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Boundaries

The monster might have been waiting for a friend but I couldn't take any chances. I popped a piece of green gum into my mouth and furiously began to chew. As I walked closer, I started to slightly flatten the piece out with my tongue. I only had one shot and a brief second to aim carefully. The package said I couldn't miss as it was a guaranteed product but I was still nervous.

As calmly as I could, I got to my bus stop and waited for it to walk by. With my gum at the ready, I eyed his furry hands. I had never been this up close and personal with a creature from the forest before. I was told they usually stay hidden amongst the trees as they preferred the quiet forest over the obnoxious city life. Strange though to see such a beast. I heard of the odd creature one may find but this one seemed to resemble a wolf but it walked on its hind legs like a human, had teeth that jutted out from his mouth and had wavy to curly hair all over his body.

He steadily walked right past me allowing me to realize that it was definitely taller than me and smelled of dirt. When I caught a glimpse of its eyes, I realized that they were darting around the area as if he was still searching for something. Being so close to the monster, I surprisingly started to feel more at ease with it. It was probably just lost so I immediately rolled my gum into a ball and spat it out before the thing began to have a funny taste. After all, gum nets weren't truly designed to be long lasting especially in their flavors.

Yet, as soon as I spat it out, I wish I hadn't. A flurry of butterflies erupted from the drainage system causing the strange beast to run after them. My gut instinct was to follow but my brain was too busy wondering what the heck was going on. Butterflies don't come out of drain holes and creatures from the forest don't wander through the city. There had to be some logical reason to all of this. Besides, the beast seemed to have been anticipating something. I'm not sure if it was the butterflies exactly but he was definitely keeping an eye out for something.

At that point, a beat up old 2005 Civic Si pulled up. The bus wasn't far behind it and honked at the car to move but it refused causing the bus to just let people off a few feet away.

I eyed the car thinking how rude the driver is and walked over to the bus. As soon as I got on, the car drove off in the same direction as the monster. The last glimpse I had of the car before it rounded the corner I noticed some butterflies following closely behind it.

Choosing my seat towards the middle of the bus, I sat down and stared out the window oddly hoping to find the beast again. I mean you only hear stories about the creatures of the forest but I had just witnessed my own story. One that no one would probably believe but I know I saw it with my own two eyes.

So, when I finally got to work, I hardly expected to find a butterfly the size of my hand with green translucent wings perched on top of my desk. I stopped a few feet away and watched as it appeared to be reading what was on the screen which happened to be some fashion website it had probably found. I had definitely not left my laptop on and I definitely was not reading about fashion yesterday.

Curiously, I stepped closer until I was right behind the butterfly. It was then that I noticed it wasn't a true butterfly. It was wearing clothes or at least it appeared to be covered by some

shiny material. And this strange thing seemed to be wearing glasses. For as long as I was staring at this creature, it didn't realize it had an audience until it started flapping its wings to turn around. When it saw me watching it, it suddenly dropped from the air. Instinctively, I reached out hoping to catch it from falling but it caught itself midfall and darted out of reach before slipping through an air vent in the ceiling.

Looking around, I hoped that someone else saw what I saw. But, except for my friend Rachel from health who was speedily walking over, no one else seemed bothered by the butterfly thing that wore glasses.

“Jennifer, where have you been? And why are you just standing there? The boss has been waiting for you!” Rachel whispered rather loudly causing me to forget about the butterfly with glasses.

I dropped my bag and grabbed my pen and notebook. I let Rachel steer me towards the conference room and when she opened the door, a fistfull of confetti was launched into my face as I was quickly ushered into the room.

Stunned, I glanced around the room and saw Bryan from editing, Kendra from fashion and Luke from photography. Behind them on the conference table was a simple cake with white frosting and scattered around the room were two dozen balloons and some blue and purple streamers, my favorite colors.

“Surprise! Happy Birthday, Jen!” they all shouted as soon as the door was closed.

I looked behind me at Rachel who was beaming from ear to ear. She was clearly rather proud of herself for pulling this off. I was definitely going to have to get her back for this.

“Wow, guys. I really didn’t expect this. But, I gotta admit that I forgot it was my birthday,” I confessed.

That caused everyone to erupt with their own comments. I ended up pulling out a chair and sitting down as I listened to everyone’s outbursts. The morning had already been fairly rough and I knew that what I just said wasn’t going to make it any easier.

“What!? You’re 30! You’re entering a new decade!” Bryan said.

“How can you forget!? It’s your big day. It’s the day you were born!” Kendra said followed by Luke who announced that we were all going out for drinks after work.

Rachel meanwhile was by my side cutting the cake and nodding her head agreeing with everyone. I knew then that I wasn’t going to be able to get out of it. I had to speak up and change the conversation but in the corner of my eye, I saw a flutter. I glanced over to a cluster of balloons and thought I saw the butterfly again but I got distracted by the door that opened revealing our boss, Chris.

He walked in, took a plate with some cake and said, “Alright, you guys got to surprise her now let’s get back to work. We have deadlines to meet and your work isn’t going to finish themselves.”

That instantly silenced everyone and causing them to grab a slice of cake then shuffle out the door past Chris who stood as a guard to the party of fun we were sure to have. As Luke and Bryan slipped past, they both turned to remind me about drinks tonight. And as soon as they got past the guard, they ran after Kendra probably to discuss which bar they should go to tonight.

“I know it’s your birthday but these decorations need to come down by tomorrow afternoon and judging by your friends, I think you should take them down now. I doubt you’ll be in early enough tomorrow to take care of it,” Chris said surveying the room.

I took a moment to peek back at the balloons as I said, “Is it okay if I take the day off, actually?”

Chris looked up from his cake and said, “Did you finish editing your team’s work?”

“Everyone whose given me something to edit,” I answered keeping an eye out for the butterfly.

Chris watched me closely so I decided to busy myself and went to help Rachel collect the balloons. While I was getting them together, I checked each one for the butterfly but no such luck. When they were all finally gathered, I tied them together and grabbed a chair to help take the streamers down. Rachel and I were just tossing everything out when I saw the same flutter by the door behind Chris. I glanced over quickly pretending to survey the room for more decorations and saw the butterfly once again hovering just above the door frame. I caught Chris’ eye causing him to look around but the butterfly anticipated his move and hid once again in the air vent. At that point, Chris had finished up his cake and tossed his trash in the bin. He kicked the floor at the confetti causing Rachel to smile shyly.

“Take Rachel with you. I don’t want you wandering back to your desk reeking of alcohol and you better show up at tomorrow’s meeting. We’re brainstorming for next month’s edition. It’s the start of summer so I want you walking in with hot ideas,” Chris said turning to leave.

Rachel looked at me, lifted her brow and said, “What’s going on? You’ve never taken a day off just because it was your birthday.”

“Listen, this morning I saw something strange and I want to figure out what it was. I don’t think it can wait until tomorrow. If you have stuff to do then I’ll just go on my own but I hope you can come with me, Rach,” I said noticing the butterfly leave the safety of the conference room and fly along the ceiling until it could slip out of a window..

“What? What happened?” Rachel asked curiously as she followed my gaze..

“You’re never going to believe me if I say it. So you’re just going to have to trust me that something is going on,” I said hurriedly.

She gave me a once over then looked around the office. Everyone was still busy doing their own thing oblivious to the birthday surprise that just occurred.

“Alright, I’ll go with you. On one condition, you tell me what is going on,” Rachel said.

“Deal. Get your stuff and meet me at the elevator. I’ll explain it to you on the drive,” I said.

We parted ways and went to collect our things. When we met at the elevator, we took it to the garage where we hopped into her car. I told her to drive back to the bus station. I was curious to see if the strange beast would make an appearance again or possibly even the butterfly that oddly seemed to be following me. During the drive, I told her everything that happened and what I saw including the butterfly with glasses. It was weird but she asked for the story and I didn’t leave any details out.

By the time we reached the bus stop, I had her park a block away and we walked back. The whole time she kept telling me how crazy I was and that she didn’t see a butterfly wearing glasses in the conference room or anywhere else in the office. I wanted to believe her but it just seemed too odd.

“Maybe, you were daydreaming? It’s possible. I mean you’ve been working so hard. It’s reasonable to think that your mind is starting to confuse reality with your imagination. Or maybe it was a dream you had that seemed real so when you woke up and forgot about it but went to the place where you were in your dream, it triggered the dream memory? I mean those supposed strange creatures of the forest haven’t been able to leave in years. What makes you think they left now?” Rachel babbled while we stood near the bus stop.

I let her keep talking as I looked around hoping that she wasn’t right. I started noticing that I wanted the creatures of the forest to be loose. I wanted them to be able to roam the streets and be a part of civilization like my grandparents have told me time and time again when I was a child.

Keeping an eye out, it was when I twisted around to look at the bus stop that I saw the butterfly resting on the bench. It appeared to be watching me as I stared at it. Neither of us moved until Rachel stood in front of me waving her hands for my attention.

“Have you been listening to a word I’ve said? This is crazy, Jen. Let’s go and we can celebrate your birthday like how we use to with chocolate ice cream and a spa day,” Rachel said exasperated.

“Rach, turn around and look at the bench,” I said staring her dead in the eye.

She heaved a sigh but turned and shrugged saying, “What am I looking at?”

It was then that she gasped and sure enough when I peered around her shoulder it was now hovering just above the point from where I saw it seconds earlier. Rachel spun around and pointed at the butterfly.

“You weren’t lying. I see it,” she said.

“I know. The only question is why is it following me,” I said.

“Maybe, it likes you?” Rachel offered.

I shook my head as we watched it fly towards us. The closer it got the more I knew it was the same butterfly that I found reading my monitor earlier and the same one that was in the conference room celebrating my birthday. When it was an arms length away, it began to veer off course and head down the street. It only flew a few feet away before it stopped and hovered in the air.

“This is strange and very much like Lassy but I think it wants us to follow it,” Rachel said answering my thoughts.

I nodded in agreement and arm in arm we tracked it down the street and around a few corners until we were at the edge of the city where the forest began. It wanted us to enter but no one has done that in years and I was most certainly hesitant to walk straight into it.

“Let’s head home and grab a few things. I don’t think this is going to be a simple walk through the forest,” I said.

“Are you sure we should be even going in there? I mean you’ve heard the stories....” Rachel said as her voice trailed off.

I looked back at where the butterfly hovered just outside of the treeline. Was it a good idea to go in there? I mean we aren’t detectives and we are certainly not scientists. It doesn’t even make any logical sense why we follow a butterfly into the forest.

“We won’t spend more than two hours top,” I said looking at Rachel then back at the butterfly as if I was talking to it too.

Rachel looked at me questioningly but she was my best friend in the end. No matter what we did, we always did it together which is the only reason we made it out of college with our sanity in tact and our current job with the magazine.

We glanced back at the forest one last time before we rushed back to the car to change out of our work attire and into something more suitable to be wandering through the forest. We had no idea what to pack but I made sure to bring a few bottles of water, a granola bar or two and a pocketful of gum balls. We didn't really know what to take with us but I figured the gumballs my grandfather gave me as a little girl would be helpful. The different colors served as markers for the different tricks they could do but they all came out in the form of a net. To be honest, I was lucky that none of them killed me but the blue ones seemed to send out a net of shock waves that stunned the individual for a good hour or two depending on how large the person was.

Driving back to the forest line, I realized that the forest was actually not that far from the edge of the city. Perhaps, it was only about fifty feet away but the edge of the forest was lined with trees that could possibly tower over the tallest city buildings. How the trees were able to stay standing instead of leaning over from the weight of its branches was pretty amazing considering the tallest building is about seventeen floors tall.

Staring at this phenomenon, I began to feel an eerie sense that we should not be there. But, armed with a jar of net gumballs, I looked for the butterfly which sat perched on a leaf. It was clear to me then that it wasn't concerned about any predators attacking us as it began to flit around Rachel and I.

“Are you sure about this, Jen?” Rachel whispered a few feet behind me.

I looked back at her then back at the butterfly. This was my last chance to back out. We could still see where we entered the forest so if I chose to turn back, we didn't need the butterfly to show us out. But, why am I here at all?

"I don't know, Rach. I want to go back and enjoy my birthday with you but I think we need to do this," I said looking around the forest for a sign.

"Why? Why do we need to be here? Why are we following this butterfly? Aren't you wondering about this?" she said.

I sighed and said, "I am but aren't you curious about why I saw these things?"

"I don't know yet if I believe you about that monster chasing butterflies. It seems crazy. This all seems a little crazy," Rachel said.

"I know. It is and I promise that once we find out where this butterfly is going we'll go straight home and forget about this whole thing," I said.

She didn't look entirely convinced so I stepped towards her and touched her arm hoping it conveyed some form of comfort. She didn't exactly have to come but I wanted to share this. Someone had to believe me when all of this was over.

Rachel took my hand and said, "Okay but not too long and not too far. Something isn't right about this place."

I nodded my head and together we walked through the forest following the butterfly with glasses. As we followed, the trees seemed to part and open a path for us. There wasn't a single noise from the trees moving but it seemed strange how a perfect path seemed to appear always a few feet in front of us. The bushes even seemed to part ways. Either the broad leaf leaves shrunk or they seemed to withdraw from the path. We could also constantly hear what seemed like bird

calls from the branches high above but we couldn't find the source. The sound was deep and melodic which further added to the eerie vibes we were getting.

At times, I would glance back at Rachel just to make sure she was okay but her eyes were constantly darting through the trees alert for any sudden movements. I knew she was only here for me and I hoped that nothing would spook the both of us. But, instead of striking fear, the forest made us more and more curious.

We had probably been walking for about a half hour when suddenly we were surrounded by hundreds of butterflies. I tried to keep an eye on our guide but it was soon becoming impossible. What made it exceptionally difficult was Rachel who kept yanking at my arm for my attention.

"I don't think we're suppose to keep walking," she said.

"What makes you think that?" I asked taking a moment to glance around at the hundreds of butterflies.

They were swarming around us and when I looked back in the direction I last saw our guide, we sure enough had lost him in the fury. In just a few seconds, the swarm seemed to become larger as our view of the forest grew smaller. Rachel and I stepped closer to one another and instinctively held each other's hand afraid to be separated. The butterflies didn't attempt to attack or touch us but they became so dense that all we saw were flashes of colors before our eyes.

Then, all to slowly, they began to fade away and instead of looking at a forest, we were standing in a grassy field with a house directly in the center of it. A path of stones led the way to the front door but Rachel and I stood frozen. Common sense told us to walk away and get out of

the forest but an odd feeling crept into my mind. It began as a whisper until I knew that the house was calling to me. I didn't want to take the first step though.

"Rach, we should turn back, right?" I said trying to regain myself.

Rachel didn't speak but nodded at me as we continued to watch the house for any sign of movement. Neither one of us wanted to turn our backs on it. What if something came out and ran after us? I mean what is a house doing out in the middle of a grassy field and why did butterflies bring us here.

I tried to take a step backward but I couldn't. So, I tried to take a step forward and my legs came to life.

"I don't think we can go back, Rach," I said as I watched her stare at her own legs in confusion.

"I can't move them, Jen," she said as she began to grow frustrated, "I told you we shouldn't have followed that damn butterfly. If we had just gone back when I said we should, we wouldn't be in this place. Instead, we would probably be out having a drink by now. Damn it."

"I know and I'm sorry but something in me had to find out what was going on," I said, "I never intended for this to happen."

"Jen, we've watched so many horror movies and every single time the person who ends up dead says that exact line. So, don't you start freaking me out," Rachel said glaring at me.

As we were talking, we hadn't noticed the door to the house open and a man walking towards us. Butterflies flitted all around him though not as dense as they had earlier. So, when Rachel had finished speaking, our hearts nearly gave out when he spoke, "I hope your travels weren't too rough."

We immediately snapped our attention to him and tried to run in the opposite direction but we were only successful at falling into a heap on the grass screaming. By the time my eyes focused on the strange man, a feeling of familiarity washed over me as I realized who the speaker was.

“Grandpa? What are you doing here?” I asked from the ground as Rachel and I tried to untangle ourselves.

“Ooo, I’m sorry about that. The forest wanted to make sure you wouldn’t go anywhere,” he said before whispering to the butterflies.

The butterflies gently let their wings brush against Rachel and I before flying off and leaving us alone. As soon as they had touched us, Rachel and I were able to move freely again but instead of running away, we stood confused.

“It’s the fairies. They’re protective of the forest and so of me. But they are friendly when they are not busy with their own agenda,” Grandpa said.

“Fairies?” I asked.

Grandpa smacked his forehead, “I forgot. You two haven’t been kissed yet. But, we can take care of that later. Let’s go indoors and have some tea.”

Still confused, I started following him curious for the answers but I stopped after I took a few steps and looked back at Rachel who stood rooted to the ground. Her eyes were fairly wide and despite having called her name several times, she refused to respond. So, I went to her side and tried to shake her awake but Grandpa grabbed my arm and shook his head.

“Leave her be. The fairies will return her to the edge of the forest and she would have thought this was a dream. Some people are just not meant to know about the secrets in the forest,” Grandpa said.

I dropped my arm and Grandpa guided me to the house. I looked back over my shoulder and watched as the butterflies came back to swarm around Rachel until I couldn't see her any more. She became a cloud of colors that flickered and changed into an inverted tornado until all at once they soon disappeared into the sky.

When we crossed the threshold, Grandpa offered me a chair with a pillow on it at an oak table then set a pot of water on an old wood burning stove to make tea. I took the moment to glance around the house and saw several plants scattered throughout the home as well as a pillow on every chair. It was quite charming in an old fashion way but it made me start to wonder how old the home was and how long Grandpa had been living here.

So, as soon as he had a chance to sit down, I blurted out, “I thought you were dead.”

Grandpa sighed and crossed his fingers between one another then placed them on the table in front of him. He wouldn't look up at me as he said, “No, I'm not dead. Not yet at least.”

“Then, why did we have your funeral? Where were you? Why didn't you ever come back?”

“That was your Mom's idea. She thought it would be best and you and I both know that it's best not to get in her way. But, once she had the funeral, I couldn't come back. The dead should stay dead.”

“But, you weren't,” I said trying to grasp what he was saying.

“Jennifer, there is a lot that you don’t know and I’ll do my best to answer your questions but please have an open mind. We have a lot to catch up on and in such a short period of time not everything will make sense. But, I promise I’ll do my best. Okay, Jenny?” Grandpa asked seeming to beg for my understanding.

I didn’t really want to agree but I nodded anyways. Grandpa shut his eyes, took a deep breath and began to tell me about the forest.

“Centuries ago the forest beings and humans walked freely among each other. There was a peace between the two but the humans began to fear the forest beings. They thought that the forest beings would control them and hold power over the world causing a war to break out. The war lasted for years where many different beings quickly became extinct and different peoples ceased to exist. Until one day, the forest people waved a white flag asking for a truce to create peace between both beings. The truce held that since both beings are in fear of one another then they shall live in separate worlds. Thus, the forest beings would remain in the forest and the humans would remain in the city. The only beings that would be able to cross over peacefully are the ancestors of the peacemakers and the fairies so that the plants and life in the city would thrive. But, you see, the humans thought that it was not fair for the fairies to cross over whenever they wished, so they demanded that at least one ancestor of the peacemakers would have to remain in the forest. Once the details were settled, both sides shook hands and the beings quickly left to remain in their own part of the world. Since then, the ancestors have passed down the role as peacekeeper from daughter to son and so forth. Your mother was supposed to be the next peacekeeper but she passed away before she could.”

Grandpa trailed off towards the end and soon became silent waiting for my response. But, I didn't know what to say. I always heard about the forest creatures as a bedtime story but I never thought they were real. Yet, whenever I got scared at night, Mom would always say that the fairies would protect us. Did this mean...?

Answering me, Grandpa said, "You are the next living peacekeeper."

No. I couldn't be. I was just a journalist who lived alone and had a few friends. I spent my free nights watching Netflix in bed and debating on whether or not I should have a dog to keep me busy. I wasn't anything special. No one knew who I was outside of work and even the world didn't recognize even though my articles were some of the most popular pieces out there. There is no way that my family let alone myself were the descendants of these so called peacekeepers. Besides, there had to be someone else, another family maybe with a son or daughter who was raised to take this job on.

"How, Grandpa? There must be someone else. Or you're joking with me? I can't be the next 'peacekeeper.' There's no way."

Grandpa nodded his head and tended to his tea making. He poured out two cups and offered me a bit of honey while he said, "I understand that this is a shock but I promise you that I'm not lying nor am I joking. This is serious. You must take my place or else the treaty will be broken and the forest beings will roam freely."

Remembering the beast I saw earlier, I said, "They already are. So, how can you be controlling them if they're already loose on the streets?"

He looked up at me then with sad eyes as everything started to fall into place, "Are you sick, Grandpa?"

Taking my hand, he rubbed his callous fingers over the back of my hand and said, “The fairies have been aiding me so I could prolong this as much as possible for you and I’m sorry this has happened on your thirtieth birthday. I wish you could continue living your life the way you choose it but I’m afraid that I am running out of time. I won’t force this on you. You can choose to walk away if you wish...”

“But, the treaty will break,” I interrupted.

Grandpa nodded, “Yes, it will break and everything will return to what it once was centuries ago.”

“What if it doesn’t? What if everything will be okay and the humans aren’t afraid anymore?”

“Remember your friend, Rachel? How she froze and you couldn’t bring her back? That is fear. And though time does heal, I don’t think mankind is ready just yet.”

“But, didn’t you say something about needing a kiss to see the fairies? Wouldn’t everyone need to be kissed in order to see them?” I asked.

“Yes and no. Since the treaty is weakening, the boundaries are slowly falling around us. Rachel may not have seen anything but the feeling that something is there can be enough to make someone afraid. You are not bothered by it because your Mom taught you not to be afraid of it. And if the world was taught like how you were then everything will be fine but they are not. So, the fairies have put a cloak on all the forest beings just in case any one of them was accidentally spotted. You can only see them in all of their splendor after a single kiss but I’ll only allow that if you wish to open your eyes to it. ”

I absently sipped at my tea while I thought everything over. I had to make a choice but I didn't know which life I wanted. If I went back home, then I knew my life would continue at the same steady pace it has been and I would probably end up with a dog or two. But, if I stayed with Grandpa, who knew what would happen. I mean I haven't even seen any of these 'forest beings' since I stepped into the forest except for the beast. Did I want to though?

"Grandpa, can I have time to think about it?"

"Sure, I'll make up the spare bedroom and you can rest as long as you like," Grandpa said getting up to grab some blankets for me.

He left briefly to fix the room which gave me some time to myself to look out the window. Butterflies of Green and yellow lined the windowsill and seemed to have been watching us. When they saw me watching them, however, they quickly took flight. Behind them, I could see hills of forest rising in the distance. I thought I saw a sudden plume of birds and trees shake but Grandpa had come back already and was directing me to my room. Finally alone, I curled up under the covers and quickly fell asleep. I didn't realize how tired I was but I also hadn't seen the butterfly that I had followed into the forest earlier fly through the window and land onto the lamp.

The next day I awoke to the smell of bacon and eggs and the sense that I knew exactly what I had to do. I hurriedly washed my face and brushed my teeth with a spare toothbrush Grandpa had left out for me the night before. My stomach was growling and I knew that I had definitely skipped a meal or two. I followed my nose back to the kitchen and sat down at the table behind Grandpa who was busy tending to the bacon.

"Good morning, Grandpa. That sure smells good."

He jumped and the pan clattered on the stove a bit but he regained himself and smiled over at me, “You scared me, Jenny. I thought you were going to sleep through breakfast just like how you slept through dinner last night.”

“Who can deny bacon though?”

Grandpa stepped towards me with his pan and poured out half of the eggs onto my plate and gave me a few strips of bacon. He did the same to his plate then washed the pan and quickly joined me at the table. We ate in silence but all the while I could feel the tension from him as he was eager to hear of my decision. I knew I shouldn't prolong it.

“Grandpa, can we take a walk after we clean up?”

He looked up from his plate and smiled, “Of course, Jenny. I would love to walk with you.”

In a few minutes, we were washing the rest of the dishes and leaving them on the rack to dry. Grandpa put on his boots and we were soon out the door. The butterflies had come back and were following us but seeing that I wanted this moment to be private, Grandpa motioned for them to leave. As soon as they flew off, he held my hand in the crook of his arm and together we walked towards a lake not too far off. He led me to a bench under the shade of an oak tree and together we watch the ripples of the lake as ducks and fish tended to their breakfast and morning duties. The sun wasn't too high and offered a nice glow of warmth off of the water's surface.

“How much time do you have left?” I asked gazing out into the distance.

“I don't know, Jenny. I don't know.”

I nodded knowing that it might have been his response.

“Will the fairies stop helping you?”

“Maybe but I doubt that will happen. They have been good company ever since your Grandma passed away and then your Mom.”

“Are you afraid?”

Grandpa shook his head and looked at me. He touched my chin making me break my focus on a duck swimming past us and said, “Don’t you worry about me. I’ve lived a long life and now it’s time for me to move on.”

He wrapped his arms around me then and we stayed like that for a bit. I shut my eyes away from the lake and took in his warmth. I focused then on the pressure he placed around me enjoying the feeling of security. I didn’t want to breath for fear of losing it.

“I’m afraid,” I said in a whisper almost to myself but Grandpa heard it and held me even tighter.

“Don’t be. You’ll be fine and I’ll always be around in case you need me,” he whispered.

A tear fell from my eye but I didn’t bother to wipe it away. I wasn’t ready to let go yet but when I opened my eyes the butterfly from yesterday sat on top of my knee. I watched as the wings opened and shut softly until Grandpa loosened his hold around me and extended a finger towards it. Without hesitation, it crawled up on to his finger and closed its wings allowing him to hold it at eye level. It looked back at him as he looked at it then he held it close to his cheek. I could have sworn that I saw it kiss him before flying off to join the rest of the butterflies that now flew all around us.

I don’t know where they all came from once again but instead of swarming in chaos, they gently floated around us. Grandpa looked down at me in his arms and smiled with a tear in his eye. We hugged each other tighter until Grandpa stood up and took my hand. He held onto it as

he leaned towards me and kissed me on the cheek then once on my hand. I began to cry as I silently begged him not to go but he just smiled and wiped my tears away.

By the time he turned to take his first step towards the lake, our hands slipped apart and I hugged myself as I watched. The butterflies then flew closer to him and gently brushed his face with a kiss of their wings. When one had finished, it joined the rest as they swirled all around him in a colorful show. The last I saw of Grandpa was his gentle sweet face smiling back at me before the last of the butterflies hid him away from my sight. They stayed like that for a big until the crowd slowly began to flit away and into the trees close by. Grandpa was gone but a white butterfly flew up to me and rested upon my knee.

This butterfly was different from the others. It wasn't as big nor as brightly colored but amongst the varying colors of the rainbow, it stood out to me. On my knee, I watched the wings open and close. I smiled then knowing that he would be keeping his word and I knew it was time I decided.

I offered my finger to the white butterfly but it merely flew off my knee and around my head before landing on my shoulder. The butterfly from my birthday yesterday flew out from the others and hovered in the air in front of me until I let it land on my finger.

Taking a deep breath, I looked around once more then finally at the butterfly I held and said, "Kiss me."

In an instant, the butterfly followed by the others brushed against my nose, lips, eyes, cheeks and neck until each one had finally kissed me and flew off. A few stayed behind and as I blinked my eyes, I began to see that the butterflies were actually fairies and that the lake was actually surrounded by forest beings. I saw the wolf beast from earlier as well as a few griffins, a

dragon, a small herd of centaurs, dwarves, elves and many more all clapping and cheering while they watched me look in awe at all of them. In the lake, I even saw mermaids instead of fish and other strange water beings that I never knew about before.

I made a note to introduce myself personally to all of them but the clamor suddenly died down. The white butterfly had flew off of its perch on my shoulder and hovered just in front of my face. It brushed its wings on my nose then flew off towards the sky. Everyone watched as it flew higher and higher until it disappeared into the light. Then, one by one, once everyone's attention turned back to me, they bowed before me. It was then that I knew I was in the right place.