

# *The Butterfly King*

*Reg Down*  
© Copyright 2017

*All rights reserved. No part of this publication, in part or in whole may be reproduced, transmitted or utilized in any form, without the written permission of the author, except for brief quotations in critical articles and reviews.*

A butterfly came to live in a castle. He was a red butterfly and the castle was small when he first arrived. Every morning he appeared out of the sky and fluttered around the growing walls. The workers willingly accepted the butterfly as the king of the castle and gladly obeyed him. He never told them what stone or wood to use—that they knew best—but the king did show them the shapes and sizes of the rooms to be built.

Bit by bit the castle rose upward and took its final form. Only when it was finished did the butterfly king go inside the highest room of the tallest tower and stay there all day long looking out over his kingdom until the sun set. That was also the day the worm dragon crawled into the castle from underneath and began to gnaw at the foundations. Every day the dragon gnawed the stonework, and every night the workers repaired the damage. But no matter how hard they worked, when the sun rose over the horizon and the king arrived out of the sky, there was one more stone missing from the castle walls.

Years passed and the butterfly king waxed in wisdom. But as his wisdom grew, his strength failed. Every day he was a bit weaker—but such a little bit weaker that no one noticed from one month to the next. At the end of a year, however, at the end of two or three years, people did notice. One of them who noticed was a maid. She was extraordinarily beautiful and wise, but also extremely shy. She hardly spoke to anyone. She was only truly comfortable with the animals, especially the lions and birds, and understood their language. The butterfly king hardly ever saw the maid, for she worked in the rooms below his tall tower. But she certainly saw him, as did everyone else, when he left to fly into the sky in the evening and return again in the morning.

One day she was going about her work when she stopped by a stairwell to gaze out a window. The stairs spiraled round and round into the basement. She heard voices coming from far below, but could hear them as clear as day.

“What are we going to do about the worm dragon?” said one voice. “By day he gnaws at the walls and we are powerless to stop him.”

“Aye, and by night we slave to keep up with his destruction,” said another. “Every morning finds us one stone short of fixing. Then we are forced to flee.”

“Something must be done,” said the first. “If nothing happens, stone by stone, the walls will be weakened until the whole castle comes crashing down.”

The maid pondered these words in her heart. She saw the butterfly king weakening and understood. She became determined to act.

Now the butterfly king had his food brought to him in his tower. His food was pure nectar which he sipped from a silver cup held by a knight. The maid gathered herbs and flowers and made a potion. Every day she slipped one drop of her potion into the king’s cup. She watched the king closely as his health and energy blossomed. Not only that, the worm dragon no longer came into the castle during the day and the years of damage he had done was being repaired.

But the maid also saw the butterfly king losing his wisdom. He began to act like a child, refusing to take his responsibilities seriously. Finally he spent the whole day flitting around the countryside and ignoring his kingdom entirely. By now, the only time he came to the castle was to take his meals.

The maid stopped putting her potion into the king’s drink. Within days the king returned to his tower and resumed his duties. The dragon returned too—and with a vengeance. He undid all the repairs that had been made—and more. The night workers despaired—not only was there more work to do than ever before, but the dragon’s breath, always foul, was now poisonous. The stale gas crept all over the castle, spreading illness and death for the unwary. Soon the king was far weaker than before, his beautiful wings becoming lame and tired.

The maid knew what must happen. She slipped into the throne room and sat by a window, never moving a muscle. She sat so still that even when people were in the room they didn’t notice or see her. Slowly she transformed into a large, leafy plant. There she stayed, basking in the sunlight during the day and closing her leaves at night. But deep within her leaves a bud was forming, with petals swirled round as if in prayer. Before long the castle workers noticed that the throne room was free of the smell of the deadly dragon’s fumes.

“It’s a breath of fresh air just to be in here,” said the knights, perking up—and the ladies agreed.

The king, too, noticed the changed atmosphere in the room. Often he came to sit on his throne or to spend time there. His health improved and he grew strong, but without losing his wisdom or becoming childish and wayward.

As the weeks passed the foul dragon's breath disappeared from room after room. The dragon himself become less wild and destructive. Eventually he was calm and deliberate. He stopped tearing at the castle walls, and the workers repaired the foundations.

One day the dragon lay round the castle in a ring and bit his tail. At the same time the plant in the throne room unfurled its flower bud. It was white, and held itself up to the sun. Within the flower lay tears, glistening and sparkling like gems. A heavenly aroma spread throughout the castle and the butterfly king flew down from his tall tower. He circled the white flower, his red wings changing to the color of peach blossoms. When he landed on the petals the castle was filled with music, as at a wedding, and the people wept and sang for joy.

From that day on the butterfly king was changed. No longer did he spend all his time in the tower, but lived in the throne room. He grew ever more delicate and light filled, his presence spreading far and wide throughout the land. The castle, too, changed. Its walls and windows, its ramparts and roofs grew transparent and glistened like diamonds. The windows transformed into precious stones with delicate shades of blue, amethyst, rose and sapphire green. But the biggest change of all was that the castle and all within it became an indestructible, living being that radiated light even in the darkest of nights.