

Chapter 2

It was summer so I did not have any school work to do this time. I spent the next few hours drawing colorful pictures of my friends and practicing my Portuguese--I'm not very good at speaking it yet but I understand most everything. Dad says it is important to learn the language of the land because outside of the major cities of São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro there wasn't much English spoken.

After a few hours, I began to wonder where we were so I glanced out the window and saw more green trees in one place than I had ever seen before! Dad glanced back and said, "Alexander von Humboldt, was the first to scientifically explore the Amazon. He called it, "helya," meaning "land of forests." Dad continued, "one third of all existing forests in the world are here in Brazil. Your playground for the next week,



the Amazonian region, is the largest tropical forest in the world!"

(Tropical means that it rains a lot and has a warm humid climate most of the time.) "You are a lucky girl, Alex", said Dad, "most people just get to read about the Amazon." That sounds so much like a Dad thing to say. But I knew he was right and the flip/flop feeling, like monkeys playing in my stomach, made me realize how excited I really was! "Obrigado por levar-me, pai", I said, impressing Dad with my Portuguese. (I said, thank you for taking me, Dad.)

Just then I felt the plane touch down with a bounce! I could hear the moaning of the breaks as they labored to slow the plane to a stop compounded with the creaking of the small aircraft. I was tossed about in my seat like as if I was on one of those old wooden roller coasters. The propellers lifted dust up into the air making a cloud so thick that I could no longer see out my window. Leave it to Dad to find some out-of-the-way place to land. He always said that if we went to the same places everyone else did, he would have nothing to write about! So much for my new white shirt, I thought. Mom always said that the dirt stains I brought home on my clothes just made them more interesting. She says, "Each stain tells a story of adventure!" My mom is not the normal mom. Come to think of it, my Dad is not the normal Dad either!

Strange how the weather can be so different within the same country! It was sticky, that's the way my clothes felt, like they were melting on me. You know how it feels when you get out of a hot shower, and the bathroom door was closed? Like water in the air without the rain. "Alex, stay next to the plane while I get everything arranged." said Dad as he quickly walked across what might be called a road. He always thinks I'm going to get lost. I leaned against the plane; arms crossed but before I could get mad at him something darted past me. It was so quick! I couldn't tell what it was, but whatever it was it wasn't human! I'm going to stay close to Dad on this trip, I thought.

We soon found ourselves in a rusty, old, military-green jeep heading down a thick muddy road into the forest leaving São Gabriel da Cachoeira, a

military settlement, behind with the last remnants of civilization. Our guide, Tiago, looked like a pirate to me. He wore dirty tan pants tucked into big black boots. His shirt was white, or it use to be as the dirt on it told many stories of past trips into the forest. Dark brown hair hung down his face in soft waves and his tanned, whiskered face told me he had not been home for a while. But his eyes were kind, deep brown like my friend Elena's. Maybe that is why I instantly liked him in spite of his otherwise scary appearance. He spoke little English so I had to listen carefully to understand his Portuguese instructions. Keep your hands in the Jeep, don't leave on your own, re-apply your bug repellent, don't touch the animals...the list went on and on! I nodded politely and had every intention of minding every word.

To be continued...