



# NEW IDEA

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# A Butterfly Queen

L. M. Montgomery

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# A Butterfly Queen

By  
L.M. Montgomery



Tom was collecting butterflies. He had three cases full of them already. Most people who saw them said the collection was a very fine one for a boy of his age to have made, and Tom was very proud of it.

But Bertha, Tom's little sister, looked on disapprovingly. Bertha admired Tom immensely, and she felt that it was a terrible thing to disapprove of him. But Bertha loved the butterflies, and she thought it dreadful that they should be caught and chloroformed and impaled on a pin. She was too shy to implore Tom to give it up; and, anyway, she knew he would only laugh at her.

But Bertha grieved over those poor, beautiful, murdered butterflies.

One vacation day Tom's greatest friend called for him to go on a fishing expedition. Just as they were starting a butterfly flew past, over the sweetbriar hedge into the garden. It was a very large butterfly, with gold-and-purple wings, and the minute Tom saw it he dashed after it.

Bertha, watching him from the door, hoped with all her heart that the butterfly would escape. But alas! in an evil moment it alighted in the sweet, dusky heart of a big red rose and balanced itself there, its beautiful wings glowing like jewels. Then . . . slap . . . dash . . . darkness! Tom's cap came down on the rose and the butterfly was a prisoner.

Tom whistled. What a beauty! He had none in his collection so big as this. Holding it carefully, so that he wouldn't brush the gold dust from its trembling wings, Tom dashed upstairs to his room and shut the butterfly in a glass box. His friend was in a hurry, so Tom couldn't wait to chloroform and impale it just then.

Bertha tiptoed in after Tom had gone, and looked at the butterfly. How sorry she felt for it! How would Tom like to be caught and impaled on a pin if a big giant were to come along some day, seeking to add to his collection of small boys? Tom always assured her that it didn't hurt the butterflies, but Bertha felt doubtful.

The longer she looked at the butterfly the sorrier she felt for it; and at last she made up her mind to set it free again. Of course, Tom would be very angry at her, but Bertha simply could not see that beautiful butterfly done to death.

She took the box down to the rose garden, but on the way down a doubt assailed her. It was Tom's butterfly; had she the right to lose Tom's property? As she stood hesitating, the cover of the box slid out in her hand, propelled merely by its own weight. Out flew the butterfly, and away it went over the roses and lilies and sweet peas; away, away, through the orchard; until it was lost in the sunshine.

"Oh, I'm so glad," whispered Bertha to herself, with a sigh of relief, for, after all, she had not opened the box.

On her way back to the house she met Uncle Jack and told him what she had

been doing, for she thought it would be just as well to have a friend on her side if Tom should be very cross.

“That’s a good girl,” said Uncle Jack. “Always keep on the good side of the butterflies. Of course, you know that they are fairies in disguise.”

“No, I didn’t know,” said Bertha, round-eyed.

“Oh, yes,” assured Uncle Jack. “Why, I thought everybody knew that. They are butterflies all day, but just as soon as the sun sets they resume their rightful shape, and become fairies again.”

Bertha wondered if Uncle Jack was in earnest. She could never tell what he meant when that funny twinkle was in his eyes. Tom scoffed at the idea of there being fairies at all, but Bertha believed that they really did exist.

Of course Tom was cross when he came home and found what Bertha had done. But Uncle Jack took her part and, after all, Tom behaved very well. Girls were foolish, anyway, he reflected; they were born so and couldn’t help it, poor things. You just had to make allowances for them.

At sunset Bertha was sitting alone by the window of her own room, looking out on the rose garden. There was a butterfly on the sill right beside her. Bertha sat so still that it was not frightened away. It was a tiny yellow butterfly, and it made Bertha think of Uncle Jack’s story.

“I wonder if the butterflies do really turn into fairies at sunset,” she said aloud.

“Why, of course we do,” said a voice close by her ear.

Bertha jumped with astonishment. There on the sill was the very tiniest person you could imagine. Not over two inches high, certainly; dressed in a filmy robe of glittering yellow with long floating golden hair and—yes—two tiny gauzy wings at her shoulders. Bertha knew that this must be a fairy.

“Why, where on earth did you come from?” she exclaimed.

The fairy balanced herself on her tiny toes and laughed. The laugh sounded like the wind when it ruffles running water.

“Dear me; I’ve been here right along. Didn’t you see a yellow butterfly on the sill? That was I. Of course, as soon as the sun set I turned into a fairy again.”

“Then what Uncle Jack said was true!” said Bertha, delightedly.

“Of course, it is true. That Uncle Jack of yours is a very wise person. But I can’t linger here any longer. The Queen of the butterfly-fairies has sent word by a whiff of honeysuckle that all the members of her court must meet her in the lily-bed at moonrise. There must be some important business on hand.”

“Oh, how I would love to see them all!” exclaimed Bertha.

The fairy looked at her reflectively.

“Well, that is permissible under certain conditions. One is that you must never have harmed a butterfly in your life.”

“I never did,” said Bertha, earnestly; “but,” she added hesitatingly, “I’m afraid that some of my family have.”

“Oh, it doesn’t matter what anyone else did. The other condition is that, no matter what you see or hear, you musn’t say a word. Now, if you want to come, run down and meet me by the lily-bed.”

Off flew the fairy, and Bertha ran down-stairs and out to the garden. Sure enough, the fairy was waiting for her on the rim of a big daisy.

“Sit down here behind the sweet-pea trellis,” she said. “You can see through it very well. Dear me, what a big, clumsy creature you are!”

Bertha had always been told that she was very small for her age, but she did feel dreadfully big by the side of the fairy. She sat down obediently, her heart beating with excitement, and the fairy swung herself back and forth on a curled tendril.

“I’ll stay here until the Queen arrives,” she said.

It was now quite dark and the moon was rising behind the big hill with the elm on it. Presently a whole bevy of tiny, winged beings fluttered down on the lily-bed. Bertha barely remembered in time to check an exclamation of delight. How lovely they were, dressed in all the colors of the rainbow! Other fairies kept coming, by twos and threes, until the whole lily-bed was alive with them.

Once such an odd-looking company arrived that Bertha could hardly help laughing. They were not a bit like the other fairies, but looked just like the brownies in the picture-book Uncle Jack had given her on her last birthday.

“Those are the dragon-flies and June-bugs and beetles,” whispered the fairy. “They are the private couriers and retainers of the Queen’s household. She will soon be here, now, and I must leave you, for all must be in their places when she comes.”



The Queen at the Moonlight Council.

Over the trellis flew the fairy, and just in time, for hardly had she perched herself on a lily-bud when the Queen arrived and enthroned herself on the biggest lily of all. She was taller than the other fairies; her robes glittered with diamond dust and her wings were beautifully dappled with gold and purple. There was a tiny gold crown on her head, and she carried in her hand a long silver wand tipped with a star. Bertha



thought there was something strangely familiar about her; but how could that be when she had never seen a fairy before to-night, much less a fairy queen?

All the fairies stopped talking, and silence reigned in the lily-bed. The dragon-fly and June-bug fairies marshaled themselves in ranks on either side the throne, and one of them bent down a lily-bud to serve the Queen as a footstool. When she began to speak all the fairies listened with might and main, and so did Bertha.

“Dear fairy subjects all,” said the Queen; “no doubt you have wondered what has caused this sudden summons of the butterfly-fairies to Moonlight Council—an event which only happens when something of great importance to our race has taken place. The event which has occasioned this meeting is no less a thing than the rescue of your Queen from a position of the utmost distress and danger.”

A thrill of horror ran through the assembled fairies. You would have thought a gentle breeze was sighing in the lily-bed.

“This morning,” resumed the Queen, “I very thoughtlessly went out without my faithful guard of dragon-flies. I was all alone, flying along in the sunshine until I reached this garden, which, as you all know, is one of the favorite haunts of our court. Becoming weary and spying beneath me a fragrant rose, I alighted to rest. Suddenly something dark seemed to blot out the sky above me. What was my horror to find myself a prisoner in the hands of that dreadful boy who lives in yonder house, and who has captured and murdered so many of our race! I gave myself up for lost; and, indeed, had it not been that he was in a hurry I would have been disposed of then and there. As it was, I gained a brief reprieve. He shut me up in a glass box, in a gloomy room, intending, as he brutally informed me, to chloroform and impale me on his return. But, fortunately for the race of butterflies, this terrible boy has a very kind and good little sister. She it was who released me, not much the worse in body for my terrible experience, although sadly shaken in nerves and disturbed in mind. And this is why I have summoned you to Moonlight Council—to consult how we shall best reward this little sister for the service she has rendered to our race.”

A silence of three seconds followed the Queen’s speech. Then a grave beetle-fairy moved a resolution of congratulation to the Queen on her escape from such dire peril. This being seconded and passed unanimously, the business of the council began. Many of the fairies made speeches, mostly the June-bugs, beetles and dragon-flies, who seemed to make up in brains what they lacked in good looks. One dragon-fly declared he had heard Bertha lamenting that she couldn’t understand fractions at school. He was willing to help her in regard to them; he himself was considered an expert arithmetician, to which fact he owed his position of court

treasurer.

A beetle, who seemed of great importance in the insect world, suggested that all the butterfly-fairies should watch over Bertha's flower-bed that summer.

"Bring gentle dews to it," he said, "and kill the evil weeds and keep the buds from harm and blight——"

"Oh," exclaimed Bertha, before she thought; "won't you please keep the rust from my asters? *I never* can."

Then she paused in dismay, for not a fairy was to be seen. Only the lilies swayed in the moonlight, as if an agitated wind had passed over them.

Bertha went sorrowfully back to the house. Tom had said that girls could never hold their tongues, and she was afraid he was right. If only she had not made that unlucky exclamation!

When Bertha got back to her window she sat down to think her wonderful experience over. Soon after, mama came up and found her there.

"Why, we've been looking for you everywhere," she said. "And here you've been asleep. Dear me, I hope you haven't caught cold with your head in that draught."

"Oh, I haven't been asleep," cried Bertha, as she went down-stairs with mama.

Then she told all the family about the fairies and the Moonlight Council. And she was laughed at for her pains. They all said that she had dreamed the whole thing.

Bertha didn't believe she had. To be sure, she never saw a fairy again! But that, she sorrowfully concluded, wasn't any wonder. She must have frightened them almost to death by calling out to them as she did.

And I happen to know that Bertha did not have any more trouble with fractions—she understood them beautifully. But that may have been because she worked harder and had a new teacher who explained things splendidly.

And I also know that her flower-bed was the very pink of perfection in flower-beds that summer. Neither rust nor blight touched it, and oh, how the flowers bloomed! But perhaps it was because Bertha kept it so carefully weeded and pruned and carried water to it so faithfully in the drought.

What do you think about it?

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

[The end of *A Butterfly Queen* by L. M. (Lucy Maud) Montgomery]