

Who Knows Where Butterflies Die

Based on true stories

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To the victims of oppression and war or
revolution who never made it back home.

Partial proceeds from
Who Knows Where Butterflies Die
will benefit victims of war and revolution.

Foreword

We have only one life to live and we must choose for ourselves how best to find meaning and purpose, how best to provide for oneself and family, and how to contribute to the common good. We consider ourselves lucky to have both liberty and chances to make the best life possible, and to live in comfort and security. We are concerned that the next generation will have the same or better opportunities than we enjoy and that they inherit a stable sustainable world. We must renew our economic and political orders to find solutions to problems like climate change and environmental degradation. However, we are challenged in our efforts to create solutions on a global scale by the lack of basic freedom and human rights that the majority of humanity must endure. Where rule by force exists, the will of the majority is silenced or oppressed in favor of the selfish interests of a ruthless minority.

Individuals have little prospect for self-determination under authoritarian regimes dominated by self-serving cliques, unrestrained by legal or moral considerations. Most go along to get along; all understand that dissent is fatal. Some opportunists co-operate with the regime for their own advantage, others settle old scores, take revenge or victimize others. If civilization is to find a way to solve problems on a global scale we must first find a way to liberate the 3/4 of people whose voices are suppressed and whose rights to self-determination are not yet secured. In any event, the story of one life might appear so unbelievable to others that it could sound like a fairy tale. This is one of them.

Who Knows Where Butterflies Die is based on true stories and written as an allegory to protect the identity of its characters.

Chapter 1

The Big Bang of Life

Since early morning, the kids had not been able to take their eyes off the big classic pendulum clock in the living room. It seemed like forever since their mother had gone to the hospital to give birth to their baby sister. And on that sunny spring day, they were told that their father was bringing them home. All three of them were glued to the window overlooking the street, anxiously counting down every minute to lay eyes on them. In the meantime, they bombarded their babysitter with hundreds of questions about babies.

Early afternoon, they saw their father's car turning onto their street. They immediately yelled "They're here!" to notify the babysitter while rushing to greet them. By the time they excitedly opened the door, their father had pulled in front of the house. The kids had missed their mother so much and were happy to see her again. As they saw her walking into the house with the baby in her arms, supported by their father's strong hold, they jumped up and down with joy.

It was a thrilling event for the entire family, especially for the children. They were so enthusiastically waiting to take their first peek at their baby sister, that they could hardly restrain themselves. A few times, they had to be pulled away from their mother's path by the babysitter to let her get to the baby's room first. Even though she was quite weak and exhausted, she clearly appreciated her children's excitement and curiosity. She kept sending them kisses in the air and waving at them with a big smile.

Finally they made it up the stairs and into the beautifully decorated baby's room. As soon as the mother placed the baby in her crib, it was time to show her off. All of them, even the babysitter, were stretching their necks to take a good look at the sleeping beauty. She was so tiny that she was almost lost within the folds of her soft pink blanket. She looked like a little princess as she lay safe and sound, surrounded by her family's love. "Wow," everyone said, admiring her beauty.

The baby's siblings, a sister and two brothers, didn't know what to think of her. At first, they'd thought she could play with them as soon as she was brought home. But seeing how tiny she was made it clear that they would have to wait for her to grow up a little before she could run around and play with them. The next thing they were all curious about was "what to call the baby."

It was a beautiful warm spring day. Nature had woken up and persuaded the earth to breathe, leaves to grow, and the flower-bearing plants to bloom. The playful birds were chirping and soaring in the sky. The air was fragrant and the streets colourful with fallen pink and white cherry blossoms. Most of all, butterflies were fluttering everywhere, complementing nature's beauty. Since she was born right in the middle of it all, they thought of a name that would be a reminder of such a fabulous season: "Butterfly." They all agreed that it was a most suitable name. Not only did it have the essence of the season, but it was also descriptive of such a stunning, delicate, tiny baby girl ...

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Butterfly and her family were living in their little corner in the capital city of Farawayland minding their own lives. Her parents were educated, intelligent, and well-travelled individuals who had seen life both inside and outside of the bubble of their homeland. They were dedicated to the well-being and education of their children not only in an academic but also a social sense. They tried to teach them to be open-minded and respectful of everyone's rights and boundaries. They wanted them to always live by high values and keep their integrity intact, for they believed that nothing was more important than one's dignity.

The mother was a wonderful and kind-hearted petite woman with shoulder-length, wavy, dark blonde hair, fair skin, and light hazel eyes. Her soft voice and never-fading smile had made her one of the most popular personalities amongst their extended relatives and neighbours. She had a good sense of humour and laughed often. Her laughter was contagious, making everyone laugh along with her in no time. Her mind was always occupied with concerns about the well-being of her husband and children, and she did her best to keep them happy at all times. Her husband was so proud of her and thought of her as the light of their home. Whenever she was away, he would leave all the lights on to illuminate the house all through her absence.

The father, a strong, tall, and successful well-known businessman, had the main priority of providing the best for his family. Along with his wife, he was running his own business and working hard to provide a safe, comfortable life for everyone at home. They both were loyal and respectful to each other; always supporting one another to make the pillars of their home as strong as they could possibly be. Family values were important to them, and for that reason, they were trying to be at their best at all times as role models for their children. They wanted them to have a good image of a strong and healthy family life so they could practice it in their own lives. The two were always so loving and caring towards each other that they became known as the "lovebirds."

Their homeland, Farawayland, was home to many different cultures, dialogues, and ethnicities living together as a nation. To the north, it was as green as an emerald, surrounded by majestic tall mountains, spotted with lakes like platinum plates. Long, wide rivers brought life-giving water to every corner of the land, and in some high elevations, they had created breathtaking waterfalls. The wet climate regularly washed the crisp, fresh, evergreen leaves and seasonal shrubs, making them shine even in a single ray of sunlight.

The northern people were mostly blond, with fair skin and light-coloured eyes. Going south, the land became dryer, until transformed into sculpted deserts. Most people in the rural areas were nomadic herdsmen and farmers, living in the remote highlands or migrating along with the changing weather much as they had for thousands of years. Most of their economic lives were based upon their farmlands and the sheep they raised. The long roads going through the mountains connecting Farawayland to the rest of the world brought together traders and merchants from all corners of the known world. The diversity of the climate, landscape, ethnicity, and means of livelihood created a multicultural kingdom unlike any other.

People from all regions of the great Farawayland were courageous and strong in body and spirit, but they were also kind and good-natured. They were patriotic and willing to defend their beloved homeland, with their lives if necessary.

The kingdom was enormous and rich, with natural resources underground and in its waters. These, combined with its vast cultural assets, were more than enough to provide for the people, if managed intelligently and equitably. However, at one point in time, the kingdom was ruled by a fanatic tyrant who considered himself to be the absolute power in Farawayland. He called himself the Great Ruler. He neglected the poor and disadvantaged in favour of his wealthy friends and collaborators. He had inherited power from his father, who had taken power in a military coup, and his regime lacked legitimacy and widespread support. His efforts to modernise and westernise the country were most apparent in the urban centres and among the economic elite, and this intensified the many divisions between urban and rural, rich and poor, new and old.

Because of his cynical state of mind and alienation from his people, he had no strategy for good governance and instead relied on terror and oppression to suppress opposition. Instead of sharing the wealth of the land with his people, he kept them in constant poverty to make them feel dependent and occupied. They were so busy providing for their basic necessities that they had neither time nor resources to oppose his tyranny or organise to improve their condition.

Over time, the combination of the Great Ruler's insecurity, obsession with power, and fear of losing it became so out of control that he created a circle of his own confidants, called "Vigilants," to be his ears and eyes and protect him from his own people. Their job was to live among the commoners, spying on them to detect any plot they might have against the Great Ruler and his family. The much-feared secret law enforcers alienated the public, kept the opposition underground, and created a false impression of stability. The country was dangerously riven by factions and inherently unstable, ripe for change when the right conditions occurred.

The Vigilants were well taken care of by the monarch, and became so spoiled with their lavish lifestyles that they were anxious to keep them perpetually—at any price. They also knew that as long as the Great Ruler kept his throne, they could continue to have their lucrative positions and lavish lives. As a result, they became selfish, vicious tormenters without mercy, more than anyone could imagine. They were everywhere, disguised as ordinary citizens—dressed as

friends, subordinates, or gardeners—and as they mingled in the texture of the society, they watched everyone like hawks.

The Vigilants created an intense fear over the entire empire, suppressing everyone to keep quiet, obey, and live as they enforced. Those who did not comply were sent to the Great Ruler's awful jails, where they suffered until they died. The oppression was so great that hardly anybody dared to talk about the Great Ruler and anything related to him, his family, and his governing system in any place at any time. To protect their children in case of a trap, parents warned them to stay away from those who talked about him, his family, and his Vigilants; furthermore, they insisted that they never mention his name anywhere at all, not even to their closest friends.

Over time, such a strong empire turned into an invisible prison, confining millions of its hospitable, brave citizens. Hindered, this intelligent, sophisticated nation was desperately waiting for a sudden change while watching the rest of the world progress far ahead of them in many ways.

Nonetheless, even in such a prolonged oppressive atmosphere, there were many courageous, bright freedom fighters who had no fear of speaking their minds. The regime broke their pens whenever they wrote about the ongoing ugly truth about the covered up misdeeds of their governing system, but the freedom fighters continued to pick up their broken pens, and their writing became bolder and louder. Their goal was to inform the people of the tyranny and inefficiency of their ruler and his supporters for their time. They had no concerns of being captured by the Vigilants and kept in the Great Ruler's horrifying dungeons. The dungeons were said to be the darkest places of all, smelling of rotten flesh and blood, and they were intentionally filled with flesh-eating rats in order to manage the bodily remains of horrendous, repeated torture. The freedom fighters believed their moral missions were greater than their lives, and by sacrificing themselves, they were hoping to restore their nation's deserved freedom and dignity.

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In such a despotic time, Butterfly was growing up amid generous love and care from her family members, relatives, and friends. She was too young to know what was happening in the real world. She was just enjoying being beautiful and the centre of her family's attention as well as being spoiled with attention from everyone in her world.

She was always dressed in fashionable clothing and groomed nicely for occasions. Her wavy dark blond hair was usually kept long. Her mother liked to comb it away from her face and secure it with decorative snaps. She wanted her daughter's big, serene, hazel eyes, enhanced with long eyelashes, to shine through at all times. With her adventurous personality, Butterfly soon became an active participant in her siblings' play, making their wish come true much faster than they expected.

They lived in a nice, three-story old brick house in one of the greenest parts of the capital city. It was surrounded by established cherry and walnut trees. It was in the shade during long, hot summers and in the sunlight in cold winters. The master bedroom and a study for everyone to quietly read or think were located on the third floor. Four bedrooms were on the second floor, all of their entrances making way to a long, wide fenced hallway overlooking the living room below. The cherry-red wooden railing along the hallway continued on both sides of a spiral staircase down to the living room, right by the fireplace. A chandelier, hanging from the ceiling in the curve of the stairs, shined onto a big tropical plant beneath, adding glamour to the entire space. The living room area, which was connected to the dining room and the open kitchen, was spacious and could accommodate large groups of people for gatherings.

The entire house was lovely, comfortable, and well maintained, but the most favourable part to all was the backyard. This was where everyone enjoyed making many fun memories, especially throughout the hot days. It had a big swimming pool, with a turquoise-coloured base, as the focal point of the garden, serving many different purposes. For one thing, it was important to the overall climate of the house in the heat of the long summers. It stretched north to south, almost the length of the backyard, in the usual direction of the wind. When the air passed over the water, it cooled down and moistened before drifting through the interior of the house, working like a natural air conditioner. For another thing, it was like heaven for the family and their visitors, particularly for children who could never get enough of playing in the water.

Large, rectangular gardens stretched alongside the length of the pool. There was always something blooming, no matter what time of the year it was. Especially in the summertime; they were often loaded with colourful pansies, lilies, cyclamens, assorted fuchsias, gladiolas, red azaleas, and many different shrubs bearing small flowers.

To the right of the house, facing south, there was a large honeysuckle vine. It was heavy with aromatic, white flowers twining over a tall wooden arch made by Butterfly's father. It had grown so big that a large portion of it was overflowing to the other side of the wall leading to the back alley. The kids made necklaces or bracelets with the flowers by passing string through them to either wear or give to their friends and teachers as gifts. Past the honeysuckle vine were the twining grape vines, on a separate wooden arch bearing fruit. The juicy, large, green seedless grapes grew through the mesh holes and hung from the arch in large bunches. They had to be shielded from the birds and bugs until they were ready to be picked. To protect them, Butterfly's mother placed them one by one inside little sacks made of delicate, sheered, natural cotton while they were still growing on the stems.

To the left of the pool, in the other garden bed, there was another handmade, wooden arch. That was to support two bushy rose trees covered with big, velvety, pink and red scented flowers. Their fragrance, especially in the afternoon after water had been sprayed everywhere, was so fresh and therapeutic that if the family closed their eyes, they felt like they were in heaven.

At the far end of the garden grew a humongous, century-old mulberry tree. This tree was one of the most native trees in all of Farawayland. With its huge, rough trunk and long, bushy shade-bearing branches stretched to all sides, it had a majestic presence. Its leaves were dark green and shaped like wide ovals with pointed tips, and its fruit was light yellowish beige with long, round bodies made of tiny sacks filled with delicious light syrup when ripened. From dawn to dusk, all kinds of birds feasted on that fruit, more than any other ones in the garden. The tree itself had nests of many different birds and kept them sheltered from the scorching heat and predators. The ground underneath that tree was often covered with sticky, rotting berries that had to be washed away frequently to keep the bugs away.

Picking mulberries was a happy family time in Farawayland, especially at Butterfly's house. When friends and relatives arrived to that function, they would usually start by chitchatting over a cup of tea. Soon they would start shaking the mulberries from the tree while joking and laughing the entire time, concluding the evening with dinner and dancing, having fun until late at night.

To get ready for the arrival of the guests, Butterfly's father would first clean the backyard with a long hose, spraying the plants all over to cool them down, which created a pleasant atmosphere scented with fruits and flowers.

On the other side of the yard, over a wide terrace, her mother would set the tables with a variety of home-made pastries, cakes, assorted nuts, and their garden's fruits, also brewing the typical tea. The naturally scented, black tea was brewed in a special, tall gold-plated water boiler inherited from her mother. Water boilers came in different shapes and sizes; some were elaborately carved with such intricate designs that many people chose to use them just for decoration. The traditional ones used coal for heat, but the more modern ones were electric. They were made of three parts: a base to provide the heat; a large middle compartment to hold the water to boil with a tap at the front; and a flat top to use as a platform for the teapot to brew.

Getting the best colour and taste out of tea leaves when brewing tea was a traditional skill that one had to master to succeed. The tea was usually served in clear cups in order to see its colour, and was usually served with sugar cubes on the side. A perfectly brewed tea had a dark cherry colour, and its aroma would fill the air as it was being poured into cups. Some would drink it strong, and others would dilute it with some hot water from the water boiler's tap, adjusting it to their liking.

When it came to picking the mulberries, a couple of adults would climb the tree to shake the juicy fruit from the branches. Others would hold a clean wide sheet or fine mesh under the tree to catch the falling berries, which could be as large as two inches long. To avoid getting sticky, they tried to avoid the berries landing on their hair and clothes. However, those in the tree would still manage to catch some of the guests unguarded when a loaded branch was shaken, making everyone laugh. Typically a few kilograms of berries were shaken off each time, and

they were always shared generously with neighbours, including those who did not make it to the event.

Those days in particular were Butterfly's favourite ones. For one thing, she loved having her friends and relatives around. And for another, it was the time she could show off her ability of climbing the mulberry tree and wobbling a few branches when no other kids could.

Chapter 2

The Faces Behind the Masks

Regardless of what was going on within the boundaries of the people's homes, life was no longer as wonderful as it should have been in Farawayland. The suffering from the oppression created by its dictatorial government was growing to an unbearable point. The authorities had already banned most of the existing books that had any notion of objection to their ruling system, with severe punishment if found in anybody's possession. To brainwash the people, they had also republished schoolbooks to control what the youth were learning. On top of that, they had total control of the communication systems and media and what was being broadcast. They were quite afraid of the nation using the mass communication avenues to organise themselves against them.

The outrageous limitations to freedom of any kind made the majority of people, especially the youth and academic elite, feel frustrated, not to mention humiliated. Knowing the world was watching them suffer without doing anything significant about it, they were convinced that the timing was not quite right for its superpowers to intervene. The power bloc was probably benefiting from the situation so much that they did not care about the excruciating pain that the silent victims were enduring.

Butterfly's father occasionally had the opportunity to get his hands on some of the authentic, banned books to keep for a short time before passing them on. He then shared their stories with his young family, keenly but tactfully, just to inform them of the world they were living in to prepare them for the possible worst.

The storytelling would usually start at dinnertime and continue in the living room, sometimes until late at night. During this time, they would reconnect as a family and get into the hearts and minds of each other by sharing memories and laughter. Most of all, they would demystify the ongoing social and global problems without having the fear of a Vigilant spying on them.

In her early years, Butterfly was much too young to understand fully the depth of what her family was discussing almost every night. In those days, she preferred to sit in her father's lap, reading her own book. However, as seasons passed and she metamorphosed into an intelligent, informed little girl, she was learning enough to have a good understanding of what was happening in her world. By about school age, she was already quite cognizant of the tormenting monarchs and leaders and their benefitters and how they could damage a nation like a malicious cancer in the heart of a country. But that was not the only thing she was learning. Over time, she also became inquisitive about foreign countries and how their citizens were living their lives

in peace. Her curiosity grew by the day, and soon she desired to explore the world outside the prison of her homeland.

There was a beautiful kingdom not too far from Farawayland, called Otherland. It had quite a rich culture, and had once been raided and ruled by some barbaric, alien dictators for a long, long time. Butterfly's father had travelled to that land a few times in recent years. He had brought her many fabulous souvenirs, one of which was a large poster of a couple dancing to ethnic music. She became so fascinated by that culture that she could not stop thinking and reading about it. She wanted to know how life could be after gaining victory over such tormenting occupiers. And the more she found out about it, the more she became enthusiastic about exploring it herself. However, every time she asked her parents to let her live there a bit, they would say, "No way; you're too young for that, and the time's not right to be away from home either."

"But how long should I wait, then?" she kept asking. "When do we know what's going to happen to our kingdom? What should we do in the meantime?" The struggle stretched throughout an entire year. Butterfly became sadder and sadder by the day and increasingly withdrew from family gatherings.

* * *

It was winter solstice, the longest night of the year. The weather was freezing cold, and a snowstorm had already dumped half a metre of snow. As predicted, it was still coming down hard, causing most roads to close.

As a matter of tradition, on winter solstice night, Butterfly's family would invite many of their friends and relatives for a late night party to celebrate. But because of the weather, they had to cancel their event that year.

On the day leading up to solstice night, Mother stayed home, taking a day off work to cook one of her most authentic, fancy, gourmet foods to celebrate that special night with her family. It was about dinnertime and Father had just come home. As he was making a fire in the fireplace, he commented on how awful the weather and roads were. Shortly after, he went outside and brought in more firewood, enough to last the whole night, placing the logs in a brass container by the fireplace. He then kept readjusting the burning logs and monitoring them until the fire was nice and stable.

Standing at the foot of the spiral stairs, he called his children to come down from their rooms for dinner. Mother had already set the dinner table well in advance, using one of her loveliest white china sets, patterned with red roses, and her antique well-polished silver cutlery. For winter solstice, as was typical, she put a big basket of unseasonal fresh fruits like cut watermelon, pomegranates, and grapes on the coffee table in the living room. In addition, there were some assorted, roasted nuts and a big bowl of raw hazelnuts in the shell to play a special game, as it was also customary to keep busy in a fun way on the longest night of year.

The black tea, as usual, was brewing on the gold-plated water boiler, and a tray of home-made tasty sweets beside it was tempting everyone.

The mouth-watering smell of the roasted lamb and assorted vegetables sprinkled with aromatic condiments had already filled the air. The food was accompanied with a tray of special long-grain fluffy rice, topped with plenty of butter and saffron. As a side dish, it was complemented with some fresh bread and a big bowl of green salad mixed with generous amounts of extra-virgin olive oil and fresh lime juice. To finish it off, she had decorated it with fresh mint and added a couple of spoonfuls of raw sliced almonds and sunflower seeds and some soaked walnuts.

Father and the children sat around the rectangular wooden dinner table in their usual spots, waiting patiently for their mother to sit down before getting their first taste of the food. Father knew his wife was particular about doing things in her own style when serving food. To buy her some more time, he tried to keep the kids busy. He started by making funny comments about silly things that had happened to him during the day. Everyone was laughing hard except Butterfly. However, as everyone knew, she was trying to make a statement about not yet having her wish granted, and he ignored her for the time being. Eventually, Mother was ready to sit down. She took a last glance at everyone with a big smile and asked if anyone needed anything else. They all thanked her and complimented her on the amazing food, saying that they appreciated the effort she had put into preparing it.

Dinnertime had always been a happy time for everyone, especially on a solstice night. Everyone seemed to be enjoying the meal and giving their mother lots of praise for preparing it all, with the exception of Butterfly. She was looking down and quietly taking small bites of her food without much participation in any of the conversation. The parents had some news for her but were waiting for the right moment to announce it.

On that night, in spite of his effort to cover it up, Father was looking exceptionally contemplative. He was often pausing momentarily while talking, as if he had lost his train of thought, and then he would recompose himself and continue without noticing it. Only his wife could notice how emotional he was and what he was going through, for she was feeling the same way herself.

Their children were growing up so fast, and the parents knew that soon they would take off to take control of their own destinies, one after another. They were quite emotional that their family life was at the point of changing forever. Most of all, their ritual dinner gatherings would soon be remembered as something they “used to do” as a family. They knew that they had come to the stage of their parenting that soon would leave them doomed just to live with their precious memories. However, that was not the only worry on their minds. They had anxieties about the possible revolution and how it might affect them as a family.

The fire in the fireplace was dancing high, colourfully, and creating a cosy, pleasant atmosphere on such a freezing night. As the sound of the storm often dominated their conversation,

everyone seemed to be feeling safe at home and happy to be together. The clock was ticking—tick, tick, tick, tick—urging the parents to overcome their emotions and say what they had been preparing for weeks to say on that night.

Father was not showing much of an appetite for the delicious food. Before finishing his dinner, he wiped his mouth with his table napkin and leaned back in his chair for a moment. He was looking pensive, as if he had doubts about pronouncing what he had planned to say. Shortly after, in a caring, gentle voice, he invited everyone to pay attention to him.

“There’re times when we’re so involved in our everyday lives that we forget how quickly time’s passing by,” said Father in a solemn tone, trying to connect with his children’s eyes. “We assume that tomorrow will always return to give us a chance to do what we didn’t do or finish today. However, tomorrow may never come for some of us ... or it may not return the way we wanted it to.”

The kids appeared to sense that something serious might be about to happen; their father was sounding so different. Perhaps the revolution had already happened. They all glanced at each other and ate quietly as they continued giving their full attention to what he was saying.

“You’re growing up too quickly for our liking,” continued Father, “but we cannot possibly challenge time. Soon you’ll be ready to take over your own destinies, make your own decisions, and live however and wherever you like. I just hope that you all already know or will know someday soon how important the role of a good family is in raising children. It can affect the lives and the directions the children take, determining whether they succeed or fail in their lives. It takes a lot of devotion for a good parent to raise a good son or a daughter. If you knew how difficult life is out there, you’d never want to grow up so fast and leave home.” He paused a few moments as if assessing what he was going to say next. “What I want to say is that a good family’s like a tall, sturdy mountain, and you may not be able to appreciate its significance and grandeur while standing on it.”

Everyone was all ears and quietly trying to digest what he was saying. He put his napkin down by his plate and crossed his arms on his chest to hide his emotions. The children had never seen their father like that. They were wondering what might have happened to make him talk so seriously that night.

“Oh well,” continued Father after taking a deep breath while shaking his head. “We didn’t live with our parents forever, nor can we expect you to live with us all your lives. When your time comes to leave home, your mother and I have to just rely on the quality of education and insights we’ve provided you while in our care. And ... trust ourselves that we have done well enough that you will do well on your own.

He took another deep breath and repositioned himself while slightly pushing back on his chair. By hooking his index fingers into the edge of his belt, he let his arms hang to his sides so no one could see them trembling. A moment later, he turned to Butterfly and stared at her, trying to

capture her eyes. She was looking down and quietly chewing her food while drawing random shapes in circular motions with her fork on the table. Everyone's eyes had followed Father's, and they stopped on her too. Her mother, who was observing everyone lovingly, quietly called to her to bring her attention to her father. "Butterfly," she said, "it's time to smile, my dear, because we've good news for you."

Without saying a word, she looked at her mother indifferently and waited to hear the news. Mother glanced at her husband to get his confirmation to continue. Then, while continuing to offer her famous soft, nurturing smile, she announced in a caring voice that they had decided to grant her long-standing wish. They told her that they were ready and willing to take her to Otherland themselves to help her settle there for a short while, just to feed her curiosity.

Butterfly froze in her seat. Her jaw dropped, and her eyes bulged. She took a deep breath and looked around the table to see whether she was being tricked. Everyone looked as surprised as she, waiting to see how much truth was in it and how she would respond. "Are you serious ...?" asked Butterfly with uncertainty.

"Yes," said her parents at the same time.

They confirmed that if everything went well, she would be visiting her dream kingdom by the upcoming August. She turned to her father to see his reaction. Through her tear-filled eyes, she saw him nodding his head in confirmation as he opened his arms to give her the first hug. She screamed with joy. She jumped out of her seat and ran towards her father to throw herself into his arms. She started crying loudly with delight and was so emotional that she could not let go of him for quite a while. Following that long hug, the rest of her family hugged her dearly and congratulated her while bombarding her with lots of good wishes.

"We understand that this is the most significant thing to happen to you so far," said Father, pointing to Butterfly once the others went back to their seats to finish their dinner. "We also know you must be very excited about it; however ..." He paused briefly, and rubbed his face and eyes with both hands, and brushed back his grey hair with his fingers to cover up his emotions. Then he pushed his unfinished dinner plate away and rested his elbows on the table, readjusting himself in his seat before continuing.

"Honestly," continued Father, "your mother and I don't know why we're letting you go away from home when you're only thirteen years old, even if it's only for a short time, not to mention at this unpredictable, sensitive time. Recently, there is not a day that I don't see demonstrators rushing to the streets, shouting their wishes and clashing with the authorities. I guess we agreed to it because we don't know when whatever is due to happen will happen, and we believe that life has to go on."

It was a long time until the following August, and Butterfly grew worried that her trip might get cancelled because of uncontrollable reasons. "Is it possible to stop whatever's happening now?" asked Butterfly desperately.

“No, sweetheart,” responded Father while shaking his head. “When the tension gets to a certain point, nobody can stop it. From time to time, the course of history changes for many different reasons. We’ve been reading about them and discussing them in our own safe private corner just to get a taste of what has been going on in our world. At this point in time, our world is our own kingdom; and as we speak, it is suffering from many unwanted ordeals. We’re far from being at peace and further from being stable.”

Suddenly, the joy of hearing the good news disappeared from Butterfly’s face. A big frown replaced her grin, and signs of frustration became noticeable in her voice. “Have we ever had a good ruler before?” asked Butterfly. “It seems to me we’ve been having problems with all of them!”

“Of course we’ve had good rulers before,” said Father. “You must know that. We’ve had many wonderful rulers who were the greatest to their subjects. They expanded Farawayland’s empire beyond anyone’s belief in their times. They shared the kingdom’s treasures with their people and had their castles open to everyone to seek justice every day. The carvings in the ruins of their castles’ walls still show how their subjects would line up to talk to their ruler in person, something that’s close to impossible these days. There’re many precious books written about them, their ruling systems, and what they’ve done for their people. If we could just have access to the authentic versions of those books ...” He closed his eyes and dropped his head down upon his chest as if reviewing a vivid image of that time in his mind. “Such a glorious and powerful time our kingdom had then,” uttered Father, almost as if whispering to himself. A moment later, he lifted his head to continue. “Even today, our kingdom is known for its majesty in the world. They are indeed the iconic symbols and pride of this nation forever. If we could have just continued having similar rulers and rulers, our kingdom would’ve been the empire of the world today.”

“But the way we’re represented in the world’s media today,” said the older brother, who was the eldest child and in his last year of high school, “is quite prejudiced and misleading, not to mention unfair. They lead people to believe that we’re an outdated nation of low intelligence.”

“Preposterous,” interjected Father.

“They judge us by our appearance, which has nothing to do with who we really are,” said the younger brother.

“I think that’s because we’re forced to hide behind our veils,” said the older sister with frustration. “If we had the freedom they have, we’d have the chance to show them what we truly are about. They must be quite confused by what the media feeds them.”

“Whoever thinks we’re an outdated, unintelligent populace is indeed too uneducated about his or her world,” said Father. “They’re too oblivious of the world’s true history. They’re blind to the truth and incapable of digging it out themselves. If they were wise enough to see beyond our made-up image, forced by the benefitters and the superpowers, they could see how our

brave people are losing their lives under severe torture that challenges them to preserve our true identity.”

“We were not just famous for the size of our empire at the time,” said Mother. “Being one of the most ancient nations, we were also a role model to the rest of the world in many ways. They copied everything from our fashion to our ruling system and learned from our literature and inventions. Those who think we’re outdated by their bigoted standards must go back to school.” Everyone laughed aloud. “I’m serious,” she continued. “They must educate themselves as to what oppression can do to people. Soon they’d realise that they wouldn’t be any different if that happened to them too.”

“With all that keeps happening to us, I think we’re still doing well in keeping our language and culture intact,” said the older brother. “We didn’t suffer just from the internal barbaric rulers. We’ve also had the most barbaric merciless, occupiers invade our kingdom from time to time. They walked over our dead and burned our precious historical sites, libraries, and cities on their path to the heart of our capital city, watching them burn with no mercy. And some of them managed to rule over us for centuries, trying hard to change our customs, culture, and language, but as we know, to no avail.”

“Thanks to our brave fighters, poets, and writers,” said Father. “They’ve been the ones who did not let that shameful intrusion impact our identity. Yes, we’ve survived through the reign of many different tyrannical rulers, and today we’re stuck with this one—someone who’s nothing but a marionette, a ruler that’s not even of royal blood!”

“What difference does it make for a ruler to be of royal blood, aside from inheriting the crown?” asked Mother.

“I guess nothing; you’re right,” responded Father. “Having royal blood has nothing to do with whether a ruler’s a just person for the role, but it could raise doubts on how he got to that post. To me, the important factor for a ruler is to be fair and generous to his subjects. A ruler must have a human heart to fit his role, and a modern mind to meet the needs of his subjects in a changing world. Otherwise, a bad apple’s a bad apple, no matter where it was grown. I honestly dare to say that our kingdom has seen it all so far, yet because of the bravery of our people, we’re still standing proud. The good thing is that nothing’s forever. All these rulers and rulers and leaders of every kind come and go in many forms and shapes and hats and names, but our nation stays the same.”

“I believe that the worse the ruling government, the more united people become against it,” said the older brother.

“As a result,” commented Mother, “the good ones live in the hearts of their people forever and the bad ones just fill up our history books with their cruel crime stories. They’ll be damned by whoever reads about them, mind you, even by their own descendants.”

“Has our ruler done anything good for the people at all?” asked Butterfly.

“Oh, sure ...” said Father. “He’s actually done a few good things. He’s built some roads and bridges and has updated some rules that have benefited some rural people. However, to keep his power, he’s tortured and killed so many innocent, intelligent, brave people and made so many families suffer for so long. Because of that, most people choose to remember him due to his misdeeds.”

“Are the Great Ruler’s children criminals too?” asked Butterfly.

“The children,” exclaimed Mother. “Oh, no! Poor children! They’re innocent victims too. They’re too young to understand what’s happening around them. I don’t think they’ve even seen life beyond their castle’s walls yet. They’re as innocent as you are, my dear. If anything happens to that family, my heart goes to those children.”

“Yeah, they’re too young to have been polluted with autocracy yet,” said Father. “However, if their monarchy lasts long enough for them to grow up in that system, soon they will learn everything. In most cases, they start doing outrageous crimes by learning ways to protect themselves within their own circle of power freaks. If the revolution happens, and if they survive the process, they’d be the ones who’d get hurt the most. Life after revolution is far worse for the surviving children of a ruler than it is for ordinary children. Once they’ve grown up in exile, if they care about their image and are sensitive to their title loss, they feel the pressure of the world’s judgment the most. The shame of what happened to their monarchy because of their parents’ fault might drive them to self-destruction.”

“I hope that doesn’t ever happen to the children of our ruler,” said Mother. “I love them as a mother. I still remember the announcements of their births and the excitement that created. I do not wish to see any harm come to them.”

“I don’t want anything to happen to our princes and princesses either,” said Butterfly. “I just don’t appreciate a leader or ruler taking away my freedom and controlling my life and future for his benefit. I don’t want to be taken as collateral to fulfill anybody’s ambitions for power. I’ve been given only one life and should own the right to live it in peace while enjoying my freedom.”

“I feel the same way,” said the younger brother. “I don’t appreciate being manipulated by any powerful third parties either. This definitely has to change.”

Father rubbed his forehead before saying, “Making a change isn’t easy. It doesn’t happen overnight either. The tension reaches an uncontrollable point before it explodes ... and then boom! It changes the course of history and our lives along with it. And once it explodes, it’s like a volcano; unfortunately, its eruption burns wet and dry together.”

“We must be far away from that explosion because not much seems to be happening just yet,” said the younger brother, looking around the table to see if anybody else was in agreement.

“It may look quiet on the surface, but there’s lots going on secretly as we speak,” responded Father. “As I said earlier, every day I see some protesters bursting into the streets and yelling angrily. They make a bit of dust here and there, but they’re quickly and forcefully made to scatter by the authorities. Nonetheless, they gather again and form their demonstration elsewhere fearlessly. If it continues, it might get out of the authorities’ control—and it might end up being the revolution we’re waiting for.”

The children looked at each other. So far, they’d been thinking everything bad was mainly happening in the books. All of a sudden, it seemed they might soon be living through some of those horrifying stories. They became worried about the unknown and what might happen to them in case of a revolution. Butterfly was the most worried, for her trip to Otherland was dependent on what happened between now and summer. She started interrupting everyone with her numerous questions.

“What happens in a revolution?” asked Butterfly nervously. “How long does it take to be over? Do they choose a new ruler right away?”

“Slow down, my dear,” said Father. “We’ve already been talking about all that from time to time. It’s hard to see or predict what might happen during a revolution. Things get so messy so fast, and that provides a perfect platform for those who are waiting to take advantage of it. I doubt we’d be able to have a genuine revolution and elect a genuine leader for our country. Even though our people have been working hard to change this government, lots of things are cooking outside the borders. Most likely, those superpowers have been working on it for a long time too, and are just waiting for a suitable time to implement their selfish plots.”

“I’m confused now,” said the older sister. “The revolution is done by the suffering people or by the greedy superpowers?”

“I wish there was a simple answer to that,” said Father while brushing his moustache. “I don’t believe anything would be happening in the world without the superpowers having a role in it. The world has become so interlinked that the impact of whatever happens is global. In our case, I believe our ruler was an appointed leader, supported by the superpowers. However, due to his incompetency, he has lost control of the kingdom to his commanders-in-chief who were pulling his strings. Now the superpowers cannot just replace him with somebody else or their role in it will be revealed. To achieve what they’re after, they’ll just add to the existing oppression in the country until the people rise up against their ruler. At some point, when things are quite ripe, they’ll kick the unwanted ruler out and bring in their new marionette to facilitate their plans. In the process, the commoners think they’ve succeeded in getting rid of their oppressor.”

“Wow, it makes your head spin,” said the younger son.

“Oh, sure,” answered Father. “If the superpowers want to get rid of a ruler or a leader of a country for their own benefit, they’ve no mercy on anybody whatsoever. They’ve countless

ways of penetrating the systems of their targeted countries to augment the ongoing tensions, resulting in bringing the unwanted governments to their knees.”

“And that’s what’s happening to us as we speak,” said the older son. “If our ruler were not such a power freak and more worried about losing his crown than losing the trust of his nation, we wouldn’t have to be where we are now. As we speak, the superpowers are walking all over us to make us cry louder in order to disable our government and get rid of it diplomatically. Who knows who they already have on their leash to govern over us afterwards!”

“I wonder who would become servants to the superpowers by betraying their own country and people?” asked the older sister. “How could they live lives with dignity and honour?”

“Those who have sold their souls to Satan for power and prosperity,” said Mother. “They’re the ones who may be known to you and me—and even have our trust—but are hidden behind convincing masks. They’re the ones who’ve let the superpowers deprive our country of its wealth and integrity in return for protection, and in order to keep the power and fill up their bottomless pockets.”

“Well, how do we know who’s the best person to vote for in the case of a revolution?” asked Butterfly.

“When a country is in chaos,” said Father, “it’s hard to really know who’s who. In such situations, you suddenly see many different individuals and parties surfacing and claiming to be the most caring for the people’s needs. However, history shows that they’re not really what they claim to be or do for people when they gain power. Like many others, they’re just after the people’s votes to take control of the country. They’re just hopeful that by being generous in their promises, they can fish from murky waters. Those unknown – more or less - small groups have neither the means, nor the support they need to succeed in their motion and to maintain it afterwards. I wouldn’t be surprised at all if they’re also on the superpowers’ leash, to be used by them to help beat their competitors and come to power. If it happens, I bet you that as soon as they start showing their true faces, the nation will feel the need for another revolution to get rid of them.”

“Now I feel so disappointed,” said the older brother. “I’ve been hoping that the revolution will happen as soon as possible, so we can get to the next stage of our lives and taste the peace and freedom we’ve been waiting for so long. But it seems there would be so many power plays that I’m afraid our country would fall into the hands of the wrong people, and our situation would get worse than what it is now.”

“If that happens,” said the younger brother, “we would need a miracle to get us out of that mess.”

“That’s true,” said Father. “The goal of a revolution is to change things for the better, but if the country falls into the hands of the wrong people, our destination to freedom will go sideways.”

Meanwhile, innocent hard-working people like us, with small families and big dreams, would become collateral damage in the process, and we wouldn't even be acknowledged!"

"After all that sacrifices, if the result of the revolution turns out to be different than we expected, it'll all be for nothing ...!" said the older brother.

"I don't mind sacrificing my life for a better future for my family and country," said the younger son, "but I would feel very disappointed if my blood and my parents' sacrifices to raise me were to go to waste."

"Well, that's what we're hoping won't happen to our people," said Father.

"I don't think anything will happen to the Great Ruler," said the older sister. "He has been a ruler for so long that he must have learned how to protect his throne by now."

"Not quite so," responded Father. "If the decision's made by the superpowers for him to go, no matter how rooted or invincible he thinks he is, he won't last; especially if he lacks the support of his nation."

"That must be why they panic and start killing their own citizens," said the older son. "Either they're hoping to subdue their uprising, or they want to leave such a mess behind that things won't be that easy for the one who takes over afterwards."

"Umm, the food is so delicious," said Butterfly suddenly interrupting the flow of the conversation. "Thank you, Mom, for making it. I sure will miss your cooking when I'm away."

"I'm glad you're enjoying it," said Mother, taking the empty food tray back to the kitchen to bring more.

"You've never cooked before," said the older sister. "I wonder how you're going to survive?"

"I'll learn how to then," said Butterfly.

"I wonder how that food's going to taste," said her younger brother teasingly. "I'm glad I don't have to taste it." Everyone laughed.

"Then you won't know what you'd be missing," responded Butterfly cleverly.

"Cooking's not that hard," said Mother as she placed the food tray back on the table. "It just takes a bit of experience. After all, whatever you put your heart to, it will be good."

The steam rising from the hot food was enticing everyone to go for another helping, everyone except Father. He had retrieved his plate but still seemed quite pensive while playing with his food.

Butterfly interrupted the silence. "If a ruler is so powerful that he can have anything he wants in his kingdom, I don't understand why he has to be a bad ruler. If he's nice to his people, everyone would definitely support him against the mean superpowers, right?"

"Who knows what's really going on behind a ruler's castle walls," responded Father. "Our ruler, for example, is a ruler all right, but I don't believe that he has much control over his throne, as I said before. I believe he's dancing with many different forces. The superpowers, of course, play a big role without a doubt, but his strings are also being pulled by some of his own family members, military commanders, and top Vigilants. They all are taking advantage of his incompetency in order to benefit themselves."

"I'm totally with you on the fact that our ruler is a bit inefficient for his role," said Mother with a disappointed tone. "And I cannot agree more that he's also surrounded with some greedy, vicious people who're taking advantage of him. Nevertheless, the Great Ruler knows only whatever's reported to him. He cannot walk among his citizens to know what everyone's doing and how they're living. His close circle of trusted individuals, who are supposed to keep him updated, might bring him distorted news. They must've scared him off with the false impression that his throne's in danger. I truly believe that most of the royal crimes are committed at the order of some of his greedy family members and ruthless Vigilants without his even knowing it."

"That's the point, Mom," said the younger brother. "If a ruler doesn't know what's really happening on his watch, he's not fit for his role."

"So suppose the revolution eventually happens. Who do you think would be the next ruler?" asked Butterfly. For a moment, a heavy silence governed. The entire family automatically started digging through their thoughts to see if they had anybody in mind.

"Bringing any leftovers of the royal family to power after a revolution would be a huge mistake indeed," said Father. "It would be like eating your own vomit. And that's because somehow all those vicious people that caused the bloody revolution to happen would find a way to come back to the system to recover what they'd lost. Besides, having a one system government and a ruler following an outdated, rigid system is a style of the past. I'd rather see a modern term government like the ones in the advanced countries. It's proven to be the most democratic way to keep up with the fast-changing world."

"In my opinion," said Mother, "there're lots of flaws even in the advanced democratic countries' systems. I'm sure there are lots of plots and deals behind the scenes with this and that to get to the presidential seats. Significant numbers of them seem to be quite wealthy and have had everything in their lives, but being the president of their countries. I feel that becoming president would be like a finishing touch to each of their lifelong resumes. By then, they have also established the resources to fund the cost of persuading people to vote for them or easily buy some of those votes by giving them a ton of promises. I don't believe they'd truly

care for the ordinary people as they claim. They'd just use them as a vehicle to get where they want to be; that's all.

"Well, that could be true too," said Father. "Every system has its own weaknesses and flaws. However, in a term governmental system, the chosen candidate must deliver some of his or her promises to keep the government in power, or they will not be elected the following term. For us to really make our revolution work, we need a fair and square system that would create a suitable atmosphere for everybody, especially for our children, to flourish. Our children are the pillars of our country's future. If we want a strong future, we need to invest in our children."

"I'd like to have a vote in choosing the leader of my time," said the older son. "He or she definitely needs to be up to date to understand and provide for my needs and to grow with the pace of the advanced world." Everybody but Butterfly nodded in agreement. She seemed bored.

"How do we know that the new leader, whoever he or she would be, is going to be the rescue angel?" commented Mother. "I believe that some people, no matter how saintly they come across, change when they gain power."

"You're totally right," said Father. "Nonetheless, we cannot simply sit and do nothing, and suffer forever from the enforced injustice."

"I guess what we need is a miracle," said the younger brother, making everyone laugh.

"We could use a miracle for sure," said the older brother. "We could also use a government that's able to fill the gaps created by the incapacity of our current one."

"I hope everything goes well for us and we keep together as a family through the power change," said Mother. "I'm so looking forward to seeing the day after the revolution's over. I'm going to throw a big party to celebrate it with everyone we know."

"That's such inspired thinking, my dear," said Father. "However, not everyone on your list would appreciate the changes enough to celebrate them. Revolution may not work for everybody. To know where we could be after the revolution all depends on where we were before it. It's human nature to assess the goodness of change based on how it benefits us."

"I hope we'd be better off after a revolution," said Mother. "I would want a new governing system that would work for most, including us as a family. But there's no point in being too worried about something we've not much control over. Whatever's due to happen will happen ... and life will go on."

The family was quiet, clearly trying to make sense of what they had been taking about all evening. Butterfly was puzzled the most. She was wearing a big frown while deep in thought. She could not picture their kingdom without the Great Ruler. As far back as she could remember, he was in power in Farawayland, and she had never felt affected by his tyranny.

Many times in the middle of school, she was taken by the school's heads to line up along the streets to applaud and wave the flag when the Great Ruler and his queen were passing by. She had seen them a few times and could remember their smiles. She found herself caring about what might happen to them. She was thinking of them as being quite majestic, and could not picture their kingdom without them.

"What happens to the Great Ruler and his family in a revolution?" asked Butterfly.

"If they survive the attack to their castle, they'll be sent to exile," said the older brother.

"Who wants a kicked-out ruler and all his troubles to be their permanent guest?" said the younger brother jokingly, which made everyone laugh again.

"Not in our house," said the older sister with a playful grin.

A smirk appeared on Father's face. "Honestly, if I were in their shoes, I'd rather die on my soil than flee to any other territories," he said. "I believe there's no shame greater than a ruler being thrown out of his own kingdom by his own nation, even if it's just for diplomatic reasons. In my opinion, there would be no place on earth for a defeated ruler who was at fault. He and his family could no longer live with dignity, honour, and pride."

"Wow, that's scary," said Mother with a bit of anxiety. "I don't know what I'd do if I were the queen! I've changed my mind; I wish we didn't have to go through a revolution at all. I wish our ruler would come to his senses and clean up his government before it is too late. He might be able to prevent it all."

"It's too late already," said Father. "He should have worked on capturing his nation's heart as soon as he took power. Then, instead of the superpowers, his nation would be supporting him with their lives and nobody would be able to touch him in any way."

"This is so shameful," said Mother. "What I hate the most about revolution is that unlike war, we'd be fighting with our fellow citizens. To me, fighting in any shape and form is so uncivilized and inhuman. By now, we're supposed to have developed an advanced global system to prevent violence of any kind. I wonder what those envoys are doing in their fancy global meetings that they cannot solve the global issues."

"They're getting fatter by the day, gulping down their greasy salaries and snoring their heads off," said the younger brother. The family burst into laughter again.

"It's not funny," said the older sister. "In the meantime, innocent people keep getting killed while waiting. Do you realise how many families are shattered by each killing? How many hearts are broken when losing a son or daughter, or a husband or a brother! Children do not grow to adults in just a day under the light like commercial chickens, you know. It takes a family at least eighteen to twenty years to raise their children—while bearing their sicknesses and

pains. For what? To be killed with one gunshot in a fraction of a second for standing up for their rights?"

"Don't worry about that either," commented the younger brother. "That's probably another way for the superpowers to control the population and create jobs for the remaining ones, by continuing to run the firearms manufacturers."

"We might find it funny, but there's so much truth in what you just said," said Father. "That is indeed how their artillery factories keep functioning. If there're no wars in the world, where would they sell their weapons? Do you know how many people work in those factories, and how much revenue they generate through selling them?"

"I wish those workers knew that every firearm they make can ruin so many lives, and so many hopes and dreams until they get destroyed," said Mother.

"Oh, they know, but they don't care," said the older brother. "All they care about are their jobs and supporting their families."

"We're not supposed to be the savages we used to be thousands of years ago, living in the middle of mountains and jungles anymore," said Mother. "We've worked so hard to civilise ourselves in many ways. We've brought ourselves to cities to create communities to care for each other. We put clothes on ourselves to give us different identities from wild and vicious animals. We've educated ourselves and created sophisticated tools and methods to find good solutions to complicated problems. Why have we been doing all that? To repeat what our ancestors used to do to settle their differences: killing each other? That's so shameful. It's so shameful to me that I'm having a hard time accepting that I'm part of the same so-called 'civilised world.' To me, that means we're still the same savages we used to be millions of years ago."

"If after all the bloodshed in the possible revolution, our kingdom happens to fall into the hands of the wrong crowd," said Father, "I'd wish they'd know they'd just won the war but not the heart and soul of the nation. They won't be able to bring peace to the wounded hearts of the people."

A sudden loud noise from outside made Father rush to the window to see what was happening. He had made it apparent that he'd been worried that the branches of the tall trees surrounding the house might break and damage the house, as had happened a couple of winters ago.

He cleared the window with his hand in a circular motion and tried to see what was going on outside under the exterior dim light. The snow was still piling up by the edge of the foggy windows as well as everywhere on the ground. The storm was stronger, and its wooing sounded much louder and spookier.

"I'm glad we've no guests tonight wanting to go back home in such a storm," said Father, shaking his head in disbelief. He then walked over to the fireplace and shuffled the burned

wood around with a long stick to make room for a couple more logs. Once he made sure everything was all right, he took his pipe kit from one of the side table's drawers. He carefully filled one of his beautifully engraved fancy pipes with fresh tobacco from a small black leather pouch, and lit it with his lighter. After a couple of deep puffs, a nice aroma from his tobacco filled the room. As usual, to amuse Butterfly, he blew a few smoke rings in the air and watched her reaction from the corner of his eye. As soon as she saw them, she would run to blow in their centres to make them bigger.

Right after dinner and cleaning up the table, they were ready to move to their usual spots in the living room, by the fireplace. They were all looking forward to eating some of those colourful desserts that had been tempting them since early that night. They were excited to enjoy the longest night of the year and hear some fun stories about their ancestors and how they had celebrated it.

Once she had made the last smoke ring disappear, Butterfly stood in the middle of the room and hesitantly scanned her happy family. Everyone was enjoying every bite of the desserts they'd had their eyes on. Something was bothering her. She suddenly felt uncomfortable with the thought of being so far away from them.

"If there're so many problems here, why don't we all go to Otherland together and live there?" said Butterfly unexpectedly. Everyone stared at her while eating.

"I know you did not really feel the depth of our conversation, Butterfly," said Father, smiling. "I didn't expect it either. However, I'd like you to know that we may not be wearing a uniform like soldiers, but we all are the guardians of our kingdom. This is where we're from and where our ancestors are buried. It's our duty to protect it and fight for it to the last drop of our blood. I do not wish to borrow somebody else's land and always be looked upon as a foreigner when I already have a homeland of my own—a precious home that was once my father's. Now it's ours, and tomorrow it'll be your children's. In fact, we do not own our land or have the right to let just anything happen to it. We've borrowed it from our future generations. It's our duty to maintain and protect it with our lives. I tell you, if you lost your homeland in a fight, you'd still have enough dignity to live elsewhere. However, if you lost your homeland because you neglected it, it would be hard for you to live with pride and honour elsewhere."

"My father was a soldier and fought in two wars," interjected Mother. "My brother was a freedom fighter and died of suffocation on a hospital bed in his early twenties. And I'll fight with whoever dares to invade my home or hurt my family. Farawayland has been in many difficult, dangerous situations and, thanks to its heroes, it has survived. I assure you she'll survive this one too."

"The fact is," said Father, "if we don't protect our kingdom from those who might harm it for personal or political reasons, soon there won't be a Farawayland that we are proud of and know as we do today."

“We don’t want that to happen to us at all,” said the older brother. “If we lose our kingdom, we’ll lose our identity and always be looked upon as homeless, and it will be our fault.”

“Times are changing,” said the older sister. “We’re not alone anymore. The new technology is making it easier for people to unite no matter where they are in the world. We can easily create the synergy we need to defeat the oppressor of our time.”

“So much for changing the schoolbooks’ and programs’ subjects to brainwash the children,” said the younger brother. “They actually made us more curious to look more for the truth.”

“That’s why the signs of a revolution usually start to be seen in educational institutions,” said the older brother. “The intelligent, open-minded people can never be fooled.”

Butterfly was still trying hard to understand the concept of patriotism. Her father’s reasons for wanting to continue living in a troubled country when he could be living elsewhere comfortably were not making sense to her.

“We’re living here under pressure without being able to do anything about it anyway,” said the younger brother in support of Butterfly. “We might be able to bring the change we’re after from outside.”

“In a sense you’re right, my son,” said Mother. “But what your father’s trying to say is that if we all leave our country, nobody would be left to protect it. Besides, at least for us, that’s not the only reason we would rather stay at home. We’re emotionally attached to years of precious memories here. We cannot just pack up and go, you know. Can you imagine how many memories exist in every corner of this house, from the time your grandparents lived here till now?” As she gestured towards the walls around them, she added with a sweet smile, “Look around there on those walls. Do you see those tiny handprints? Those are all your dirty handprints from the time you were learning to walk. You would hold on to the walls while pulling yourself up on your feet to walk around the room. They’re still there to remind us of the good old days. We’ve not repainted them yet because we want to keep those precious memories alive. How can I ever leave this house, filled with history like that from each one of you and start new elsewhere? This is where I belong.”

“I appreciate that, Mom,” said Butterfly. “I enjoy looking at them too, but do you prefer living with our memories or with us? If we all go to Otherland, at least we will all live together in peace. What’s the point of living here in fear and being afraid of our own shadows when we can afford to be somewhere safe?”

“Maybe one day,” responded Mother, “instead of having the desire to move to a foreign place in search of freedom and peace, we will bring the peace and freedom we deserve to our own homeland. And I believe that’s possible if we stay united.”

“Butterfly, even though you’re the youngest of all,” said Father, changing the subject while having another puff of his pipe, “we’re giving you wings to see this other place in order to feed

your passion. And we trust you'll do well, for we believe that if you train a dove properly, no matter how high and far it flies, it always comes back to you. In fact, your mother and I trust ourselves and the education we've provided you, which encourages us to let you go so far away. So let's celebrate that tonight while we still can."

"I know," said Butterfly with a big smile, sitting beside her father in his armchair, which was her favourite spot. "And I cannot wait to be on my way."

"Hey, Butterfly," said her younger brother, "enjoy your night tonight as much as you can. You might not be with us next year, you know."

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Since Butterfly had heard she would be soon headed to Otherland, she was so excited that she could not stop talking about it. She was anxiously counting down every minute until her departure day arrived. She had packed and unpacked her luggage so many times that she had lost count. She just couldn't make up her mind about what to take with her on her trip.

Finally, it was the night before her departure for Otherland. It was late August, and the sun was wrapping up for the day. A soft breeze was dancing with the white sheered curtains hanging beside Butterfly's bed.

She had just enjoyed her last dinner with her family before rushing up to her room to finish packing. For the last time, she looked at her cherry-red cabinets, standing tall against the wall, to see if she had forgotten anything. Her books and dolls lined the shelves in rows, the latter quietly staring back at her. She wished she could take them all with her because she knew she would be away from them at least until the following spring.

She had no more space in her luggage for any more of her belongings, except for one thing: the poster of the dancers. She climbed onto the foot of her bed and stretched up to reach the poster, gently removing it from the wall. She then carefully folded it and placed it in one of her suitcase's side pockets.

She was nervous about being all alone so far away from home. She did not want to admit it, but she was quite afraid of the unknown, especially at a time when things could change abruptly. Her chest was feeling heavy, and tears rolled down her face. She kept picturing an erupting volcano, as in her father's example, coming at her while burning everything in its path. She threw herself onto her bed to compose herself. Her hands automatically went to pick up "Poodle," her stuffed dog that had always comforted her when she was emotional. He was sitting on her bed as usual, looking at her with two round black eyes from under his curly fur. That little dog was one of the first stuffed animals she had received as a gift from her parents. It was made of natural, white, curly lamb's wool and was always on her bed like a guardian angel. She hugged him dearly. "Please pray, Poodle. Pray that the revolution never happens. Please, pray ..." whispered Butterfly in his ears.

A little after the big antique clock in the living room announced 10:00 p.m., her mother knocked on her door. She reminded her it was time to go to bed if she wanted to get up early the next morning.

She went to bed but had difficulty falling asleep. Way past midnight, everyone but Butterfly was long asleep. The house was awfully quiet and the backyard dark and eerie. She was not sure whether to be happy or sad. Thinking of being away from what she loved and was used to was bothering her.

The next day at dawn, she was the first one on her feet. Just before leaving for the airport, she stood by her bedroom door next to her suitcase and took a last glance around while squeezing Poodle to her chest. With tearful eyes, she said goodbye to everything she was leaving behind. Hearing her mother's call, she walked over to the corner of her room and picked up her olive-green winter coat, its hood trimmed with black fur. As she walked out the door, her eyes fell on the thousands pieces quilt on her bed. It was a special handmade gift from her mother for her thirteenth birthday. To make that quilt, her mother had been collecting beautiful pieces of fabric with colourful patterns for years. Its pieces were creatively cut into different shapes and sewn together to make a unique design. She thought that if she took the quilt with her, it would make her feel as if she were sleeping in her own bed, away from home. At the last minute, as she heard her mother calling her again, she strapped the quilt to her backpack and rushed downstairs to join the others.

Soon they were all on their way to the airport, not knowing that they were about to change the course of their destiny.

To follow Butterfly on her dangerous journey of life, you can order your book right now by clicking on the Book Order tab on the nav-bar of this website. Thank you