



## Balance Point

ALTHOUGH LIFE NEVER ENDS, AS EDUARDO HAD SAID, time also never stops. The days had slipped by rapidly, and we had arrived at our last full day in the rainforest. We had all become rather adept at making our way through the thick vegetation, which was good, because we now had a fourteen mile hike planned, through the immense and ancient jungle.

There were no hills to climb in this flat, green Amazonian basin, but lots of moss-lined, meandering rivulets to wade across. And there were always new wonders to marvel at — snakes thick as a person's leg that seemed to take minutes to cross our path because they were so long (Eduardo cautioned us to avoid them); flying, crawling, and buzzing insects, some the size of your fist; birds with long, sweeping tail feathers and sharply curved beaks; unbelievable fungi, as big as elephant ears; snails as round as grapefruits; towering ferns everywhere; and, of course, the ubiquitous mosquitoes. Our net hats and insect repellent were lifesavers — we found that the natural oils of the citronella grass worked remarkably well in keeping the bugs at bay.

And the rain showers — intermittent, but certain — poured on us at any unforeseen moment, and then passed

over, allowing the sun to filter through the canopy once again. We learned to ignore these drizzles, perhaps even to find some pleasure in them. The most striking feature of the jungle, however, remained the utter silence. Unless we were near running water, the deep, daytime forest was completely quiet and still. Our conversation was the only sound to break the silence, other than the trampling of our feet.

Our final day's hike into the jungle allowed us ample opportunity to discuss the issues that had drawn us there. I was still somewhat obsessed with the "balance point" concept, recalling that a half million dollars with my name on them were burning a hole in an escrow account somewhere. Relentlessly, I questioned Eduardo about it. He kindly endured my persistent barrage, although he often preceded his answers by telling me that the concepts were difficult to put into words. He insisted that my awareness would develop in its own time.

"You have seen your greater self, *amigo*. You know that you are much more than just a man, you are a part of a greater being, as we all are. Now you must take that into consideration with every act you engage in, for the remainder of your life. Everything you do affects everything else. You know that now."

"That's right, we're all strands in the web of life," Michael added.

"You're so *trite*," chided Sarah, poking him in the back.

"So I'm trite, but it's true!" retorted Michael. "You can't damage one of the threads without eventually fraying the entire tapestry."

"But how does that translate into *normal* life, in the *real* world?" asked Annie. We had paused to rest on a bed of moss beside a huge tree trunk. "What's that have to do with average Americans like *us*? We can sit here in the middle of the Amazon jungle and wax poetic all day long, but we still have to go home tomorrow. Back to the real world."

"Look around you, Annie. *This* is the real world!"

Michael exclaimed, standing up and spinning in a circle with his arms outstretched. “This world has been here for eons, and will continue to be here for eons more if we don’t destroy it. The world we’re going home to tomorrow is an artificial world, one we’ve created — very recently, in comparison, I might add. And who knows how long it will continue the way it is. Not very, if we have any hope to survive as a species.”

“So what’re we supposed to do? All go and live in a cave? Go live in huts in the woods and eat lizards? If our American world is going to change, it isn’t going to change *that* way. No one would go along with that. No one is going to give up their hot showers and their cars and their washing machines and their toilets!”

Michael apparently had a knack for pushing Annie’s buttons.

“I’m afraid the problem is more dire than that,” interrupted Eduardo, who was seated beside us, weaving some fibers he had stripped from the stem of a plant. It looked like he was making a short cord of some kind. “Your people could make the necessary changes without going back to the dark ages. You could use your intelligence to solve the problems, and if you don’t ignore your true spiritual nature, your sense of oneness, it will work. But first you have to admit that the problems exist. So far, your people haven’t even done that. Instead, they rush to feed their egos — to line their cages with more mirrors, to cloud their awareness, to stifle their spiritual selves. They are desperate to make money. Money has become their god. It is blinding them, leading them to their doom. Your people don’t want balance. They could not care less about spiritual fulfillment. They want money, the more the better.”

“So what’s the solution, Eduardo?” I asked. “What can we do about it? The problem is too great, it’s too big; there’s nothing that one person can do!”

“Ah, *amigo*, this is where you are dreadfully wrong. There is one thing that everybody can do, and as more and more people do it, the Earth mother will heal.”

“What’s that?” asked Sarah.

“Seek and find your point of spiritual balance. That is something no one can do for anyone else, but it is something that each of us can and must do for ourselves,” continued Eduardo. “Religion is not necessary to do this, and religious leaders may even lead you away from spiritual balance. Government is not going to help you; money is not necessary. Spiritual balance is actually quite a simple thing, a natural state of being.”

“Well, it all sounds a bit too philosophical to me,” remarked Annie. “Too abstract. I want to know how to translate that into practical terms. What does that mean with regard to my day-to-day living?”

“Today is our last day in the bush together,” Eduardo replied. “Tomorrow we will meet the boat and you will be taken to the airport at Puerto Maldonado. Stop your questions and just sit with what you have learned and discussed



Annie crosses a downed tree in the heart of the jungle

so far. You will understand it all soon enough. And, Annie, I have one suggestion only. There will be someone waiting for you when you return. She may have the answers that you seek. I suggest that you talk with her.”

“Waiting where? In Lima? In Pennsylvania? Who, for heaven’s sake?” asked Annie.

“The one who sent you to me.”

“Melissa Berger?”

“Yes, her. She waits for you in America. You must speak with her.”

“How do you know that?” asked Annie, still skeptical. “I talked to her and she was *not* at all friendly. In fact, she would barely speak to me.”

“She will be waiting for you. Enough questions, though. We have spent too much time talking. If we start back to camp now, we will just get there by nightfall. You do not want to be hiking in the bush after dark, believe me.”

At that mild admonition, Eduardo started working his way back through the jungle rather hurriedly, and the rest of us were right on his heels.