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BY THE TIME the morning sun burst above the forest wall, Enqueri and I and the truckload of Huaorani were a good twenty miles out of Coca, barreling down the *Via Auca* toward the territory, sweat streaming from every pore. The *Auca* is pitted and gouged and an oily mess, but the land surrounding it is breathtaking: Behind and around us, in the undulating terrain where the Amazon basin meets the Andes, volcanic peaks loomed above mist-shrouded hills. It is in this region, where two distinct climate zones join, that the Oriente is at its richest. Thirty million years ago, the Oriente was an embayment of the Pacific Ocean. Four and a half million years ago, the Andes thrust up from the earth, creating finely subdivided habitats—deep valleys separated by high ridges, with microclimates that change radically over short distances. Plants, and the insects and birds and other creatures that evolved with them, were isolated, encouraging such intense speciation that in its endemism—the presence of species that exist nowhere else—the Oriente may be the richest place in the world. Though it is about the size of Alabama, it is home to an estimated 8,000 to 12,000 species of plants, or up to 5 percent of all the plant species on earth. At a single research station near the Napo River, observers have recorded 491 species of birds, or about two-thirds as many as are found in the entire continental United States. Four hundred seventy-three species of trees—more than are native to all of Western Europe—have been identified in a plot of forest about the size of two football fields.

By almost all accounts the richest section of this incredibly rich

region is the land and rivers the Huaorani have inhabited for centuries. The traditional Huaorani homeland is roughly 120 miles wide, east to west, and 75 to 100 miles north to south. The ferocity with which the Huaorani defend themselves is legendary among their indigenous neighbors, which include not only nations of comparable size—the Siona, the Secoya, and the remaining Cofans—but the formidable group of interrelated peoples on their southern flank that includes the Shuar, the Achuar, and the Shiwiar, and now totals about 50,000; and, to the north, west, and south, the extraordinarily fecund Quichua, whose population is now approaching 100,000. Of all the Oriente's indigenous groups, large and small, only the Huaorani consider themselves never to have been conquered.

If there is one glaring contradiction to the Huaorani sense of sovereignty, it is the *Via Auca*. From Coca the road runs due south into the territory, splitting it almost down the middle, and for four miles on each side the land has been set aside for colonization. This zone is a legacy of the symbiotic relationship between American evangelical missionaries and the Company. In the late 1960s and the 1970s, in understandings worked out with the government and with Texaco, Rachel Saint and other North American missionaries affiliated with the Summer Institute of Linguistics (a worldwide evangelical network, headquartered in Texas, that is dedicated to translating the Bible into indigenous tongues) conducted a program of pacification that, with the aid of magic and trinkets—airplanes and mirrors and salt—lured most of the Huaorani into a small protectorate on the far western edge of their traditional lands. This move helped Texaco blaze the route of the *Via Auca*, which opened the Huaorani territory not only to further oil development but also, for the first time, to large-scale colonization.

The *Auca* is only sixty miles long, but it is the forward line of battle: It is the deepest penetration, by road, that has been made anywhere in the upper Amazonian watershed.

FOR ALMOST the entire four hours it takes to drive the length of the *Via Auca*, a rusty steel pipeline runs alongside the road. In some places the pipeline rests right on the ground, and in others it is raised on stilts. Men tether their horses to it, women spread their washing on it to dry,

and children play on it. On a clear day the metal soaks up so much equatorial sun that it's hot to the touch, and when you rest a hand on it you feel the oil pulsing along inside. Every few miles the line passes a separation station, where a flame as big as a house flares from a metal stack, burning off natural gas. The flames are visible for miles. They burn night and day, producing such intense heat that colonists spread their coffee harvest beneath them to dry.

Oil and oil-waste spills are common on the Auca. Trucks plow into the pipeline, trees fall on it, and in some places it is nearly rusted through. It has no check valves, and when it ruptures it can spill for days, until someone at a receiving station far down the line notices a drop in production. Sometimes the spills are deliberate. Two-thirds of the way down the road, at the Shiripuno River, there is a Texaco well inherited by Petroecuador. "The Company dug a canal from the waste pit to the river," Enqueri said, "and it drained right above a Huaorani village. Children were swimming in the river. When they came up out of the water, they had black all over their bodies. They were asking, What is this? Nanto went to the Company, but the Company said the spill had not happened. There was nothing we could do."

From beginning to end the Vía Auca is lined, in ones and twos and clumps, with the rickety wooden shacks of colonists. They come from southern Ecuador, from the coast, and from the Oriente itself—many of the new settlers are Shuar. The colonists raise cattle and coffee—neither of them well suited to the area's poor soils—but mostly they work for the Company, cutting roads, digging wells, cooking food. The colonists suffer, and their children are often hungry and sick. Still, they say that life on the Auca is better than the life they left behind. By law the land was there for the taking, free to anyone willing to cut down the trees and work it, and in Ecuador land, no matter how poor, has always been the true measure of wealth.

The mood along the road was tense. Bored with the trinkets and magic that had drawn them into the protectorate, several Huaorani clans had drifted back to the Auca, and violent confrontations with the colonists were common. In Coca Enqueri had heard that a Huao had been killed near the Shiripuno River, and when we arrived at the bridge, two dozen colonists and a handful of Huaorani were waging a heated argument in the middle of the road, their anger held in check

only tenuously by a gang of nervous soldiers too preoccupied to notice me. Nobody was dead, but shots had been fired and houses burned. Enqueri defused the situation by giving the Huaorani much of the food and gas we were carrying and sending them downriver, but he said that it was only a temporary solution at best.

A little farther down the road he showed me an exploration camp that had been operated by Unocal from 1989 until 1991. When the camp was abandoned a Huaorani clan tore it apart, to prevent it from being taken over by the military, and then built huts on top of the old cement foundations. Anything the Huaorani hadn't destroyed they put to use. In one hut a wood fire burned on a linoleum floor, and the head of a wild pig had been strung on an electric cord to smoke. In another, masticated manioc fermented in a stainless-steel sink. In several homes sheets of heavy plastic had been fashioned into hammocks, and drinking water was stored in old gasoline cans. At the last home we visited I found a shelf full of drugs: erythromycin, codeine, penicillin, and half a dozen others. Next to them lay a dirt-encrusted spoon. The man of the house said that the Company had given him the medicine, and that his family took it for coughs.

"Which one do you take for coughs?" I asked.

"They are all the same," he said.

Beyond the camp the Vía Auca died into a small, muddy track that led to an exploration well operated by Petro-Canada in 1989 and 1990. Within weeks after the well was opened, three Huaorani clans occupied the site to compete for looting rights. One was led by Babae, whose father and grandfather had hunted the area tamed by the Vía Auca. The Company convinced Babae's clan to leave the well by building twelve small shacks for them on the Vía Auca. After they settled in they held a celebration feast. No other Huaorani came, but the Company did, and so did the missionaries and the military, and Babae drank his first hard liquor. Before long he was in a mission-run detox program, and the clan women were working the oil camps as prostitutes, and many Huaorani were sick with *cowode* disease. The next year the colonists who had been thrown off the land so the shacks could be built returned and burned them.

To keep Babae happy the Company built him a new house. Enqueri took me there. Babae was sitting on the front step, sipping a bottle

of rum. Deep chested and broad shouldered, he radiated enormous physical strength. He was said to have a violent temper, one that inspired fear all along the *Via Auca*, among Huaorani and colonists alike. Fortunately, Enqueri had brought fishhooks and rice, and at these Babae grinned hugely, flashing a mouthful of gleaming teeth—Company dentures.

Babae was proud of his new house, though it was built of planks rather than the traditional thatch, and had no windows, and was dark as a cave, and felt hot enough to bake bread. One room had a foam mattress, gnawed to shreds by rats. This, Babae said, was where tourists would stay. The family cooked in the next room, on a pile of sand that had been poured onto the wood floor, and slept in the third, which was carpeted wall to wall with Company flotsam: candy wrappers, discarded tuna tins, spent shotgun shells, a couple of car tires, a broken radio, several empty rum bottles and cigarette cartons, an empty fuel can, old magazines and newspapers. Babae pointed out the light fixtures and wall sockets. Of course, the house had no electricity. The Company, he said, had given him a generator, but someone had come in the night and stolen it.

We did not stay long. Enqueri said you never knew when Babae might explode. We left him sitting on his front step with an arm wrapped around the shoulders of his son, who looked even more powerful than his father until he stood up and exposed his withered left leg, crippled by polio.

ENQUERI AND I headed for the Shiripuno River, where ONHAE kept a funky canoe. Carved from a single tree trunk, it was about twenty feet long and two feet wide and patched with bits of tin, cloth, leather, and, directly beneath me amidships, a one-liter plastic Coke bottle butterflyed and flattened and nailed over a long crack in the floor.

The green Shiripuno slips slowly east into the silt-brown Cononaco, which in turn slips into the Curaray somewhere near the Peruvian border. On even the best maps of South America this hundred-mile watershed is blank. Running with the current through a forest that grows ever richer, with parrots, turtles, caimans, monkeys, herons, the

occasional harpy eagle, and, if one is lucky, the golden flash of a jaguar, a canoe takes three days to reach the clearing where Quemper and his clan have settled. It is about as far as one can travel in the known Huaorani world, and you must skirt the northern boundary of the territory hunted by the Tagaeri, the clan that killed Alejandro Labaca. Occasionally there were rumors of a Tagaeri sighting, and though there had been no documented contact with them, it was widely believed that they watched everything that happened on the Cononaco.

Farther downriver, in the sixty or so miles between Quemper's clan and the Peruvian border, there were said to be three more clans. In 1992 a Company seismic crew were the first to spot a group thought to be the Taromenga. ONHAE maintained that the confrontation was violent, but the Company denied this, and in any case the Taromenga were not seen again. The other groups, the Oñamenane and the Huifiatere, had never been reached; their existence was suggested only through the stories of the Huaorani elders.

Along the river Huaorani appeared out of the forest in twos and threes, bearing children, shotguns, and pots of banana juice, and after a momentary pause to twist my chest hairs or paw the stubble on my chin, and another moment to hiccup with laughter, they clambered aboard our canoe. Though it was soon filled beyond capacity, no one was refused. With earsplitting shotgun blasts a long-eared old man riding in the bow killed a paca, a couple of woolly monkeys, and several turkeys. Throughout each of these messy affairs—the game was hauled in and cleaned, and blood coursed thickly through the canoe and coated my bare feet—the other Huaorani roared so enthusiastically with advice and approval that they nearly tipped the boat over.

Enqueri released the tiller only once all day. He laced his hands on top of his head. "When a Huao sees a girl he likes," he said, "he drops one hand, like this. That means, meet me over there." Or he might point discreetly with a forefinger. "And if you think a woman wants to make love with you, you wink your right eye to say yes and your left eye to say no." He winked his left eye. "But Enqueri can't close his right eye!" he said. He tried, grimacing with effort; his lid stuck like a jammed window shade. "See? It doesn't work. So Enqueri has a hard time getting women!"

At this he laughed so hard he doubled over. The canoe ran up on

a submerged boulder, and, with a sound like a gunshot, a crack five feet long opened in the floor. Water raced into the boat. Howling wildly, women reached under their skirts and ripped off their underwear and men pulled small rocks from the river. They stuffed them into the void, then bailed and kept going. Soon the stories started—the Huaorani would be telling this one for days.

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TO MY EYE the only sign that we had reached Quemperi's settlement was the sudden appearance of a long, silent line of Huaorani standing in a clearing on the right-hand side of a broad bend in the Cononaco River. There might have been thirty of them. Some held spears; some were naked. They neither waved nor spoke; they simply stared. They stood atop a bank about fifteen feet high, but it felt as if they were studying us from a much greater height.

After Enqueri and I climbed up through the mud, a short, port-bellied old man with a single tooth in the middle of his upper gum walked over to me, indicated that I should open my mouth, then tapped my teeth one by one. He said something in Huaorani, and a roar of laughter went up.

"Quemperi says welcome," Enqueri said. "He wants to know if you will give him your teeth."

At a nod from Quemperi a gaggle of small boys slid down the bank and began hauling up our gear, which they deposited at the shaded edge of an otherwise barren, sun-broiled stretch of open ground a few yards from the river—an airstrip, or *pista*, as it was known. For years Quemperi and his clan had roamed widely between the Cononaco River and the Yasuní, to the north, changing homesites every few months, alternating among half a dozen manioc gardens. About 1991, however, they settled more or less permanently around the *pista*, which the Company built during the seismic testing of the region and then abandoned. The *pista* was intended to be temporary, but the Huaorani were fastidious about keeping it free of brush. It was the only significant

"Of course," he said. "We will take the bus to a place where we can cross the Napo and walk into the forest."

"When will you leave?"

"Tonight or tomorrow morning."

"That is a good idea."

"And when will you come to Toñampare?"

"I do not know," I said. "In a few months, if I can get inside the territory somehow. First I must go to the United States of North America. My wife is going to have a baby."

"It would please me very much if you would come to visit my home."

"I would enjoy that. Thank you."

He handed me a sheaf of papers—his census, which documented 141 Huaorani living in or around Block Sixteen, roughly 10 percent of the total Huaorani population. He asked me to hold on to it and make copies and bring the original back to him when I came to Toñampare. "This will show the People that I am working hard for them," he said. He said to tell the whole world that the Huaorani lived well and that many Huaorani lived where the Company said they did not and that the Company must not go there. Then he said, "It was a good trip. And you thought you were going to die!"

"Yes."

"But the Condor knows the forest!"

"Yes, he does!"

Then we laughed—*ha-ha-ha-ha-ha*—and as I watched his bony shoulders shaking up and down I thought, again, that I liked him very much and trusted him very little. Yet here we were, alive, in Coca, which for at least one long night I had believed would never come to pass.

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AFTER I said good night to Enqueri I sat on the patio and drank a bottle of beer and then I took my first shower in a month. I stood under the cold water and tried not to begin to sort or interpret what I had seen but I was in a dark and exhausted mood and the questions arose on their own, like bones spit up by a swamp. In the morning I went back to the Capuchin mission to talk to José Miguel Goldáraz.

José Miguel led me to a cement bench in a cool courtyard one high fence and a stone's throw from the Huaorani Hotel. He brought two cups of coffee. He is tall and lean, and he wore a beret, a cotton T-shirt, khaki pants that were frayed at the edges, and cheap tennis shoes. He had been in the Oriente for more than twenty years—or close to half his adult life—and he no longer returned to Spain for his vacations, preferring instead to walk in the mountains above Coca. José Miguel had accompanied Alejandro Labaca on many of his exploratory visits into the Huaorani lands. He still had the seventeen spears that were taken from Labaca's body. And he had traveled a long way down a risky path that Labaca had only begun to explore: Eschewing religious conversion for political activism, he had become a quiet but tireless, and often solitary, advocate of those, colonists and Indians alike, who suffered most from the consequences of oil development.

DuPont's Edgar Woolard had yet to decide whether he would allow Conoco to proceed with developing Block Sixteen, and the meeting held at the Capuchin mission the day before had been another bid by Conoco to win the stamp of approval Woolard required. I asked José

Miguel how the meeting had turned out. After a moment or two, he said, "How much of the story do you know?"

I knew enough to know that the future of the Huaorani hung in the balance. I knew this:

In 1967 Texaco discovered commercial oil in the Oriente. In 1972 it completed a 312-mile pipeline from the Oriente to Ecuador's Pacific coast. During the next seventeen years—until Petroecuador assumed operational control of the pipeline—the Texaco consortium shipped 1.4 billion barrels of oil over the Andes and accounted for 88 percent of the oil taken from the Oriente. Ecuador had no environmental regulations for oil production, and almost no attempt was made to assess its environmental impact until 1989, when an American named Judith Kimerling came to the country and began to stick her nose into things. Traveling by foot, canoe, and truck, sleeping in the homes of Indians and colonists, she visited producing wells, exploratory sites, seismic trails. She combed government reports. A former environmental litigator in the office of the New York State attorney general, she learned that the Texaco pipeline had ruptured at least twenty-seven times, spilling 16.8 million gallons of raw crude (the Exxon Valdez spilled 10.8 million off the coast of Alaska), most of it into the Oriente's delicate web of rivers, creeks, and lagoons. Little of it had been cleaned up, and the pipeline was all but worn out and rupturing with increasing frequency. She calculated that the petroleum industry was spilling an additional 10,000 gallons of oil from secondary flow lines every week and dumping 4-3 million gallons of untreated toxic waste directly into the watershed every day. Malnutrition rates near oil-producing areas were as high as 98 percent. Health workers reported exceptionally high rates of spontaneous abortion, neurological disorders, birth defects, and other problems linked to contaminants and predicted an epidemic of cancer.

After Kimerling wrote up her initial findings (they eventually appeared as a book entitled *Amazon Crude*), Petroecuador tried to have her deported. It was dissuaded by the American embassy, which argued that making an international incident of Kimerling's investigation would draw further attention to it, but the military arrested her, in Coca. She was released only when José Miguel Goldáraz and the local Quichua federation intervened on her behalf.

I had met Kimerling in Coca. She is a compact, intense woman

with wide, green eyes, thick, curly, black hair, and a voice that carries hints of her native Alabama. She had set up a pilot legal-aid program in several Indian communities, and she was teaching the residents how to document contamination for a lawsuit against Texaco. She had received so many threats that she no longer traveled in the Oriente without an escort. She had also spent weeks bedridden with shigellosis, a rare bacteriological infection she picked up in the field, and funding for her work was so scarce that she often lived hand to mouth in one of the poorest countries in the hemisphere. But she said that she had suffered most at the hands of two men she once considered her allies—Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., a staff attorney for the Natural Resources Defense Council, and S. Jacob Scherr, the director of the organization's international program.

In July of 1990, Kennedy and Scherr had asked Kimerling to show them the Oriente, which neither man had ever seen. She took them on a five-day tour. They canoed through an oil spill in the Cuyabeno Wildlife Reserve and helicoptered over Yasuní National Park. Moved and impressed, Kennedy and Scherr hired Kimerling to work in their organization's Manhattan headquarters, and that October they announced that they intended to pressure Texaco for \$50 million to start a cleanup fund for the Oriente. At the same time they wrote to Edgar Woolard to condemn Conoco's plans. Though Conoco would be the first company ever to produce oil inside the titled Huaorani homeland, it represented something even larger: Beneath the virgin rain forest inhabited by the Huaorani Conoco had discovered substantial deposits of heavy crude, the production of which had only recently been made profitable by technical advances, and which the Oriente has in abundance. The Ecuadorian government was counting on Conoco to launch "the era of heavy crude," for which it predicted \$3 billion in foreign investment through the end of the century and tens of billions more in revenues. Conoco, in other words, was the key to opening up huge tracts of the Oriente to oil exploitation.

The NRDC was by no means alone in its opposition to Conoco. Because Conoco's concessions fell within Yasuní National Park, the Sierra Club and its Ecuadorian partner, a nonprofit law firm called La Corporación de Defensa de la Vida, had promised DuPont a "brawl." The Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund (which is not part of the Sierra

Club) had petitioned the OAS on behalf of the Huaorani. CONFENIAE, the Amazonian Indian confederation, was demanding a ten-year moratorium on oil development, and in a groundbreaking alliance with the Indians, Ecuador's Latin environmentalists had endorsed the moratorium, driving their point home with a three-day occupation of Conoco's offices in Quito, the nation's capital. At least two dozen groups in the United States and Europe sympathized with or formally supported the moratorium. By late 1990 Woolard was facing serious talk of an international boycott against DuPont.

When the NRDC entered the battle, Conoco requested a meeting. It took place in the NRDC's Manhattan office in November 1990. In an abrupt about-face, Kennedy and Scherr left the meeting convinced that forcing Conoco out of the Oriente would be a mistake—that Conoco would do a cleaner job than the companies that would move in if Conoco pulled out—and they scheduled a second meeting with the company to explore a settlement that would allow it to proceed. Kim-erling was aghast: "If a deal was going to be made, that decision had to be made in Ecuador." She was fired, and the NRDC withheld some \$8,000 in severance pay in an attempt to force her to sign an agreement not to publicly criticize Kennedy and Scherr. She refused.

Kennedy and Scherr met again with Conoco, in New York in February 1991, under a veil of confidentiality. Conoco told them that without the NRDC's endorsement it stood a less than even chance of being able to proceed with development. Kennedy and Scherr proposed that Conoco fund a nonprofit foundation for the Oriente, with the NRDC allowed to nominate representatives to the board of trustees. They gave Conoco a strategic analysis of how groups involved in the region would react to the deal—they said, for example, that neither The Nature Conservancy nor the World Wildlife Fund would pose a problem, and that the deal would compromise the Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund's petition before the OAS. Conoco offered to put up \$10 million.

In March, Kennedy and Scherr returned to Ecuador to pitch the deal to Valerio Grefa and Angel Zamarenda, the newly elected president and vice president, respectively, of CONFENIAE, the umbrella under which the political leaders of the Oriente's eight indigenous nations come together. Grefa is a Quichua and Zamarenda a Shuar.

The Quichua and the Shuar are the Oriente's largest nations, and its most acculturated politically and economically, and they had controlled CONFENIAE since its founding, in 1980. In the past they had done so with a spirit of inclusion—in fact, CONFENIAE had helped the Huaorani gain official title to part of their traditional territory, and it had been instrumental in the founding of ONHAE.

But Grefa and Zamarenda had been in office less than two months when Kennedy and Scherr arrived, and the two Americans did not understand the change their election represented. Grefa, known in the Amazon as El Vaselino, had ruthlessly set about rekindling the centuries-old enmity between the Huaorani and the larger nations. (Among other things, he was involved in a controversial deal in which his family land in Coca was sold to become offices for a company that was exploring the Huaorani territory for oil.) The Shuar, meanwhile, were moving more aggressively than anyone else to take land from the Huaorani—a quest the Conoco road could only enhance. Grefa and Zamarenda were more than willing to go along with what was, in essence, the sale of the Huaorani homeland. The only real question was the price: They wanted not \$10 million but \$211 million, or about a dollar a barrel for all the oil in Block Sixteen.

Kennedy and Scherr flew home and relayed the counteroffer to Conoco. About then, however, confidential notes of their second meeting with Conoco were leaked to every nonprofit group in the world with an interest in the Oriente, and they found themselves under wide attack. People who had devoted years to saving the Oriente felt betrayed by those they had considered their own. "Robert Kennedy and Jacob Scherr are what we call environmental imperialists," Esperanza Martínez, at that time the coordinator of a coalition of thirteen Ecuadorian environmental groups, had told me in Quito. "They came to Ecuador for five days, and then they went home and sat down with an oil company and decided they knew what was best for us. What on earth gave them that right?"

The Ecuadorians were outraged at what they saw as a double standard—if the NRDC was opposed to oil drilling in national parks in the United States, why was it willing to promote such activity in Latin America?—and by what they saw as the callous way Kennedy and Scherr had quashed the fledgling alliance then developing between

Ecuador's urban environmentalists and Amazonian Indians. The alliance had produced only one major piece of work, a joint letter to the World Bank opposing a proposed \$100 million oil-development loan to Ecuador. But given the enormous cultural gulf that has always existed between Latins and Indians in Ecuador, the letter represented an important step forward. Alone, neither group had the power to influence the Company, but combined they were a force that had to be reckoned with—a fact underscored when the World Bank subsequently shelved the loan. However, when Kennedy and Scherr showed up and put millions of dollars on the table, the Indians and the Latins found themselves divided by old feelings of suspicion and mistrust, and the alliance disintegrated.

Meanwhile, seemingly out of nowhere, the mysterious Huaorani letter surfaced in San Francisco. Suddenly, Conoco wasn't sure who spoke for the Huaorani. It went directly to Valerio Grefa and Angel Zamarenda: What if Conoco were to accept their counterproposal? Would the Huaorani go along with the deal?

The meeting in Coca was arranged. Valerio Grefa vowed that if Nanto and Moi blocked the deal, he would destroy ONHAE and start his own Huaorani organization.

"I BELIEVE the Huaorani said no," José Miguel said when I asked him about the meeting. "I am not sure what the Company heard." He smiled—a small smile. Were the Rio Napo Foundation to become a reality, he said, it would make it easier for the Company to develop the Huaorani territory, and the Huaorani would almost surely receive nothing of value from it. The American "politicians" who had come up with the deal did not understand the Oriente. But it was not accurate to say simply that CONFENIAE was corrupt—one had to consider the enormity of the temptations facing its leaders.

That led me to a harder question, one I had found myself struggling with more and more of late. What right did the Huaorani have to be protected from change?

José Miguel sipped his coffee and thought for a while before he answered. "The forest is relentless," he said. "It shows no mercy. When the Huaorani deviate from the rules they have developed over time,

they perish. But on your travels, did you observe their joy? They are joyful in a way that is complete and without self-consciousness. You and I are condemned to live our joy knowing in each moment of that joy that it must end, but in the moment when the Huaorani experience joy it lasts forever."

Again he was silent. Then he said, "Change is inevitable. The Huaorani cannot avoid change. The real question is, on what terms will change occur? The right the Huaorani have—a basic moral right that all people have—is to be allowed to evolve their own cultural tools for dealing with change, rather than having that change imposed upon them."

He said, too, that he thought violence probable when the Conoco road went in. "You see it already on the Via Auca, and the Huaorani who live around Block Sixteen are much more traditional—they are much more likely to kill."

He had a question for me. "When the Huaorani kill, there is a spiritual discipline to it," he said. "Americans kill without knowing they are doing it. You don't want to know you are doing it. And yet you are going to destroy an entire way of life. So you tell me: Who are the savages?"

THAT AFTERNOON I found Enqueri walking the streets of Coca. He had spent every cent I paid him. I took him to the bus station and bought tickets for him, Awa, Quimonca, and Yohue, and then I bought him some food for the trip and gave him a bit more cash and walked him back to the Huaorani Hotel.

"José, come back soon!" he called out as I left. I promised I would.

NOW AND THEN on the flight to California I awoke startled and sweating, and when I got home I had violent dreams. I immersed myself in elemental tasks—gardening and carpentry—and for two and three days at a stretch I did not leave the house except to take solitary walks in the rain. I had been in South America for three months, and I needed time to adjust, but it was more than that. In a world of television and freeways, I needed to feel soil, wood, water. Direct experience is the

fabric of Huaorani life, and I sought it out as if it were the only way to remain connected to what I had seen.

A month after I got home Conoco announced that it was pulling out of the Oriente. It would concentrate its energies about as far from the Amazon as it could get—the oil fields of Siberia—and it would sell its share of the Block Sixteen consortium to one of its partners, Dallas-based Maxus Energy, about whom this much was generally known: Back when it had been called the Diamond Shamrock Corporation, it had been one of the two principal producers of Agent Orange, and it had dumped so much dioxin into New Jersey's Passaic River that in 1983 it was forced to undertake one of the most expensive cleanups in the history of the state, if not the nation. The cleanup was so big, in fact, that it was still going on eight years later, even as Maxus rolled up its sleeves and headed for Huaorani territory.

I went to New York to speak with Robert Kennedy about the Conoco-NRDC deal. We met at his office at Pace University. He has piercing blue eyes, and though taller and leaner, he looks very much his father's son. He was dividing his time between directing an environmental-law clinic at Pace and working for the NRDC, at which, after his felony conviction for heroin possession, in 1984, he was sentenced to serve two years of "community service." The NRDC is one of the wealthiest environmental groups in the country, with a core of Ivy League lawyers and scientists who operate at the highest levels of governmental and corporate power, and Kennedy went on to become a fund-raiser and staff attorney. It was a desire to do something "substantive," he said, that had drawn him to the Oriente.

"Do you know what [\$10 million] would mean down there?" Kennedy asked me. "We saw a hospital in the Oriente that was operating on a budget of three thousand dollars a year. If you had that kind of money, and you had it in a framework where the Indians couldn't steal it, which has happened in the past, you could make a vast difference. And you would have a model. The Indians could then go to any oil company that came into the Oriente and say, 'You have to match this.' They'd be getting a way to ratchet themselves into the corridors of power. They'd be able to stand up to the military, and the government would have no choice but to deal with them. Conoco was the ideal place to start that process."

He was befuddled, if not shocked, when the deal fell apart. He blamed American environmentalists. He had been impressed by the commitment of Valerio Grefa and, even more so, of Angel Zamarenda, who struck him as "no nonsense, no bullshit, very aggressive." Kennedy seemed surprised when I described the conflict between the Huaorani and the two larger nations, but he shrugged off the suggestion that the Rio Napo Foundation would have been a sellout of the Huaorani, and that it was stopped not so much by environmentalists as by the Huaorani themselves. "I have no idea what happened, or what the internal politics were," he said. "Who are the Huaorani?" In retrospect, he had concluded that there was "almost an anthropological question" of whether the Indians of the Oriente "have the capacity to negotiate." They were, he said, "essentially inept at government." He wouldn't say why Judith Kimerling had been fired but insisted that it had nothing to do with her opposition to making a deal with Conoco. There was one thing he would do differently: "Make sure that at that meeting we had with Conoco nobody was taking notes."

What, he asked, would I have done in his place?

I said that I really didn't know. I felt that so long as oil companies dominated the Oriente, groups such as the NRDC had a legitimate, even obligatory, role to play there. But the Oriente was a political snake pit—there were a hundred ways to make mistakes, and if you figured out fifty of them, you were a genius. There were no simple solutions, and no substitutes for spending real time on the ground. And I believed that before you sat down with an oil company to negotiate a deal for Huaorani land, you should, at the least, get to know the Huaorani.

While I was home I talked to quite a few people who had taken up the cause of the Huaorani, or their land. But none of them had a relationship with the Huaorani that was anything more than tangential, because working with the Huaorani was a high-risk, low-reward proposition: Travel to the territory was expensive, dangerous, and time-consuming (and, often, illegal); communication was nearly impossible; the cultural gulf was enormous; the Company was all-powerful; and the Huaorani themselves were utterly unpredictable. So it seemed inevitable when, in the wake of victory, the international coalition of environmental and human-rights groups that had stared down mighty DuPont collapsed, worn out by betrayal, meager resources, the enormity of the

challenge. Though people continued to discuss the Huaorani, little of substance was being done.

If there was any consolation to be found, it was that the Huaorani didn't miss such support—they hadn't known it existed. As they saw it, they had never been conquered and never would be, because they were "the bravest people in the Amazon."

PART TWO

West