

# *The three Butterflies*

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A butterfly lived in a stone castle. Its wings were morning glory blue edged with silver. During the day, when the sun shone in the sky, the butterfly stayed inside the castle's highest room and looked out into the wide world. But in the evening it flew onto the windowsill. There it raised and closed its wings like breathing as the sun set below the horizon. Then, as twilight thickened and the night birds sang, it flew out into the world of stars and planets wheeling overhead in the milky sky.

One morning the butterfly returned to the castle to find the windows and doors shut. It beat against the window glass, it beat against the wood and steel of the doors, but none opened. The butterfly was trapped outside with the sun rising over the mountains in the east. Finally it flew off across the meadows and fields, heading for the cool shade of a distant wood. For weeks the butterfly stayed hidden among the trees. During the day it sat in the shadows and only at night did it fly into the starry world.

One afternoon a young man came riding on horseback. He stopped in the wood and drank at a spring bubbling from the ground. He lay beneath a tree, resting, and closed his eyes. As soon as he fell asleep a yellow butterfly flew out of his mouth. It flitted through the dappled shade beneath the trees and out over a meadow covered with flowers. The blue butterfly followed and together they rose and fell, twirling in the warm air and visiting the flowers to drink sweet nectar.

After an hour the yellow butterfly flew back to the young man and entered his mouth. The blue butterfly watched as the youth woke, yawned and stretched. He fetched his horse and rode off, ignoring the blue butterfly dancing along behind him. On and on he rode throughout the summer's day while the sun sailed high into the sky and down again. As the last rays of the sun shone on his face the young man reached home and went inside. The blue butterfly found a dark corner beneath the house eaves and rested through the night.

Day after day the blue butterfly followed the young man whenever he came out of the house. Sometimes it sat on his shoulder or hat and people laughed to see them together. The young man laughed too, and said he had no idea where the blue butterfly had come from or why it was following him. But he never slept outside and the yellow butterfly didn't appear — though once, very early in the morning, the blue butterfly saw the yellow butterfly flitting around the young man's bedroom. Soon they were fluttering against the window pane, trying to be together, but the glass separated them and kept them apart.

The blue butterfly followed the young man for a year and a day and never did the yellow butterfly appear in the wide world. At the end of the year he met a young lady and went a-courting. Often and often they were seen walking hand in hand down the green lanes, the blue butterfly shimmering around their heads. So it was on their wedding day, too. A church window was left open and the blue butterfly flew in. It circled over the couple's heads, and to everyone's astonishment, as soon as the bride said 'I do', the blue butterfly flew into her mouth. The bride startled, touched her heart, then threw herself into her husband's arms as tears ran down her cheeks.

That wedding was the talk of the town for many a month. Everyone wondered at it and could not make it out. Before the year was done a child was born. It was a girl and she had the bluest of blue eyes. They called her Azure Sky and the father loved her dearly. As she grew she was often seen flitting around her father like a butterfly when they walked across the summer meadows.

Many years passed and the father grew old and died. On his death day his daughter lay down and died as well. Her mother grieved bitterly until the third day. That's when she looked out the house window and saw a blue and yellow butterfly dancing together over the garden flowers. Suddenly her heart lightened and all sorrow left her. She set herself on her bed, bid her friends goodbye, and breathed her last.

All that day three butterflies played around the house, one yellow, one blue and the last a lovely rose-red. As evening fell the three butterflies were seen rising in circles into the twilight sky. Higher and higher they danced until they were lost in the starry world wheeling in the milky heaven overhead.