

found in translation

AN ALTERED HEARTS NOVEL

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All scripture quotations are taken from the Reina-Valera translation of the Bible, 1909 edition.

Song lyrics for “When God’s People Come Together,” p. 143, and “Wherever There Is Need,” p. 144 written by Roger Bruner. Used by permission.

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by Roger E. Bruner
with Kristi Rae Bruner





Foreword

During my junior and senior years of high school, I participated in weekend seminars to strengthen my walk with Christ and my evangelistic skills. Two of my favorites were Dare to Share and Acquire the Fire, both of which were connected with Global Expeditions.

The seminars I attended featured Global Expeditions' trips. Hearing the stories and seeing the pictures of all the people who were very much in need of help and evangelism touched my heart. I desperately wanted to go to another part of the world and become involved in any way I possibly could.

I requested information on an upcoming trip where volunteers would build houses for people in a Mexican village and evangelize as much as possible. I ended up taking this trip when I was eighteen, after my senior year of high school. It required a lot of preparation work; I had to take time off from my job, complete a lot of forms, and even get a passport.

The trip lasted seven days, and the participants were a combination of Global Expeditions staff, church youth, young adult groups, and individuals like me. Once everyone arrived, we had orientation and received our group assignments. The twenty-to twenty-five groups consisted of about fifteen people each.

Although I was aware we would be doing construction work, I'd been under the mistaken impression that we would stay in housing—complete with roofs and electricity. So while preparing for the trip, I made sure to pack my hair dryer and flatiron, makeup, a CD player/radio, my cell phone charger, and several changes of nice clothes for group Bible study. I even paid extra money at the airport because my luggage was well over the weight limit.

I flew to San Diego, and then we drove in groups on buses to the area we used as our camp. Camp consisted of a large

building (we used that as our meeting area); two different clearings with tents (one for the boys and one for the girls); a kitchen and eating area; and two areas with outhouses and shower stalls.

When I saw the tents we were to sleep in, I was very upset. All of that money spent and trouble getting everything to fit in my suitcase, and it was useless there. All I'd really needed to bring was a sleeping bag and pillow and grungy work clothes. Because of my error in judgment—I failed to take part of the instructions seriously—I ended up sleeping on a blanket and wearing my good clothes for construction. I was definitely out of my comfort zone.

Each day, during the morning hours, we worked on the houses. Although we didn't have a translator, some of the volunteers knew minimal Spanish and were able to communicate with the villagers. In the afternoons we walked around different parts of the town and shared the gospel. Each of our groups had a translator during that time.

While talking to the villagers, we discovered that some people had heard of God and were God-fearing, but they didn't seem to have a personal relationship with Christ. We shared the gospel with them and frequently used the Roman Road. We also gave Spanish Bibles to the villagers.

After the trip was over, I told my parents all about my experiences. They heard about the people I met, the trials of learning to do construction work, and the joys of helping those less fortunate, and they saw how the trip changed my life.

So my dad decided to write a short story about a girl who goes on a mission trip to Mexico and has her worldview changed. That short story turned into an even better novel. (I'd say that even if my dad hadn't been the one to write it.)

I hope you enjoy *Found in Translation*. . .and I pray that it changes your life.

Kristi Rae Bruner

chapter one

Day 1

What do you mean I missed my connecting flight?" Never had I raised my voice to my parents—or to any other adult, for that matter—but I couldn't have screamed much louder at that forty-something Skyfly Airline representative if I'd tried. She may have been joking, but I didn't feel like laughing. I couldn't have missed my flight.

"The plane was here and ready to leave at 1:19. Your baggage was aboard, but you weren't." Although her voice remained calm, she resembled a flashing danger signal and siren that screamed from head to toe, "Kim Hartlinger, it's not my fault you're the most irresponsible eighteen-year-old I've ever met!"

"So," she said, "your flight left without you. We paged you a number of times first, but you never responded."

"Is that what those announcements were?" Curiosity and defensiveness made me forget my initial irritation. I was too naive to know how concerned I should have been. "I heard somebody paging a Kimmy Somebody-or-Other, but nobody calls me Kimmy—and nobody ever will. If that guy said Hartlinger, I misunderstood him. His accent was thick, like a TWI—talking while intoxicated—or maybe like someone who isn't a native English speaker. Don't tell me announcements like that are made somewhere offshore."

Telephone support for our home computer was, and I hated calling there for that very reason.

Oblivious to everything I'd just said, Millie Q.—I'd glanced at her name tag a moment before—had the nerve to smile,

revealing an excess of leathery wrinkles that wood filler would have smoothed out better than her rainbow of cheap and ill-applied makeup.

I could also see a mouthful of teeth that needed braces so badly I was tempted to refer her to my orthodontist. I doubted, however, that she could handle the commute from the Dallas/Fort Worth Airport to Georgia on a regular basis, even for something as important as making those fangs look friendlier.

Besides, I wasn't in a mood to do her any favors. If she was teasing about missing my flight, her humor was sick and her attitude the ultimate in unprofessional. If she was serious—I was battling hard to reject the niggling possibility that she was—I needed to consider my alternatives. Normally, Scarlett O'Hara and I could put our worries on hold until tomorrow; but I had to reach San Diego early enough today to join the mission team to Mexico or turn around and go home again.

I could have panicked then, but I didn't. Missing my flight would be a minor nuisance comparable to short periods of bumpiness due to mild turbulence. It couldn't be a real problem like a major blizzard closing the San Diego airport in mid-July and preventing the plane from landing.

Although I'd never been on a plane before today, I imagined flying must be pretty much like traveling by city bus. Miss a flight, especially at a large airport like DFW, and another one headed for the same destination will come along any minute.

No worries. I'd be on a plane to San Diego soon enough.

Millie Q. hadn't finished getting her digs in, though.

"They spent fifteen minutes wrestling your luggage off the plane, making that flight late leaving. Very late. One of the baggage handlers ended up in the emergency room with two broken toes after dropping one of your bags on his foot. What do you have in there—bricks?"

She couldn't fool me with her story about the baggage handler, although I couldn't deny that my luggage was heavy. Excessively so.

I didn't regret having to pay seventy-five dollars for the overweight extra suitcases, though. I needed everything I'd packed: a professional-quality hair dryer; enough matching shoes and purses to have a fresh look every day; a treasure chest of my best cosmetics and toiletries; enough clothes to wear separate day and night outfits for the next fourteen days; a steam iron and travel-sized ironing board; and a small, high-power portable karaoke system with dozens of accompaniment CDs and tons of extra D-cell batteries.

Oh, and I'd packed a thick Spanish-English Bible I hadn't taken out of the box yet. I didn't bother bringing a Spanish dictionary, though. After all, we would have translators; and I wouldn't need to communicate with the Mexican natives without one. Besides, I'd studied too much French in high school to feel like learning any Spanish now that I'd graduated.

"Kim," Millie Q. said, resuming what seemed like her current favorite activity—picking on me, "if you'd been here at boarding time, you would be in the air now. You and every one of your bricks." She grinned.

I cringed at seeing those teeth again. *Doesn't Skyfly care about the appearance of your mouth?* Then I smirked without intending to. *Your mouth reflects badly on Skyfly in more ways than one, lady.*

Then I realized what she'd said.

"At boarding time? Look at my watch!" I stuck my left wrist in front of her eyes, unaware that the time display was upside down. "You see that, Millie? It's only 1:00 p.m., and my plane isn't supposed to leave until 1:23." I glanced outside where the plane should have been. "What have you done with my plane?"

Although I'd once seen a magician on TV make an airliner disappear, Millie couldn't shrink my concerns by a single millimeter.

"There's your problem." I heard the implied "you dodo" as she pointed to my wrist. "Your watch is wrong. It's 2:00 p.m. now—actually 2:04. We started talking at 2:01." She failed to suppress a smirk as she pointed to the huge digital clock on the wall behind her without turning to face it.

The next Vanna White? No way.

"I, uh. . ."

No matter how poorly Millie and I had communicated so far, I couldn't argue with the facts, and they all agreed that my time didn't match DFW's. I had too much intelligence to question which one was wrong.

But why weren't they the same?

"Didn't you set your watch to local time when the pilot from Atlanta announced it?"

She didn't grin like the Cheshire cat in *Alice in Wonderland*, but like a demented rat. I might have reacted less defensively if she'd asked a helpful, friendly "Did you. . . ?" instead of what assailed my ears as a nasty, accusatory "Didn't you. . . ?"

"Of course I did!"

I remembered setting my watch. I'd stopped freshening my makeup to do it. I was a hesitant first-time flyer, but I knew having the right time was imperative. Mom and Dad would have been proud of me. No carelessness on my part today. No, sir.

But—oh, no!—I forgot I was wearing a different watch now. When I spilled my makeup on the floor of the plane, I lost the watch I'd just reset and was now wearing the totally inelegant replacement I bought at one of the airport gift shops. Since the new watch was already running after I fought my

way into the plastic packaging—it was too cheap to merit a box—I assumed the factory had set it to the correct time.

Duh. The correct time at the North Pole, maybe. So much for “no carelessness” today.

Imagining Mom and Dad shaking their heads as if they’d predicted a disaster like this was bad enough. Just this morning before leaving home, Dad said, “I wonder if the airlines are up to our well-intentioned Kimberly.” He barely cracked a smile when he added, “Do you suppose Mexico has special insurance to cover Kimber-quakes?”

He’d been teasing—or so I’d convinced myself at the time. I wasn’t so sure now. Either way, I wasn’t going to admit any more of my carelessness to Millie Q. than I had to.

“I bought a new watch,” I said, as if that explained everything.

“I assumed that.” Millie reached across the counter and peeled off a sticker I’d overlooked.

“They failed to set the time correctly at the factory.” There. I’d told her my version of the complete truth.

I wished she would stop laughing so hard, though. I was going to have to compromise if I wanted her to help me. “I guess I should have checked the time on an airport clock, huh?”

She nodded, tears of laughter overflowing the dam of her raccoon-look, black eye makeup and giving her face a mildly water-colored streak.

I guess I should have prayed then, but swearing came more naturally under the circumstances.

I couldn’t yield to the urge to curse, though. I was desperate to break that habit. If I didn’t succeed now, I’d chance being sent home early from the mission trip. Swallowing my favorite four-letter words to keep from saying them aloud was like trying to eat dry, crumbly cheese without a nice mug of diet root beer to wash it down.

“Millie, will you please get me on the next available flight?” I smiled at her as if we’d become best friends. That was tougher than forcing back swear words. “Just book me on a plane that’s a lot faster than the one I missed so I can still arrive in San Diego at the original time. Okay?”

Her laughter broke the cosmetic dam that time, leaving her face looking like a little kid had finger painted a hodgepodge of abstract art all over it. I had to keep my eyes focused on hers so I wouldn’t crack up laughing back.

I didn’t want her to think I was laughing with her.

“Kim, you’ve never flown before, have you?” She didn’t wait for me to shake my head no. “You’d need to rent the space shuttle to reach San Diego that fast. Or maybe ask Scotty to beam you there.”

She cackled. I didn’t.

Stranded on Gilligan’s Island in the middle of a busy international airport, I was starting to despair of Millie Q, even wanting me to get to San Diego on time. More likely, though, she enjoyed torturing me so much she would keep it up as long as she could.

I kept waiting desperately for Mom’s voice to say, “Wake up, Kim. We need to leave for the airport in thirty minutes.”

But—alas!—I was already wide awake.

Miss Congeniality started clack-clack-clacking away on her computer keyboard without saying anything else. I couldn’t tell if she was doing something to help or just ignoring me. Whatever else, she succeeded at annoying me big-time.

*Lord, if she doesn't help me now, You will, won't You?
After all, this mission project is Yours, and I know You plan
to bless my activities in a special way. Don't You have a moral
obligation to fix this mess and get me to San Diego in time for
orientation?*

Perhaps whining, cajoling, and trying to pin a guilt trip on God as if He'd landed me in this dilemma weren't the most mature things for a Christian to do; but I was starting to catch on that this situation far exceeded my ability to control, and that realization made me more than a little queasy.

When God didn't respond the instant I said amen, I looked at Millie Q. She was still clack-clack-clacking—can't you set that keyboard to silent mode!—doing who knows what.

My panic level began inching its way up, like the red column of mercury in an old-fashioned thermometer. But if I'd known what I was facing today—this problem was just one more installment in today's ongoing tragicomedy—I would have begun practicing my panicking months ago rather than my music.

Witnessing to the lost people of Ciudad de Plata—Silver City—with my singing, my testimony, and my modest Southern charm—I'd use that Spanish-English Bible if I needed to—would be the thrill of my young adulthood, especially when we won everyone in Silver City to Jesus in two weeks.

Well, almost everyone. They might not let us visit prisoners, and they might be afraid to let us convert high-ranking government officials.

Of course, I was also looking forward to chowing down on all the authentic Mexican tacos, chimichangas, and enchiladas I could and buying one of those sombreros that's bigger than me. That would look so cool at the community pool back home. Making people walk three feet around me would be a blast.

Although I'd been a professing Christian for just a couple of years, I'd grown up in a Christian home and been heavily involved in church activities almost since birth.

I believed God loves and cares about everyone equally.

“He loved Judas Iscariot as much as He loved Simon

Peter,” my parents used to tell me.

So every person in the world should have a chance to hear and respond to His Good News—even that toothy toad across the counter from me.

I hoped God didn’t expect me to witness to her, though. Playing Jonah to a Nineveh that welcomed me—that’s how I pictured Ciudad de Plata—was one thing, but I almost gagged at the thought of having to be Jonah to Millie Q.

Miss Congeniality’s nasal voice brought me out of my daze.

“The good news is we have five flights leaving for San Diego between now and midnight” – *Huh? What’s wrong with Skyfly? Only five flights in ten hours isn’t one every few minutes!*—“and the next flight hasn’t started boarding yet.”

I stared at her, unsure whether to get my hopes up. What was the . . . ?

“The bad news?” The expression on my face must have been as legible as handwriting. “That flight is completely full. The next one doesn’t have any available seats, either. Neither does the one after that or the one after that.” I was glad she didn’t say, “I’m sorry.” I wouldn’t have believed her.

Then she changed to an unbelievably cheery voice that would have sounded more convincing coming from an undertaker talking with a bereaved family. “But switching back to the good news channel. . .”

She glanced to her right and to her left as if expecting a drum roll from somewhere. I rolled my eyes impatiently, but I doubt that she saw me.

“The 10:19 red-eye has one seat left. It’s at the very back, but at least it’s inside the plane.” She paused as if expecting me to laugh. “Shall I book you on that one?”

“But the mission team buses will leave for Mexico without me. They’ll reach Ciudad de Plata before I leave Dallas/Fort Worth.”

“Oh, you’re going to Mexico? Your baggage is only checked through to San Diego, you know. Before you change planes there, you’ll have to pick up your luggage at the baggage claim area and recheck it. I hope you have plenty of time before the flight to your final destination. Of course, since flights leaving San Diego after 11:30 p.m. have to pay a hefty fine, practically no airlines fly out that late. So you’ll have to wait until tomorrow morning after 6:30 for a flight to Mexico, anyhow.”

I seldom cried—I could manipulate boys without having to—but the reality of my dilemma finally hit and hit hard. I was terrified, not just angry and frustrated. I couldn’t waste time and energy calming down, and Millie’s inattentiveness was making things worse—if that was possible.

She didn’t honestly believe she was helping me, did she? Like my dad sometimes, Millie Q. hadn’t listened closely enough to grasp the real problem, and she couldn’t have misunderstood the facts more perfectly if I’d been speaking a foreign language.

But worst of all, she was a grown woman. She should have been more like Mom than like Dad.

“That’s all well and good, Millie, but—as I just explained to you—we’re going to Mexico by bus, not plane, and the group I’m going with is not going to wait for me.”

I heard my voice rising again, and my favorite expletives began pawing the earth to see which one would break out of the starting gate first. I was cheering for the one that would tell the toad where to take an extended hot vacation.

No, Kim. Don’t even joke about something like that. Hell is for eternity, and your goal is to stop people from going there, not encourage them to.

Millie Q. hadn’t maxed out on thoughtlessness and insensitivity yet, though.

“So, Kim,” she said, just as oblivious to my dilemma as before, “do you want to take the 10:19 flight or not? There’s a hundred-dollar fee for changing your unchangeable reservation. We wouldn’t charge you if Skyfly had been responsible for your missed flight, but. . .”

She shook her head and shrugged. She didn’t need to say, “But we’re not responsible.”

“Do you have a hundred dollars, Kim?”

As if I could have gotten a refund on the manicure I had an hour ago while killing the time I didn’t know I didn’t have. Or on all the airport food I’d eaten in the past two hours.

“But I’m not changing reservations. I’m just” —*think hard, Kim!*— “I’m just using my reservation later than I’d intended to.”

I didn’t realize how featherbrained I must have sounded until I’d said it and heard Millie Q. start guffawing. Passersby were looking at us now—in amused amazement at Millie and in sympathy at me.

She’d be the hit of the break room today with my story. At least I had the satisfaction of knowing nobody would believe one bit of it.

I let an obscenity slip. In fact, I pushed it out. But it was the least offensive one I could think of.

I didn’t seem to have any choice about the 10:19 flight, although it meant using the Visa card Mom and Dad had given me for emergencies only—the same one I’d used for the manicure, which I hoped Mom and Dad would view as an emergency. I’d forgotten to have my nails done the day before.

I’d fly to San Diego tonight as if everything was okay and return home tomorrow. I’d explain to my parents that there’d been a problem with my flight—I’d try to avoid admitting that I was the problem—and, by the time I reached San Diego, the team had already left.

That plan sounded better than returning home today and

saying, “Guess what, Mom and Dad? I discovered the funniest thing after killing hours at DFW. Did you know cheapie-watch factories don’t set their products to the time zone they’ll be sold in?”

Like I could’ve expected Mom and Dad to make the three-to four-hour roundtrip to Atlanta twice today, anyhow.

Then something caught my eye.

Huh? You’re kidding me. You can’t possibly be a . . .

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