and sealed it with the words of Paul, “I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 3:14.