



AN OPEN DOOR

A TRUE STORY OF
COURAGE IN CONGO

MAUD KELLS

WITH JEAN GIBSON

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INTRODUCTION

Over the years as I have recounted my stories, many people have asked if I have written a book to share these accounts of God's deliverance and undertaking. I have always answered, 'No', because I want God alone to receive the glory for all that I have experienced and accomplished in my life.

'But you can give Him the glory if you write them down,' I was told.

Hence the reason for this book: to give glory to our wonderful Lord Jesus. As I quote in it, 'Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord' (1 Corinthians 1:31).

Only He and His Promises have carried me through the many difficult circumstances in my life. The Living Bible paraphrase of 2 Corinthians 12:9, 'I am with you; that is all you need', has been His word to me many times when I was at my wits' end in Africa and Northern Ireland.

In the course of time a few authors offered to write my story, but finally the Lord confirmed to me that Jean

Gibson should be the one to write it down. I am very grateful for all the hard work she has put into deciphering my prayer letters and interviews to record them in this book.

Again, though, I would like to reiterate the one big purpose in writing this book: to glorify my wonderful Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Maud Kells



THE ATTACK

The African night was quiet as I closed the shutters and prepared for bed. A whiff of smoke from dying fires hung in the air. It had been the usual busy Sunday and I was still recovering from the New Year celebrations on Thursday with all the attendant distribution of food and clothes. Onande, my night guard, moved around outside, checking the compound, making sure the gates were well secured with ropes. On occasion his system worked so well the midwife from the hospital was unable to undo them if she needed me in the night, forcing her to waken me by shouting over the hedge. Tonight, however, there was no shouting. My neighbours were already settled for the night and only the high-pitched chirp of crickets and the occasional croak of a nearby frog disturbed the silence.

‘*Mademoiselle*, are you awake?’ I fought my way into consciousness and checked the time as the knocking on the

shutters woke me. Just after midnight. I had had a couple of hours' sleep. I recognised Mama Rebecca's voice.

'What's the problem?'

'A mama has come to maternity who has had three caesarean sections before.'

I blinked the sleep out of my eyes as I assessed the situation. 'How is she? How is the baby's heartbeat?'

'Everything is fine. She is not in any danger. I'm just letting you know.'

I was pleased that Rebecca the midwife had heeded my request to be kept informed of emergencies but it sounded as though all was under control. 'Do you need me for anything? Is there a nurse surgeon there to do a caesarean section?'

'We are fine, we can cope. Nguza and Ramazone are there. I just wanted to let you know what was happening.'

'Very good. If there are any problems, if you need IVs or medical supplies from the house here, come back and call me.'

'That's fine. I'll do that.'

I settled back into bed, grateful for trained staff who ensured I no longer needed to deal personally with each situation.

'*Madame*, please come, it's an emergency. No one else can do it. We need you.'

I shot awake again. It was a male voice this time. Only fifteen minutes had passed since the previous call. The knocking on the shutters was insistent.

'I've talked to the midwife, I've dealt with that problem.'

Everything is under control.’ I tried to sound patient. It was probably an overanxious husband in a panic.

‘No, no. You need to come immediately. The lady’s very ill. They have sent me to get you.’

‘Why? She’s having a caesarean section, she’ll be okay,’ I tried to reassure him.

‘No, no. You need to come.’

With a sigh, I dressed quickly and slipped my feet into my sandals. Although my bedroom was beside the front door, the key for the Yale lock on that door had been lost during the war so I went out through the back door, locking it behind me. Onande met me on the doorstep.

‘*Mademoiselle*, I heard you talking to someone. Do you need to go to the hospital?’

‘Yes, I think it’s the husband of a maternity patient who is insisting that I go.’

‘I’m coming with you.’ The hospital compound was only 300 yards from mine but Onande took his protective duties seriously. We checked that the back door was securely locked and set off together, the white dust path picked out in the light of my torch. The gate of my compound was already open and I wondered vaguely whether Rebecca had left it open, or the husband who had come to my window.

Between the maternity department and the operating suite, a group of people had gathered: hospital staff and relatives of the patient.

‘*Mademoiselle*, why have you come?’ One of the midwives was confused.

‘The man said you needed me. Didn’t you send him to call me?’

‘No, we didn’t send anyone.’

‘Where is the husband of the patient? I’m sure he was the one who called me.’

‘I think he’s in the theatre with his wife, in the waiting area.’

‘Well, I don’t understand it. Do you need me for anything?’

‘No, no. Everything is under control.’

I looked at Onande. All appeared calm. ‘Then we’ll just go back.’

I was aware of a slight unease. In all my years at the hospital I had never had a hoax call. We went back through the gate of the compound and up the side of the house towards the back door. Suddenly out of the darkness ran two masked figures in camouflage clothing pointing something shaped like a gun, covered in leaves. One of them grabbed Onande and ran off with him. For a moment I froze, then thought of the cash I kept in the house in the absence of local banks. Doubtless a seventy-five-year-old lady seemed an easy target.

‘You won’t scare me; you won’t get the better of me,’ flashed through my mind as I reached out to grab the weapon. The noise and the pain were instantaneous. I didn’t realise a gunshot would be so loud. Pain shot through me from front to back. A scream that seemed to come from somewhere else brought my attacker up short and he took to his heels as I continued to yell at the

top of my voice. It was my only means of getting help but a disturbing stillness followed my screams. Where were the neighbours, the pastor, the *chef de poste*, the hospital staff?¹

Blood was pouring from a wound between my shoulders where the bullet appeared to have passed through. Desperate to stem the bleeding, I staggered to the wall of the house, pressing myself against it as firmly as possible. Time seemed to stretch indefinitely as I stood there, fighting to stay conscious and keep the blood flow under control. Call after call elicited no response. Images flitted through my brain: pictures of Jesus left on the cross, crucified and alone. As on that night, people were too terrified to come near and identify with the victim. It looked as if this was it. I would die here in Mulita where I had invested so much over the years.

I had no fear. I was very conscious of God's presence surrounding me and the Holy Spirit's whisper that He was in complete control of the whole situation. He reminded me of Scriptures that had been precious over the years: 'The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in' (Psalm 121:8, *ESV*); 'My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth' (Psalm 121:2, *ESV*). While I was standing there with no physical help appearing, I thought, 'Lord, are you taking me now?' I prayed my daily prayer whatever the situation: 'Forgive me, Lord, for anything I've done wrong.' Then I added, 'I'm ready to go, Lord. But there are a few things I'd like to finish off on earth before I go.'

'*Mademoiselle* is dying! *Mademoiselle* is dying!' A Congolese friend, Mado, visiting me in Mulita, appeared from the guest house where she was staying. Having suffered from hearing problems all her life, it was ironic that she should be the first to respond to my screams. As she joined in my attempt to call for help, Mado shouted, '*Mademoiselle* is dead! *Mademoiselle* is dead!'

'*Mademoiselle* is manifestly not dead,' I thought to myself. '*Mademoiselle* is still shouting!'

Onande, a wiry little man, having managed to wriggle free and escape the bandits, came running up, taking in the situation as he tried to get his breath back. 'I'll go to the pastor's house and call him.' Realising the pastor was too frightened to come out of his house, Onande dashed off to reassure him that the bandits had gone. His explanation seemed to have the desired effect because almost immediately I heard the drum going as an emergency message went out to the community.

I was frozen to the wall, keeping pressure on my back as firm as possible. I could still feel the blood dribbling from my wound and knew that once I moved it would be difficult to stop.

However I could not stand there indefinitely. As the medical staff supported me into the house, shock and blood loss took over and everything grew dim as I collapsed onto a mat on the floor.