

N.B. This translation contains errors due to the insurmountable language differences between German and English

VOLCANO

With a primeval deep rumbling it pulls me out of sleep. It begins to live, to breathe. The earth trembles and the mango tree to which my hammock is attached, becomes uprooted and suddenly flips in slow motion on its side. I quickly jump from the mat and in a mad rush bring myself to safety – when simultaneously the tree cracks, thunders to the ground and shatters. My hammock is lost, but I have saved my life. Briefly I think of the coming nights without a hammock, a vital thing in the jungle. It provides some safety in the jungle from snakes and other wild animals! But now it is destroyed, and for some time I can get no other hammock, for I am in the midst of the Indian jungle, and the next settlement is more than 120 miles away. I am completely alone and my only friend is my .38 Smith & Wesson revolver, together with a dagger and a bayonet. But I will have to see how to master the situation, as I have come this far and am very determined to continue and still find my way.

For now, the earth still trembles, and deep below the ground is a heavy rumbling. Earthquakes: heavy and deep in the midst of a wild jungle. It can become dammed hot and dangerous because if the rumbling doesn't stop soon then the animals become even wilder than they normally are. A continuing earthquake makes them crazy. Already they are howling, roaring, screaming and whistling in the highest tones of fear, and driven by panic-fright they chase and rush over the shaking ground and through the hot air. But the rumbling and rolling keeps going on – it becomes louder and more threatening than it was before. From minute to minute, the dull sound increases more and more to a howling. Not far away from me in the jungle I can see through the dense plants that the air begins to shimmer and a dangerous hum sound suddenly can be heard. Damn it, this was all I needed. Only a short time until the earth opens. It will rip and tear like brittle leather, and then hell will break loose. Red-hot lava will shoot out from the earth and will turn the jungle really into a hell. A volcano erupts – it has started to live only a few minutes ago, with a deep, threatening rumble, deep under the earth.

Rooted to the spot, I stand there and look into the shimmering hot air between the trees. What else could I do? All around, the abundance of the jungle grows rampant, and it prevents me from simply running away. I would not get far, in any event, when the approaching volcano would take my life. So I might as well remain standing on the spot and wait for things to unfold. If I must exchange my life with Nirvana, then I can do it here and don't have to struggle just a few metres through the jungle before my destiny reaches me. So I stand and stare at the trees, liana vines and other jungle plants.

Seconds tick by on my watch, becoming minutes, and eternities. The damned tic-toc-tic-toc of my watch appears to sound very loud in my ears, something that never happened before unless I had held the watch against my ear.

There is nothing I can do but stare at the glowing fire. Like in a cinema, I stare at the same place and only a small difference separates me from the show and the spot where I am standing; in the show I see everything, completely safe, on the screen, whereas here I face the harsh reality, and instead of the screen, I'm staring at the lethal spot where hell will break loose in a few minutes. But hell comes quicker than I expected! Crashing and screaming painfully, the earth is torn apart and plunges into the depths, dragging along trees, plants and animals. In a thundering explosion they are being transformed into atoms a few metres below the ground as they fall onto the high-swelling and bubbling lava. Heavy, thick and white smoke of the atomized plants spews from the bursting ground, followed by a pitch-black smoke plume. Now reddish-yellow glowing chunks are spurting out – lava. With primeval force, a tremendous explosion is hurling glowing lava into the air that is filled with thunder. Some eighty metres high it hisses and draws a fiery tail behind it, like a big shooting star. As the chunks and lumps of lava have reached the summit of their catapult flight, they whirl back to earth, thunderously crashing through the jungle's huge trees, splitting them into a thousand pieces and setting the jungle on fire. The small volcano is born – and it lives. A mere 130 metres away I stand in front of the raging hell. Suddenly the air is diabolically hot, and unspeakable thirst begins to torment me. I often have to jump to the side when a piece of lava is sailing along, and only with great efforts can I escape the many glowing chunks of rock that come thundering down. They spray in a small explosion when they crash to the ground, and then set everything on fire around them. I am already standing in a sea of flames, when a last tremendously loud explosion shakes the ground, and then suddenly total silence prevails, which in the next moment becomes replaced by a roaring downpour and a bursting thunder. Then suddenly no sound can be heard, and all the small and large fires have gone out. Only the extinct fire spots and the smoke curling into the sky are witnesses

to the events which have rolled through the jungle only a few minutes ago. The heat is suddenly gone, and only the normal oppressive temperature of the jungle lies between the half-burned or at least singed trees and plants.

What has happened? Over the fiery hot and steaming ground I walk slowly towards the crater, while here and there avoiding a faintly glowing chunk of lava lodged in the midst of completely burnt plants. About 40 metres before the crater I stand as though turned to stone. A huge tiger lies on the ground and – in spite of what has happened – seems to sleep calmly, while directly behind it an enormous piece of lava glows. But no – what's that? The lava covers a third of the tiger's back part, and its hair is mostly burned or singed. The tiger must have been sleeping, undisturbed by the rumbling and thunder of the erupting volcano, and during sleep it was hit by the lava falling down and instantly killed.

Proceeding, I meet other dead animals: Snakes, monkeys and much more that could not flee the raging elements bursting from one second to the other. Now I am standing at the crater. In fact, I have spent more than an hour to get the 130 metres from my resting-place to this area. 130 metres of jungle and partly glowing lava that now cools down by the gradually-falling heavy rain. It is tremendously hot here at the crater or what is still left of it. Just over a metre in diameter and around 4 metres in length, but certainly about 20 metres deep: now it is closed down there, and water is bubbling and simmering. And now I understand why the volcano so suddenly exhaled its breath and why all the fires were extinguished. The lava has eaten away and melted the eruption channel until it broke through the walls of an underground lake and the watery mass thunderously plunged into the glowing lava. This in turn led to a thunderous explosion that destroyed all the oxygen on the ground surface in a great area for a few seconds, immediately extinguishing all fires. Now I could also explain to myself why I could breathe no more air for a few seconds and why I was seized by a terrible deadly feeling of suffocating, so I had to gasp for breath.

The events appear strange to me, for I know of no volcanic activity in this area, consequently I also cannot explain the peculiarity of this small outburst. To me, the whole thing appears like a small volcano that erupted and did its ways just to let me experience a little adventure. Now I take out my camera and snap a few pictures as a reminder of the hours, where I was standing with one foot already in Nirvana. Then I go back to my resting-place and gather the rest of my belongings that are not destroyed and burned by falling-down lava chunks. From half-burnt branches and leaves I make a make-shift camp for the night and lay down for some rest; for the sun is already sinking down, and soon it will be night. And tomorrow I have to be rested because I want to solve the mystery that has lured me to this location.

Days later, back at the Ashoka Ashram in Mahrauli, I learn from Miss Rogers and Monk Dharmawara, that exactly at the time I had the experience in the jungle, a strong earthquake had occurred.

Billy, (written at age 27)

12th July 1964, Mahrauli / India

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Corrected by Christian Frehner on 4th September 2012

Sent to FIGU-Landesgruppe Canada for correction and publication in a newsletter.

Additional corrections by Catherine Mossman.