

Flight of the Butterfly

Her scent of rose face cream and cinnamon tea is heavy in the room of closed windows. I fear her skin, delicate as paper, may dissolve beneath my kiss. Our final goodbye, we've been told. She is too fragile to survive winter, faltering at the first frost on the trees.

Our favourite show plays on the television muted in the corner. Explosions of nature fill the screen, demanding attention, announcing life going on in intricate ways. Millions of butterflies cluster on trees, folded against one another in sleep.

I take her hand, we lace fingers, my thumb tracing the lines of a path intertwined with mine. Her body warm as I lie beside her, I explain the flight of the Monarch Butterfly. "They escape the winter of Canada and fly thousands of miles to Mexico." A last shard of the evening sun points to the chair in the corner of the room, where her dress lies discarded, the vibrant orange patterns lost in the folds.

Her dancing spins in my memory, arms waving, limbs as loose as her laughter, filling the room with colour. During our first date she made us share one embarrassing thing. Mine was I couldn't swim; hers, that she broke her wrist trying to do a cartwheel down the hill from her University halls of residence. She taught me to tread water and to embrace danger, often making me believe I am brave.

Her grip tightens, as if telling me: *You are, you are, you are.*

The butterflies shiver awake in the forest. As sunlight streams through the trees, their bodies unfurl in the heat. Thousands of wings beat as one as they rise together in the sky.

I hold her close against my heart, her smile flickering an understanding. Her hand slips from mine and I bid her goodnight as she takes flight.