

Chapter 1

Someone Must Die

An Indian chief stood by a palm tree and watched the witch doctor, with a small bag over his arm, walk toward the hut by the big rock. As he walked, the witch doctor stuffed coca leaves into his mouth from the bag he carried. The chief saw him break off a thorn from a thorn bush. He raised his hand to his mouth. The chief felt sure it was not coca leaves the witch doctor had put into his mouth this time. Then the witch doctor stooped and picked up several stones. Once more his hand went to his mouth.

“Aha!” the chief said to himself, “there is something strange going on.”

Just then the chief heard quick footsteps coming up the path and the sound of laughter. He turned to see his little girl chasing a butterfly as she ran up from the river. The chief smiled as he watched her follow the butterfly to the thorn bush. For a moment the butterfly lit on a flower and then flew off. The little girl picked the flower the butterfly had been on. She held the flower out to her father, the chief.

“Chave (Chah-veh), you are like a butterfly. You run so fast you seem to fly from flower to flower,” the chief said.

“I like to run and run and run,” Chave said. “I’m glad you named me Chave.”

Chave is the word for butterfly in the language of the Indians in that part of South America where Chave and her people lived.

The chief stooped down and spoke in almost a whisper. “Don’t go near that hut by the big rock, child. The witch doctor has gone there. A woman is very sick in that hut.”

“No, Father, I won’t,” Chave promised. “I’ll run back to the river. I’m afraid of the witch doctor.”

When Chave ran back to the river, the chief slipped quietly over behind the big rock. From there he could see into the hut where the witch doctor had gone.

From where the chief crouched he could see a sick woman on the mat on the floor. Her eyes were closed, but she tossed about as if burning with fever. Beside her on the ground sat her friends. The chief saw the witch doctor squat beside her. No one spoke.

Slowly the witch doctor reached into his bag. The chief could see the fear in the eyes of the people as they watched the witch doctor. Suddenly he made a low sound like a dog growling. Then he spoke, and the chief knew that his words made everyone in the hut shiver.

“Someone has made this sickness.” The witch doctor spoke very slowly and in a low voice. “Whoever did this must be tied to a tree. We will give him a stick to dig with and he must dig until he finds what causes this sickness. If the sickness goes away, we will beat him with the stick and set him free. If the sickness makes the woman die, then that person must die too.”

The witch doctor’s black eyes looked at each person in the hut while he chewed on coca leaves. Then he bent over, put his mouth on the body of the sick woman and made a loud sucking sound as if he were drawing something out of her body. As he lifted his head, he put his hand to his mouth and pulled out a long thorn.

“See,” he shouted, “some person put this thorn in this woman’s body. That’s why she’s so sick.”

Again he put his mouth on the sick woman, this time on her head. He made many loud sounds as he sucked. Once more he raised his head, and this time he took from his mouth two small stones. His black eyes darted about the room again. “I know who put this thorn in her body. I know who put these stones in her head,” he said slowly. Then he added, shaking his bony fingers, “I saw the chiefs daughter, Chave, go to the thorn bush. I saw her run to the river, where there are many stones. She put the thorn and stones in this woman. She is the bad one who made her sick.” Then his voice rose higher and higher. “She must be tied to a tree. Go quickly. Find her and tie her to a tree so she can dig before this woman dies.”

“Ah!” the chief said to himself, “so that is what the witch doctor did. He put the thorn and the stones in his mouth.” The chief shuddered. He feared for his little Chave. His butterfly girl must not be tied to a tree. She must not die.

Quickly he ran to the river. No one in the village saw him as he picked up Chave and jumped into his canoe. “Be quiet,” he urged as he grabbed the paddles. He paddled as fast as he could. The boat skimmed along over the swift river. Soon they came to a bend in the river, then another and another. The chief paddled hard and fast, leaving the village far behind.

MAMMA STAHL AND THE BUTTERFLY GIRL

Chave, with big, wondering eyes, watched her father wipe the sweat from his face. She listened to his fast breathing. "Why does he not smile?" she wondered. After a long time she spoke to him.

"Father, why do you make the canoe go so fast? You didn't even see the monkey that jumped from the treetop, nor the big red bird that flew in front of the canoe."

"Chave, we have no time to look at the jungle animals and birds today." The chief kept paddling as he talked. "I heard the witch doctor say that you put the thorn and the stones into the woman, that made her sick. I know he lied. I don't want my little butterfly girl to be tied to a tree. I don't want you to die; so I'm taking you far away where he cannot find you."

"Where are we going, Father?" Chave began to feel afraid.

"We are going to the mission. I visited there once and saw how kindly the missionaries, Papa and Mamma Stahl, treated all the Indians. Maybe they will be kind to you too. Maybe Mamma Stahl will take you to be her little girl. Then you won't have to die but will be safe. We will go and see."