

Fronted adverbials

Relative clauses

Expanded noun phrases

Modal verbs

Parenthesis

JULIANE KOEPCKE

The girl who fell from the sky

(Peru, 1971)

As the fuselage began to disintegrate around her, Koepcke had been thrown clear of the airborne wreckage and then fell more than two miles down into the jungle below.

Despite the trauma of this experience, she realised at once what had happened. Looking up at the trees, she knew she had survived an air disaster, probably because her seat had broken the fall as she crashed through the dense foliage.

Unsurprisingly, the seventeen-year-old was in considerable pain and feeling dizzy. She had broken her collarbone, damaged a ligament in one knee, and sustained deep cuts and bruises as she hit the ground. Her left eye was also swollen shut, but she could still walk and knew she had to start finding a way to safety.

Koepcke had learned enough about the jungle from her parents to know it wasn't as dangerous as people like to think. Travelling on foot, it was important to keep a cool head and not do anything foolish, but she had no idea where she was, or where any of the other passengers had come down. She had also lost a shoe and her glasses, which complicated things as she was very short-sighted. Nor was she dressed for a jungle trek, with only a light cotton summer dress to protect her from the hordes of biting, stinging insects that were buzzing all around her.

The first thing to establish was if anyone else was nearby, especially her mother, but when Koepcke called out there was no response except the chatter of startled animals. Some time later, she was thrilled to hear an aircraft circling overhead. Presumably, the crew were looking for survivors, but since she

couldn't see the plane through the thick canopy of trees above her she quickly guessed they couldn't see her either. This realisation made her feel utterly alone.

For a while, the Koepckes had lived in a remote scientific research station in Pulcallpa and Hans-Wilhelm had taught his daughter some useful survival tips. For example, he told her that walking through shallow water can be safer than walking on land - snakes and other venomous creatures are hard to spot on the ground and may attack if anyone steps too near them. Koepcke also knew that jungle settlements tend to be built along rivers, so if she stayed near water she would stand a better chance of meeting someone and finding help.

Until this happened, however, her situation looked desperate. She had nothing to eat except a small bag of sweets in her pocket, and she had no idea how far she might have to walk to reach safety. Soon, dozens of insects were dropping onto her skin and climbing into her hair and, with the sun up, the rain forest was unbearably hot. It was also very wet because torrential storms like the one that had brought down the Electra continued on and off throughout the day.

Having failed to find signs of anyone nearby, Koepcke started to walk and, when she came to a small stream, she decided to follow it. It was lucky that there was plenty of water to drink, but the rainy season meant there was no ripe fruit on the trees and, from her parents' jungle training, she knew that eating anything else would be too risky (she couldn't risk being poisoned).

At nightfall, the temperature dropped dramatically and, with her sleeveless dress wet through, Koepcke felt terribly cold. She also felt lonely as well as frightened. Unable to sleep, she sat shivering as she listened to the startling sounds of the rainforest at night.

The following morning, she continued slowly along the course of the stream. It didn't take long before the little bag of sweets was empty and, when her watch stopped, she rapidly lost track of time.

After a couple of days, she heard the sound of a king vulture somewhere nearby. From her mother, Koepcke knew these huge carnivores tend to land only where there is lots of food around. Knowing they eat only dead animals, she had to consider the gruesome possibility that the bird was looking for bodies from the plane.

To her horror, her fears were proved correct shortly afterwards when she stumbled upon a bank of seats from the aircraft. It was partly buried in the

undergrowth and Koepcke could see three bodies still strapped in place. For a moment, she thought one of them might be her mother, but then she noticed nail varnish on the toes, which Maria never wore. In fact, Koepcke never did find any more survivors during her time in the jungle; she later learned that of the ninety-one people on board the Electra she was the only one left alive.

For several days, she continued her journey downstream, alternately walking and swimming. This made her progress very slow, and swimming led to serious burns from the sun beating down on her back and arms. Together with her other injuries, this caused her more and more pain, while a lack of sleep and the effort needed to keep moving only added to her exhaustion. She was also alarmed to find that the insect bites were becoming infected and that live maggots were now burrowing under her skin.