

KUTUE'S CHRISTMAS ORGAN
(or TAKING CHRISTMAS HOME)

Arlene Bush Cornelius

CHAPTER ONE:

The moonlight turned the Liberian palm trees to silver as twelve-year-old Kutue (pronounced Koo-too) walked up the path and stopped in front of the missionaries' window. She gazed contentedly at the manger scene in the window, framed with beautiful colored lights. Christmas was a wonderful time at the mission. She couldn't bear to think that this was her last Christmas here. In a few days, she would be graduating from the sixth grade. Her feelings were all mixed up. She was excited and sad at the same time.

Kutue sighed a little and walked on up the path to the chapel at the top of the hill. She set the kerosene lantern on top of the little pump organ, sat down, and began to play her favorite Christmas song -- "Away in a Manger." Kutue loved the little organ, even if some of the notes didn't work. She was so glad Mrs. Peters had taught her how to play it.

As Kutue practiced, she thought about her family, back in the bush (or jungle). They didn't even know what Christmas was all about. If only they could all come to the mission for the Christmas program and sixth-grade graduation!

Kutue's mother was going to have another baby soon. She could not walk the two days to the big road and get a truck to the mission. But her Father had sent word that he would try to come and bring one or two of the other children. They would hear her play the organ for the Christmas program -- and Pa would hear the true story of Christmas for the first time in his life!

Kutue turned back to the organ. She must practice her songs so she could do a good job on Sunday. She only had one more day to practice, and she might not have much time tomorrow -- especially if her father came.

When Kutue woke up Saturday morning, her first thought was, "Pa is coming today!" It was hard for her to keep her mind on her work in the dorm. As she washed the dishes with her friend, Hawa, they chatted happily about the events of the next few days.

"My Pa is coming today, Hawa! Are any of your people coming?"

"Yes! I think Ma and Pa are both coming -- at least I hope so! Oh, Kutue, pray for my Pa. He's not a Christian."

“My Pa, too! Let’s pray for them right now!”

Two black curly heads bowed over the dish pans as the girls talked to their heavenly Father about their earthly fathers. Then they turned back to their jobs.

“Mrs. Peters asked me to stay after graduation and help her get ready for the Christmas church conference again. It’s fun to be here for Christmas!”

I wish I could stay sometime, Kutue.”

“Maybe Mrs. Peters will ask you to stay next Christmas, Hawa. You’ll be in sixth grade then.”

“I hope so!”

Every time Kutue had a chance, she ran and looked down the road for a truck that might bring her Pa. Just as she finished her last job, a truck pulled into the mission compound. The back of it was full of people, and the top was stacked high with bundles, boxes, and fruit. One boy’s Pa and another boy’s brother jumped down from the truck. They had a happy reunion as the boys took them on a tour of the compound. But there was no Pa for Kutue!

Kutue ran up the hill to the chapel to practice the organ again. After awhile she thought she heard another truck coming. She ran to the door and looked down the hill. There was a truck coming up the drive! Maybe her Pa was on that one. Her tiny braids bobbed up and down all over her head as she ran down the hill to meet the truck.

She watched eagerly as one person after another climbed out of the truck. Her friend Hawa ran to greet her parents -- but there was still no Pa for Kutue! Just then the truck driver called out her name. “Are you Kutue? I have a letter for you. Here!”

Kutue quickly unfolded the wrinkled paper and saw her father’s sprawled handwriting. It said, “Sorry too much, Kutue. I know your heart will ‘fall down’. No way for me to come. Your sister is sick. I had to use the money for the country doctor.”

Kutue’s heart did “fall down.” She was so disappointed, she couldn’t make herself go back to the organ to practice again. Now, her Pa wouldn’t hear her play the organ or see her graduate -- but worst of all, he wouldn’t hear the Christmas story. He wouldn’t know that God sent His Son to be his Saviour from sin!

CHAPTER 2:

As the children practiced the Christmas songs on Saturday afternoon, Kutue's eyes filled with tears. She missed a lot of notes on the organ and it really sounded terrible. After the rehearsal, the teacher sat down beside her. "What's the trouble, Kutue? You always do so well on the organ -- has something happened?"

Kutue told her about the note from her father. "Now Pa can't come because my sister is sick, and no one in my family will have any Christmas!"

"Why don't you take Christmas home to your family?"

"But I don't have any money for the ride home!"

"Aren't you working for Mrs. Peters this week, Kutue? You can earn enough money to go next week!"

Kutue smiled faintly. "Maybe Hawa can take my place at the conference."

"I think that would be a good idea, Kutue. Now, practice hard so you can share the Christmas story with other people tomorrow!"

"I wanted my Pa to hear me play the organ. Now there's no way!"

:"Maybe you can teach the songs to your brothers and sisters and have your own little Christmas program at home!"

Kutue brightened. "OK! I can teach them "Away in a Manger!" And Pa and Ma can hear the Christmas story, too! I'll tell it to all the family! We won't have the organ, but we'll have a Christmas program!"

Kutue did her best for the mission's Christmas program Sunday evening. She was glad to have a part in telling about God's love to the visitors who had come. She was especially happy when she saw Hawa's father come to the front of the chapel to accept Christ as his Saviour. Oh! If only her own Pa would turn his heart to Jesus!

Kutue had accepted the Lord Jesus as her Saviour the first year she came to the Mission school. She had told her father about Jesus, but he had only shrugged his shoulders and said that wasn't the African way. So she had been afraid to say anything more. Now, she was eager to try again. If she had a Christmas program for the family, maybe her Pa would listen and believe!

Graduation day was exciting for all of the sixth graders at the mission. But Kutue was glad when it was over. There had been no one special to share the happy day with her.

The week sped by as Kutue helped Mrs. Peters make bread and cookies and cakes for the conference the next week. Hawa's parents had allowed her to stay and help, too, so she could take Kutue's place while she went home.

At the end of the week, Kutue had earned three dollars -- just enough to go home and come back on the truck! When Mrs. Peters paid her she said, “Kutue, you have been a good worker, so I’m going to give you an extra three dollars today. Have a happy Christmas with your family. I’ll be praying for you.”

“Thank you plenty, Mrs. Peters!”

Kutue was excited about having extra money to spend. Now she could get that pretty blouse she had seen in the Lebanese shop in the village. She could buy it when she went to the village to find a truck going her way! She wondered if the blouse would still be there?

After Kutue had walked the two miles to the village, she went straight to the Lebanese shop. The blouse was still there! And the man said it only cost three dollars! Just as she was ready to buy the blouse, Kutue saw a pretty head-tie! She wished she had some more money! Her Ma would like that head-tie “too much! “ Hmm! If she didn’t buy that blouse, she could get the head-tie for Ma and some “small-small” things for her brothers and sisters!

For a few minutes, Kutue stood there struggling with herself. She really wanted that pretty blouse for herself. But it would be fun to carry some gifts to her people, too! What should she do?

Suddenly, Kutue remembered the Bible verses they had learned in school for the Christmas program. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” And the other verse said, “Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift.”

Kutue thought, “God gave the greatest gift of all. I shouldn’t be selfish! If I get something for my family, it will be like giving Jesus a birthday gift!”

Kutue bought the head-tie for her mother and carefully chose some small toys for her brothers and sisters and a pocket knife for her father. It was fun to do something for someone else! She could hardly wait to see the happy faces of her family when they saw her! “They will have two surprises”, she thought. “They don’t know I’m coming home -- and I’m taking Christmas home!”

CHAPTER 3:

It was a tired but happy Kutue who finally walked into her village after two days on the trail. She took the precious bundle down from her head and ran into her Mama's arms. "Mama, Mama! How are you?"

"Kutue! Welcome home! We didn't know you were coming!"

"I wanted to surprise you, Mama. And I brought a small "something" for each of you!"

Six brothers and sisters appeared from nowhere and made a circle around Kutue as she opened her bundle and gave out her precious gifts. Then they disappeared as quickly as they had come -- running off to show their treasures to their friends -- all except her sister who was sick. She lay inside the hut, turning and tossing on her mat. Kutue turned back to her mother.

"I found a nice head-tie for you, Ma. I hope you like it. But where is Pa?" Kutue asked.

"In the forest, hunting. We haven't had good meat for many moons."

"How is Sister, Ma? Is she better?"

"No, Kutue, she has plenty fever and she can't eat."

"The mission nurse sent some medicine for her, Ma. Let me go and give it to her. I will give her gift to her, too."

Kutue was glad that she had brought the malaria medicine. Within a few hours, her sister was feeling much better.

Just as the sun was setting behind the hills, Papa and several other men came home with a load of deer meat. He was surprised and happy to see his daughter. "Well, Kutue, what brings you home? I thought you were staying at the mission!"

"Oh yes, Pa! But when I found out that you couldn't come to my graduation, I wanted to bring Christmas to you!"

"Christmas, child? What kind of talk is that?"

"Two more days and it will be Christmas, Pa! It's Jesus' birthday. I'll tell you all about it a little later, OK?"

Kutue was very busy the next two days, helping her mother beat the new rice in the mortar and collecting red palm nuts from the palm trees in the forest. They would have a feast of new rice, palm butter, and deer meat on Christmas day!

Kutue taught her small brothers and sisters to sing "Away in a Manger" while they worked together "white-washing" the mud walls of their little house. By the time they all dropped wearily onto the sleeping mats that Christmas Eve, the place was shining clean.

In the middle of the night, Kutue was awakened by a strange sound. What was it? It almost sounded like someone laughing! It was someone laughing! It must be the mid-wife -- the old woman who helped mothers when they had their babies. Kutue listened carefully and counted the times the mid-wife laughed. If she laughed three times, it was a girl. If there were four laughs, it was a boy! One - two - three -- four!! She laughed four times! Mama had her baby, and it was a boy! Kutue jumped up from her mat and ran to the door of the other room. By the light of the lantern, she saw her Ma cradling a new-born baby in her arms.

"Ma -- the baby came! It's a boy, isn't it?"

"Yes, Kutue! A fine man-child!"

“Oh Ma! Just like Jesus -- born on Christmas night! I can’t wait to tell you about the first Christmas!”

“Yes, child. Now, you must go back to sleep. You will have to do all the cooking tomorrow, you know!”

Kutue was almost too excited to go to sleep, but finally her eyes fell shut. It seemed like only a few minutes later when the rooster began to crow and the first rays of light came into the sky.

The news about the new baby spread fast in the village and all around. Plenty people came to see him and to say “Thank you for the baby,” as was the custom. Kutue had to work hard cooking rice and palm butter for everyone who came.

In the middle of the day, Kutue heard the faint sound of drums and shakers. It came closer and closer. She hurried to put the pot of rice on the fire and ran to the front of the house! There came “Old Man Beggar,” dressed in a black and white striped outfit, wearing a mask, and carrying a long pole with a white flag on top. A lot of people followed him with drums and shakers, blowing whistles and chanting a Kpelle (pronounced “Pelly) song. When “Old Man Beggar” reached the house, Kutue’s father gave him some money and he did a special African dance for them before going on his way.

Finally, as the sun began to set, Kutue had time to think about her Christmas program. Most of the people who had come to see the baby were still there, so Kutue gathered them together in front of the house. She was a little frightened as she looked at all of those faces. But she breathed a prayer to the Lord for help and her fears left her.

“I have something small to say, my people. I thank God for my fine baby brother. But God sent a very special “man-child” to earth on this same night many years ago. His name was Jesus -- He was God’s own Son. He came to save the people from their sins. Angels came to tell about His birth, and some men who took care of sheep saw them. They went to find baby Jesus and worshipped Him ... because He was really God! He was lying in a box of grass --- in a house for cows. I’m so glad Jesus came. He is my Saviour and Friend. And He can be yours, too!

“Now, the children and I are going to sing a song about baby Jesus. I wish I had the little pump organ from the mission - - then I could play it, too.”

Just as the children started to sing, they saw someone coming up the path with a heavy load on his head. It was one of the teachers from the mission! He set a big box wrapped in cloth in front of Kutue and told her to open it. With trembling fingers, she pulled the cloth away -- and gasped in surprise! It was the little pump organ! Now she had a chance to play the organ for her Pa -- and for all the other people, too! Everyone crowded around to watch her as she played “Away in a Manger” while the children sang.

After everyone else had gone home and the small children were sleeping, Kutue sat by the fire in the open palm-thatch kitchen with her mother and father. Her father put his hand on his daughter’s shoulder. “I’m proud of you, my child. Why don’t you tell your old Pa some more about this Jesus?”

Kutue’s brown eyes sparkled with joy. This was the best Christmas ever! She was so glad that she had brought Christmas home!