

Rampage to Reconciliation

by Ria Zebua

Translated from Indonesian by Leatha Humes



At the Upper Langilan Ministry Center¹ that morning, Annabelle was giving a Bible lesson to 63 women. I was in my house with the team, trying to hear Annabelle while we practiced a drama for a devotional. Hearing Annabelle's voice no more, I wondered what had happened, so I went outside.

"I'll kill you!" A man was yelling as if possessed. "Doming, Bernard! All you missionaries! I'll kill you all!" His voice boomed with ear-splitting volume.

I went to the classroom. Annabelle and all the women were huddled together facing the left.

Tarar-r-a-a-a-k! Ta-ak! Kra-a-a-a-k! George

Subla, bare-chested and wielding a short sword, was slashing my bamboo fence and stomping it down!

"I'll kill you!" he screamed pointing his sword at me.

I hurried back to the team. Obviously Satan wanted us dead. We prayed.

George raged on.

"Let's ask *Datu*² Max's help," Heidi suggested.

He was in his house. "*Datu*, what shall we do?" I asked. I didn't need to explain the problem. From the bench where he was lying he could clearly see and hear all that his son George was doing and saying.

"What's all this about?" he said disgustedly, going out with dragging footsteps.

Heidi and I returned to the house and prayed again with the team.

"No-o-o-o! You can't do whatever you like in our village!" George roared.

"Ria! Go! Face George!" ordered George's mother Klara from my doorway before ducking out of sight.

Huh? Face George? To die? I struggled in my heart.

"Let *me* go, *ate*³," offered Bernard, getting to his feet.

"No, Bernard. I'll go." I stood up while praying silently, "Father, if this is my time, let this bring salvation for all of Upper Langilan people." Turning to the team, I said, "Continue the work," and left.

In the yard some women approached me saying, "Before coming here George tied his four children to the posts of their shanty in the field. When he's finished here, he's going back to kill them.

George was still raving. My fence was completely destroyed.

"*Ate*..." George's wife Catherine pled, trembling. She grabbed my hand, crying.

Catherine and women from the ten villages in Upper Langilan district that our mission was reaching had been at our Ministry Center three days attending the Manobo⁴ Women's Conference.

Returning to the house, I found the team praying. I called to Heidi, "Give some food to Catherine. Send her through the back way to watch the children; I'm going to George." Trembling, I went down again.

Klara and another woman led George into his house, just 15 meters from mine. I followed. He continued yelling, "I'll kill them all!" The sword and his hand were smeared with his own blood.

"Talk to him!" ordered Klara.

What should I say, Lord? I needed words.

"Ask his forgiveness!" Klara ordered further.

Forgiveness for what? I wondered.

I felt moved to approach George. He needed love. "Lord Jesus, please pour Your love on George!" I prayed urgently.

George twisted free of his mother. I stood petrified some distance behind him. George, facing the wall, continued his angry yelling that only Jesus could restrain. "Oh, Lord Jesus, please quiet George. Now, oh, Lord," I pleaded fervently.

Uncertain whether to get near George or slip away, I closed my eyes. Jesus' words echoed in my ear: "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to Me...and I am with you always."⁵

Opening my eyes, I found myself beside George and was now all alone with him.

"I'm here, George. Whatever the problem is, we can talk it over. Give me your sword." I said, extending my hand to take it; my whole body was cold with fright.

"I'm here, George," I kept saying. "Talk to me."

George dropped his sword. I took his bloody hand while patting his shoulder. Head down, he seemed to be crying.

"It's heavy, *ate*. Painful," sighed George. I nearly vomited at the smell of liquor and cigarettes on his breath—he was drunk. But I ignored my feeling and inquired of the Lord what He wanted me to say next.

"What's weighing you down, George? If you share, I'm willing to listen."

George went up the steps to the room above us and sat down. He was more relaxed now.

I sat on a bench near the steps facing him.

George began: "They look down on me, call me a stupid headman, an irresponsible coward. They accused the *Datu* of receiving money from you, missionaries." George raised his head. Looking toward my house he said "You've changed the name of our village without our knowledge. Look what you've written on the name plate!"

I began to understand why *Datu* Max was unwilling to help us and why Klara, his wife had ordered me to ask my accuser's forgiveness.

George continued, "You don't care. I told Doming, Magonot and Bernard a month ago, but to this day you've done nothing. You've insulted us." Anger tinged his words.

"No, George. We don't look down on you!" Those words mounted on my throat ready to burst, but I pushed them back. "Keep quiet!" an inner voice commanded. "Better listen!"

"I couldn't stand it. I drank myself drunk. I wanted to show them I'm not a coward, nor stupid," George declared

Faced with George, thoughts raced through my head. Can something as small as that make them kill? Are they that narrow-minded? Have we been wrong in this, couldn't they have also considered the good we've done serving them these three years? Don't they know forgiveness?

Forgiveness! The word jolted me awake. *We* should forgive *them*!

"George, we can have a village meeting to talk this over. Tell us when, and the nine of us on the team will come. Please, forgive us. This happened because of my negligence."

It really was my fault. The team told me about the problem with the name plate. Reading "Upper Langilan" on it, the villagers thought we had changed the name of their village, Upper Tagasan. They didn't know that name was given by the Manobo Bible Church Association in which churches formed through our ministry would become a part. I had failed to explain this to George as the village leader and to his father as the *Datu* of Upper Tagasan. People who weren't happy with them and with us had used the opportunity to set us against each other.

We both were silent for a few moments. I wanted to tell that to George, but my thoughts turned to another matter, something I had long wanted to tell him.

"George, there's something I want to tell you today. The Lord Jesus loves you. He has given you the ability to lead. He wants you to become His servant. Would you and Catherine be willing to go to Bible school?" I asked.

Plo-o-o-ong! I was glad. I now had given my most important message to George. Satan hadn't succeeded in hindering me.

From the time I first met George and Catherine, I often prayed for them that one day they would become God's servants in Upper Tagasan. George was a gifted leader, and he had received Jesus during our literacy course two and a half years before.

I waited eagerly for his answer. He was clearly still thinking, but his face had brightened. Changing his position, he replied, "I'm willing, *ate*. Catherine and I will go to Bible school. I want to study God's Word."

That evening George came for supper with our team. We completed our sweet fellowship by praying for one another before George went to join Catherine and their children, who were still hiding in their shanty.

Satan had been defeated! Jesus reigned! Love and forgiveness had gained the victory!

George and Catherine went to Bible school. I was happy to become their teacher and see their spiritual growth. They fought to win over their old life, a battle that is never easy. They fell, and rose, fell again and rose again. Our team stood by them, helping them, praying with them and witnessing their victory!

We weren't the only ones who witnessed the victory of George and Catherine: the people in Upper Tagasan saw it too.

One Sunday, two and a half years after that blood-stained day, George and Catherine proclaimed their faith in the Lord Jesus by being baptized—the first people to do so in Upper Tagasan!

After their baptism, we turned the responsibility of leading the Upper Tagasan Church over to them.

George and Catherine's love for Jesus has grown. They are reaching out beyond the borders of their own village. They've begun preaching the gospel of reconciliation in Lower Tagasan, Klara's home village, two-hours' walk away.

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1. The base of Upper Langilan Mission Team
 2. *Datu* = village headman
 3. *Ate* = a term used to address a woman older than you
 4. A tribe living in the jungles of Mindanao island, Philippines
 5. Matthew 28:18

