

*Madam*  
*of the*  
*Butterflies*

**CHARACTERS:**

MADALENA DAS BORBOLETAS – INN’S OWNER, SINGLE, 20

INÁCIO – MADALENA’S UNCLE, 60

DORA – MADALENA’S HELPER AT THE INN, 17

FREDERICO – BIOLOGIST, 35

GRINGO - BIOLOGIST, FREDERICO’S COLLEAGUE, 35

ÚRSULA – FREDERICO’S WIFE, 33

ZINHO-OURO – MADALENA’S AND FREDERICO’S SON, 3

**PLACE:** MADALENA DAS BORBOLETAS’ INN, IN THE TOWN OF SOLIDÃO, PERNAMBUCO’S COUNTRYSIDE.

**TIME:** SEPTEMBER OF 1998

**IMPORTANT DEFINITIONS:**

**CANGAÇO** - *m.* 1. *Bras.* Cangaceiros’ set of weapons. 2. Their way of life.  
(Minidictionary Aurélio)

The large guest room at Madalena das Borboletas' Inn. The decor is rustic. The wall plaster is poorly maintained. The color of the wall is cheerful. Despite this, the room is very clean. Some doors lead to other parts of the inn. Some openings with a hanging cloth instead of doors. The patterns of the cloths are flowery and colorful. Hanging hammocks. A large table for guests' meals. In the center, in the background, a shotgun hung on the wall. On the other walls, several handcrafted crepe paper butterflies. On the floor, leaning against the back wall, a bright red accordion. Dawn. A soft September light shines through the cracks in the windows. Madalena das Borboletas is lying on the ground. Her face is exaggeratedly painted with carmine as well as the mouth. Her dress mimics a butterfly wing design. She has got her hair tied up. Dora is lying in a hammock. Dora wakes up, putting her feet on the ground slowly. Dora wears a colorful dress and is barefoot. Her black hair runs down her shoulders. She looks at the light from the window. She looks back at Madalena. After a long time, she looks for the slippers on the floor. She puts them on, still sitting in the hammock. She passes one leg over the hammock, facing Madalena. Gets off the hammock. She kneels beside Madalena. She reaches out to wake her, but stops in the middle of the action. She hesitates for a moment. Holds Madalena's arm, shaking her. Madalena sits up, looking around. Dora hugs her. Madalena stares ahead, in alert. Dora stands up and pulls Madalena by the arm. Dora takes her inside. The room is empty. The light gets more intense. It's early. From another door enters Inácio, dressed as a cangaceiro. He walks with difficulty and goes to sit in a hammock. There are three knocks on the door. Silence. Dora rushes in from inside the house. She runs her hand through her dress, smoothing it out. She looks sideways, unaware of Inácio. She sees one of the fallen crepe butterflies and fixes it, sticking it back on the wall. She hurries to the door. Opens the door. Gringo steps into the room. He looks for something with his eyes. Gringo looks at Dora who has her head down. Frederico comes in slowly. The two men look at each other. Frederico and Gringo wear urban clothes and boots dirty with dust. Frederico and Gringo have fair skin. Frederico has blonde hair. They look tired. Gringo looks at Dora.

**GRINGO**

Did you know we were coming?

*Dora discreetly nods her head.*

**FREDERICO**

This woman set a trap for us. (*Pointing to the butterflies*) Look! (*He examines the butterflies closely.*)

**GRINGO**

Where is she?

*Dora nods toward the room where Madalena das Borboletas has entered.*

**GRINGO**

Cat got your tongue?

*Dora looks up and stares at Gringo irritated.*

**DORA**

What do you want me to say?

*Gringo is embarrassed. Dora looks out of the house through the door.*

**DORA**

Shall I Close it?

*Gringo looks at Frederico. Frederico approaches them.*

**FREDERICO**

Gringo, you'll find the way to solve it. I do not want to stay all day long here in this Solidão.

**DORA**

*(Looking out of the house)* Why did you come then?

**FREDERICO**

*(Thunderstruck)* Why? What does this butterfly mound mean?

**DORA**

*(To Frederico)* Yesterday she spent the whole afternoon cutting and gluing, wing by wing. With Zinho-ouro.

**FREDERICO**

What kind of name did she give for the boy? *(To Gringo)* Imagine the nickname he will get when I put him in a decent school. *(To Dora, with irony)* Is there a school in this town?

**DORA**

Your car made a lot of dust. I had to put a cloth on everything.

**FREDERICO**

We arrived at night so nobody noticed it.

*Dora faces Frederico. Frederico awkwardly becomes uneasy.*

**DORA**

*(To Gringo)* Shall I close it?

*Gringo walks out the door. Frederico picks up a rustic toy from the sofa. He examines the toy.*

**FREDERICO**

*(Not looking at Dora, embarrassed.)* What's his name again?

**INÁCIO**

Aren't you ashamed to ask such a thing?

**DORA**

Zinho. Zinho-ouro.

**INÁCIO**

Why are you doing this to us?

**FREDERICO**

Do you really want to know why I came?

**DORA**

Stupid, I'm not, no.

**INÁCIO**

Calm down, my child. They want to rip our little one from us, but they'll rip him away with pain. The ones that will feel the pain will be them. It's going to be him.

*Frederico drops the toy and walks over to Dora.*

**FREDERICO**

*(Challenging)* I miss the boy. He is mine. You want to know what I came here for? I came to get him. He is blond like me! Just like his father. He has his father's blood. My blood.

**DORA**

*(Lowering her head)* Stubborn. I told her not to send the photo.

**INÁCIO**

Come on, Dora. It was not the photo that brought him here.

**FREDERICO**

*(Agitated)* Do you think I'm going to leave him abandoned in the middle of this rough caatinga, in this suffocating desert? He deserves to live. Live, did you hear me?

*Dora looks toward the door to the bedrooms. Frederico exhales heavily.*

**FREDERICO**

*(Almost whispering)* No, I do not want to wake them up.

**INÁCIO**

Goat of the plague, you do not want to wake her up. Coward.

*Gringo enters followed by Úrsula. Dora looks into Úrsula's eyes. Dora looks at Gringo.*

**GRINGO**

*(Embarrassed)* Dora, ...

**DORA**

Stop. Keep your words. You will still need them.

*Dora closes the door. Frederico gets annoyed and moves toward Dora. Gringo holds him.*

**FREDERICO**

I cannot stand the way of talking of this little maid.

**DORA**

*(To Úrsula)* Sit down, ma'am.

**INÁCIO**

This lady brought disaster.

**FREDERICO**

Let's settle this at once.

**INÁCIO**

He does not know how to wait. Calm down, yellow man, here the time is different. The sun dictates the rules, not the people.

**ÚRSULA**

*(To Dora)* Your inn is very cute. *(to Gringo)* Fred told me horrible things about this place.

**INÁCIO**

Of course, ma'am. The tragedy is not yours!

**DORA**

If before I thought he would not have the courage to come, now I see that he is a coward goat too: brought his friend and wife.

*Gringo goes to Dora.*

**GRINGO**

Dora...

**INÁCIO**

At least one of you has to show courage. Or am I going to have to teach you this?

*Inácio gets up from the hammock and goes up to the door. Stops and watches Dora and Gringo.*

**GRINGO**

We want you to understand that the reason for us to come here ...

**DORA**

You talk a lot and say little, Gringo.

**GRINGO**

*(Lowering his head) ... I know. (Looks at Dora) I just feel sorry for her. No mother wants to stay away from her son.*

**DORA**

*(Dry) She's going to die.*

**GRINGO**

*(Confused)* But here, in the middle of this caatinga ...

**INÁCIO**

We live very well here, it's our land, our ground. If there's anything missing, you find a way, stranger. The caatinga never killed anyone.

**GRINGO**

... don't you also think that the best for the boy is to go to another place where his education is guaranteed?

**DORA**

*(Points to Madalena's room)* Do you want me to call Ma'am?

**GRINGO**

*(Scared)* No!

**FREDERICO**

This house smells funny.

**INÁCIO**

It smells of pain, of suffering, of lack.

**ÚRSULA**

*(Rising to a butterfly on the wall)* What an exaggeration, Fred. Look how beautiful this butterfly is. By the way the boy is well taken care of here.

*Dora looks at Gringo with a triumphant smile on her mouth.*

**GRINGO**

Dora, can I count on you?

**FREDERICO**

*(A little exalted)* Girl, where did she keep the butterflies we took when I lived here?  
*(To Gringo)* Do you remember that white one? It looked like snow. *(Thoughtful)*  
 Snow in the sertão. Have you ever heard of it?

*Gringo awaits an answer from Dora. Dora goes to a drawer and takes out a wooden box with a glass lid. Delivers it to Frederico. Back to Gringo. Úrsula goes to Frederico.*

**GRINGO**

Why the butterflies now? Can't you see I'm on a serious topic?

**FREDERICO**

Butterfly is serious stuff too.

**INÁCIO**

*(Looking at Frederico)* My niece ended up becoming Madalena das Borboletas because of you, researcher. And the people here do not see her with good eyes. They condemn this collection of butterflies' corpses. They say it's a very beautiful animal to kill. And whoever kills has to be punished.

**GRINGO**

Please, Dora. That way we finish this story.

**ÚRSULA**

I'm thirsty! And what a hot time this morning! In Recife it was not that hot.

**INÁCIO**

*(Laughing)* That's the cangaço, ma'am. The cangaço.

**DORA**

I talk to her.

*Gringo exhales in relief.*

**DORA**

*(Going to Úrsula).* Come with me that there must still be some water *(Goes out through another door).*

*Úrsula is astonished. Looks at Frederico and then at Gringo. Gringo nods positively. Úrsula leaves after Dora.*

*Silence. Gringo looks at Frederico examining the box with the butterflies. Frederico steps forward and sits down. Frederico looks at Gringo.*

**FREDERICO**

This is wonderful. I have never seen such exotic, such different butterflies ... and so special.

*Inácio goes to the back of the room and stares at the shotgun on the wall.*

**GRINGO**

*(Relieved)* She agreed. Thank God.

**FREDERICO**

Look at this one! ...

*Inácio takes his shotgun off the wall.*

**GRINGO**

*(Rubbing his hands in his arms)* It got cold all of a sudden, don't you think?

*Inácio goes to Frederico with his shotgun in his hands.*

**FREDERICO**

*(Looks at Gringo seriously)* It's been a longtime since I danced forró ...

**GRINGO**

What?

*Inácio stops behind Frederico and stares at the butterflies.*

**FREDERICO**

*(Dropping the box on his side)* I had even forgotten, but when I saw those butterflies locked in here, I remembered the times we were out hunting. *(Almost in a delirium)* The midday sun shining ... the cracked earth ... me and her ... you know ... it was good ... it was very good.

**GRINGO**

Fred, you crazy? He came so sure of what he wanted, *(Imitating Frederico with irony)* the son is mine, my blood and blah, blah, blah. What now?

*Frederico gets up. He walks around the room. Inácio grabs the box of butterflies and examines it.*

**FREDERICO**

This here, this room was my haven of love and joy, resting in the scorching sun of the sertão. *(Walks over to a butterfly)* And we would listen to the radio together, lying in the hammock ... and I do not have the courage to lie in the hammock anymore. I fear I will fall. On the ground. *(He strokes a butterfly from the wall, rips it off, turns and rubs it in his face with his eyes closed)*

*Inácio drops the box of butterflies and points the shotgun at Frederico on the other side of the room. Gringo is amazed, looking at Frederico. A moment of tension. Frederico opens his eyes.*

### **FREDERICO**

*(Suddenly)* No! *(Drops the butterfly inside the hammock)*. I cannot stand being here anymore. I realized all my mistakes. And that my mistakes will never give me peace. *(Looks around)* Goodbye, refuge. *(To Gringo)* I'll be waiting for you at the hotel.

### **GRINGO**

But Fred, wait, where the ...

*Frederico opens the door and hurries out. Gringo makes a point of going after him, but does not leave the room. Looks through the door.*

### **INÁCIO**

*(With a triumphant and sarcastic smile)* Ah, what could be expected of such a goat? When I raged against my niece, I tried to prevent her, to spare her impending doom. These people that come from afar always come to rip off the best of us. And this one that the people call "Madalena das Borboletas" will have to pay the price for having renounced the cangaço. Whoever was born in the sertão has to carry it within himself for the rest of his life. It's like a heart: if you pluck out, you die.

*Inácio puts the shotgun back on the wall. Dora returns with Úrsula from inside the inn. Dora notices Gringo. Gringo turns to them. Dora goes to the door and closes it. Inácio returns to the hammock.*

### **INÁCIO**

She woke up.

### **ÚRSULA**

*(To Gringo)* I talked to Dora quite a bit and she promised that she will help us. She agreed that he will be much better off away from here. *(Realizes the box of butterflies)* Ah, the box. Hey, where did Fred run off to?

### **GRINGO**

*(Awkwardly)* He's gone. He said he's waiting for us at the hotel.

### **ÚRSULA**

It's better this way. She suffers less. *(Shaking her head, examining the butterflies)*  
Poor little ones.

*Gringo and Dora look at each other.*

### **INÁCIO**

I hear her wings flapping.

### **ÚRSULA**

*(Going to a window)* Dora, it's too dark here. I'll open it.

*Dora runs to the window and stops Úrsula from opening it. Úrsula is astonished.*

**DORA**

The dark is more appropriate for my lady's pain.

*Úrsula shivers.*

**INÁCIO**

The heat increases, the day grows. It's time for the butterflies to come after the sun.

**MADALENA DAS BORBOLETAS' VOICE**

*(From the inside)* Dora! Dora! Where the hell are you, child?

*Gringo and Úrsula look at each other. Dora runs over to the door from where the voice is heard. Dora tries to stop Madalena das Borboletas from entering the room. They both struggle. Dora is pushed away by Madalena das Borboletas. Madalena das Borboletas enters the room and stops in astonishment. She is dressed up for a festive day, wearing the same dress from the beginning of the play. Her long hair tied up with a flower. Her face painted with some exaggeration.*

**MADALENA DAS BORBOLETAS**

Gringo! It's been quite some time! What about your partner? *(She looks at Úrsula. Nervous, to Dora)*. Does this lady need a room?

*Short break.*

**MADALENA DAS BORBOLETAS**

Answer me, child? How long are you going to keep your head down? *(Looks around the room)* And those windows shut? How do you expect someone to come

here? They'll think the inn is closed! (*To Úrsula*) How did you get in, if it was all closed?

**ÚRSULA**

(*Embarrassed*) But I thought the inns would be open twenty-four hours ...

**MADALENA DAS BORBOLETAS**

(*Agitated*) But not mine! This is a family inn. We work hard here, Dora and me.

(*Pointing to Dora, quieter*) This is Dora, my helper. Dora, show the room to this lady.

**ÚRSULA**

(*Embarrassed*) I did not come to stay in your inn ...

*Madalena das Borboletas looks at Gringo confused. Gringo walks toward her.*

**MADALENA DAS BORBOLETAS**

Stop it, Gringo! If you came to bring me some bad news, tell me soon.

*Gringo staggers and sits on a chair.*

**MADALENA DAS BORBOLETAS**

But he just arrived yesterday. We coughed so much with the dust of your car ...

*Dora walks over to Madalena das Borboletas and hugs her. Madalena das Borboletas repels her.*

**MADALENA DAS BORBOLETAS**

I do not need this. Hold on to the bone. I'm from the cangaço.

**DORA**

I never doubted that.

**MADALENA DAS BORBOLETAS**

*(Stares at Dora).* Not even when Uncle Inácio burst through that door cursing me, making me die of shame, accusing me of having betrayed the cangaço?

*Dora looks at Madalena das Borboletas without answering.*

**MADALENA DAS BORBOLETAS**

*(To Gringo)* So the bastard did not come with you in the car? Did he have the courage to send yourself? To tell me what? Speak, man?

**ÚRSULA**

Where is the boy?

**MADALENA DAS BORBOLETAS**

*(She looks at Úrsula and shudders.)* Why does she ask about Zinho-ouro in that butter-sweet voice? Dora, say something, you fool!

**GRINGO**

He arrived with us yesterday.

**MADALENA DAS BORBOLETAS**

Us?

*Madalena das Borboletas turns to Úrsula and watches her for a moment.*

**MADALENA DAS BORBOLETAS**

*(To Úrsula)* Ma'am, why do you have such yellow hair like that?

**GRINGO**

She's not to blame. She only wants the best for Zinho-ouro.

**MADALENA DAS BORBOLETAS**

The best?

**DORA**

They arrived early, I did not want to wake ...

**MADALENA DAS BORBOLETAS**

*(Suspicious)* Gringo?

**GRINGO**

*(Head down)* We came for the boy.

**MADALENA DAS BORBOLETAS**

For the boy? *(Looks at Dora, stunned)*

**GRINGO**

... Frederico ... he was here ...

**INÁCIO**

He ran away, the goat.

**GRINGO**

...it would be better...

**MADALENA DAS BORBOLETAS**

No, not my son. They've already ripped out my heart, put a pointed pin inside it. And now they want to take the little one! What a doomed life!

**GRINGO**

It's the best solution, Ma'am. Here he has no future.

**INÁCIO**

Who is born cangaceiro, dies cangaceiro, goat of the south.

**MADALENA DAS BORBOLETAS**

How am I going to live now? (*To Dora*) Sitting on a chair watching the people come in and out from this door, until I become a dull, dark from sunshine old woman, is that it, Dora?

**GRINGO**

Explain to her, Dora!

**DORA**

Dear Ma'am, I'm staying here with you.

**MADALENA DAS BORBOLETAS**

And will you replace my son?

**ÚRSULA**

*(Approaching Madalena das Borboletas)* I'm sorry ... Madalena... my intention is not to disgrace your life ...

**MADALENA DAS BORBOLETAS**

*(Trying to control herself)* I know, lady. But the pain of a mother who loses her child is huge: be it for the drought or for the ones who come and steal us. *(Laughs sadly)* Oh, now I get it. Gold is worth more than tar. What I feel is envy of the lady.

*Úrsula and Gringo look embarrassed. Inácio gets up from the hammock and picks up the accordion. Dora drives Madalena das Borboletas to the couch.*

**ÚRSULA**

Envy?

**MADALENA DAS BORBOLETAS**

That golden hair that shines ... Under the great bridge of heaven, there is no happier woman than you. *(Looking at Úrsula)* I beg you to always be happy, do not be sad for me. *(Looks down)* The people who are from the cangaço get by on their own.

*Inácio returns to sit in the hammock. He starts a mournful melody on the accordion.*

**GRINGO**

*(Desolate)* What the fuck!

**ÚRSULA**

I understand your pain ...

**DORA**

*(To Úrsula, with anger restrained)* You do not understand. You are in a foreign land and you speak a language that you do not even understand. How are you going to understand what goes on inside a flower in the sertão?

*Úrsula is embarrassed.*

**MADALENA DAS BORBOLETAS**

Leave her alone, Dora. She has no fault.

**GRINGO**

Dora, we had arranged ...

**MADALENA DAS BORBOLETAS**

*(Interrupting)* Arranged? *(Laughs)* Don't sell yourself so easily, woman. *(Looks at Úrsula and Gringo)* In half an hour I give you Zinho-ouro.

*Dora shakes her head.*

**GRINGO**

*(Relieved)* Good. Everything's solved.

**MADALENA DAS BORBOLETAS**

With one condition, however ...

*Inácio stops playing the accordion.*

**ÚRSULA**

Condition?

**GRINGO**

*(Distressed)* Oh, come on!

**MADALENA DAS BORBOLETAS**

I want him to come get his son. *(To Dora, ironic)* After all, it's his son, isn't it?

*Dora looks at Gringo and Úrsula.*

**INÁCIO**

Bravo, Ma'am!

**GRINGO**

But...

**ÚRSULA**

*(Grasping Gringo's arm)* Alright. He will come. *(In a low voice)* Come on.

**MADALENA DAS BORBOLETAS**

Escort them to the door, Dora. That's how it's done.

*Dora leads Gringo and Úrsula to the street. Inácio resumes playing, a funeral melody. Madalena das Borboletas lets her hair down, holding the flower in her hands. She shakes her head. Looks at the shotgun on the wall. She smells the flower with her eyes closed. Dora comes back and closes the door.*

**MADALENA DAS BORBOLETAS**

This sunshine annoys my eyes. Can't you close the windows any tighter?

**DORA**

No, ma'am.

**MADALENA DAS BORBOLETAS**

That smell of spring in the air. *(She opens the eyes. She sees the box of butterflies on her side.)* Dora, *(picks up the box)* burn it.

*Dora is surprised.*

**MADALENA DAS BORBOLETAS**

Are you going to stand there?

*Dora goes slowly to Madalena das Borboletas and picks up the box.*

**MADALENA DAS BORBOLETAS**

Go and check what Zinho-ouro is doing.

*Dora watches Madalena das Borboletas for a moment.*

**MADALENA DAS BORBOLETAS**

And bring me a brush.

*Dora walks into the bedroom. Inácio stops playing. He gets up from the hammock and walks over, close to Madalena das Borboletas. He stands behind her and starts a melancholy and lyrical melody.*

### **MADALENA DAS BORBOLETAS**

*(Eyes closed)* And he called me a girl with eyes full of charm! He liked my brown braid and begged me to say, "I love you." And I never said it. *(She makes movements with her hands imitating the wings of a butterfly.)* And I said to him: "Love me, please, even just a little, as if you love a child, as I should. Please love me." For in truth we are persons accustomed to small things, humble and silent, to a tenderness that caresses the surface, but is as deep as the sky and as broad as the sertão. *(Imitates the flight of a butterfly in vain).* And so the butterflies kept falling in his hammock, I cannot believe we spent four months together here, and they were still being pinned and nailed to the wood. And at that time it was me, and him. No Zinho-ouro, without this blondie, without Uncle Inácio. *(Lowers her head)* May God have him in heaven, where he should be. *(She raises her head and opens her eyes, stands up and goes to the shotgun, pulls it out of the wall, pulls the flower into the opening of the gun, and squeezes the gun against her.)* Fred, now I can tell you. I love you.

*Dora walks in and is startled by the scene she sees. Inácio stops playing and puts the accordion on the sofa.*

### **DORA**

Ma'am!

### **MADALENA DAS BORBOLETAS**

*(Turns to Dora)* Oh, I did not even hear you come in. And the boy?

**DORA**

*(Scared)* Playing.

**MADALENA DAS BORBOLETAS**

*(Sitting in the chair)* Come on, brush my hair.

*Dora goes to Madalena das Borboletas and starts brushing the other's hair with an expression of sadness. Madalena das Borboletas closes her eyes and smiles. They stay that way for a while.*

**MADALENA DAS BORBOLETAS**

*(Opening her eyes)* That's fine. Go and stay with him. *(Goes to the hammock)*

*Dora does not move.*

**MADALENA DAS BORBOLETAS**

*(Not looking at Dora, caressing the shotgun).* Dora, my poor Dora. Our destiny is this and no other one. Go, time is running.

**INÁCIO**

She's already with me, Dora. Go.

**DORA**

Please, Ma'am!

**MADALENA DAS BORBOLETAS**

*(Turns to Dora)* Take good care of this inn. Go, Dora, I'm sending it.

*Dora heads down.*

**MADALENA DAS BORBOLETAS**

*(Looking at the shotgun)* Ready, Uncle Inácio. Now there is not much left. To clean the honor of the cangaço. If you were here, you'd be proud of me.

**INÁCIO**

*(With a smile)* But I'm here, my child. By your side.

**MADALENA DAS BORBOLETAS**

The boy will have to understand later why I did it. He has my blood, our blood. And this will never change. *(Goes to a chair and sits down, with a sad voice)*. Too bad the sertão is not going to see him grow. In the middle of a dirty city, far from his place, among strange people, who speak a language other than ours. But he has the cangaço inside him. No one will ever be able to rip it out. Never!

*Inácio opens the windows, letting in the bright, incandescent light into the room.*

*Madalena das Borboletas lifts her head with great joy.*

**MADALENA DAS BORBOLETAS**

Now I'm filled with sunshine.

*The light diminishes to almost darkness. Silence. A shot is heard. The light begins to increase until it reaches brightness with the windows open. Dora comes running from inside the inn. Inácio is sitting inside the hammock, smiling. A butterfly flies around the room. Dora accompanies her flight in amazement. The butterfly flies out the window. Dora goes to the window and stares outside.*

END