

A HOUSE FULL OF BUTTERFLIES

As I close my eyes, I still see the spartan, homely garden with unkempt patchy grass and, a stray thistle. A chained bike left to rust in the October rain, a trowel and compost bag beside a '*Grow Your Own Butterfly*' kit once promised as birthday present, lost in the ruffles of the mind. For those were the days when I valued promises and trusted people thinking one could never go back on one's words.

I had wanted to find a special friend ever since I came here. However, I never thought I would find such an amazing one! Bron was my next door neighbour. She spoke in the unchaste language of dreams and lived to her words, never remotely breaking one. 'Being sleep-deprived is healthier than being deprived of dreams', was her motto in life. Auburn, short-aired, with strong Welsh accent and in her fifties, Bron's kind eyes were pools of innocence. Her garden was her first love, always nurtured and in bloom. Here, Bron worked tirelessly wearing a pouch with her gardening tools, much like a kangaroo and joey! Bron involved me in planting daffodil bulbs, watering snowdrops, digging potatoes in the patch, raking autumn leaves or making Christmas wreaths using her storehouse - her garden. She inspired in me a love for wildlife. Together we had happy times building dens, watching squirrels, dewdrops dancing and frogs bouncing in her garden pond. Bron had brought me my first bird feeder and David Attenborough DVD's with images, more powerful than words, leaving a lasting impression on my mind.

A tad eccentric to the world for her orthodox ways and unconventional beliefs, Bron was a great lover of wildlife and all things even remotely African. She often recited names of African cities whilst gardening "Tana, Ethiopia, Khartoum, Aswan...." At times this left me confused on whether it was a manifestation of her love for Africa or for the poem Mrs. Tilscher's class by Carol Ann Duffy! Bron was my window

A House full of Butterflies

to Africa - the Congo rainforest; the croc infested Mara River, the Saharan sands and the Amboseli National Park where elephants roamed in the backdrop of the Kilimanjaro. Together we had adopted an orphan rhino - Icarus, from a Namibian game reserve. In Bron's spinster pad (as she said), were maps and flags from many African countries. She was also a storehouse of African folktales; my personal favourite was Anansi, the spider which Bron narrated using a finger puppets.

Bron was otherworldly. She was a practicing Buddhist. Her Wendy house was converted into a prayer room with figurines of the Buddha, aromatic candles, wind chimes and prayer wheels, radiating peace amidst which Bron chanted every morning and evening. Bron radiated peace, practiced peace and taught others to make peace. I once remember her finding two lonely snails propped on her garden fence whom she lovingly plopped into a decorated flowerpot, naming them 'Peace' and 'Silence' much to my delight.

Soon, it would be my eighth birthday. For as long as I could remember, Bron always brought me a present. Like any other child of my age, I always had new obsessions. Last year, it was unicycles; year before, origami. This year, it was butterflies and Bron had promised me one. Just as Bron's kindly voice had asked 'What would you this year, darling?' time flew unnoticed, as quickly as a butterfly's wings.

We returned from our holiday and were still unpacking when I decided to visit Bron. I walked onto our front lawn carefully avoiding calendula plants before ringing her doorbell in two clear crotchets. No answer. I chuckled. Bron was probably in the back garden watering plants or working on her next flower bed. I wasted no time. Running straight through the pavement I went to our back garden to lean over the fence, shouting loud and clear, "Bron, I'm back!" No reply. This time, I was a little wary. Bron was

A House full of Butterflies

mostly home, hated holidays, rarely visiting anyone. I rushed home to Mum. "Bron isn't home, Mum!" "That's funny!" said, Mum, reminding me instantly of the last line to one of my poems on butterflies (my present obsession!)

"That's funny", said, the butterfly

Flying effortlessly amongst the brambles....

I waited for Bron to return as days turned to months. The garden withered and the grass turned yellow. The house never smelled of evening casseroles or chocolate cakes baked especially for me. Bron's milk white lace curtains greyed and the door changed colour for a new nameplate. Her cat Penny cried for nights and stopped scratching on the front door. Rumours spread of Bron selling home and moving to Wales as a recluse. But, I never gave up.

I wondered if Bron wanted to return to her roots of country life or if it was her way of practicing detachment in Buddhism - forsaking the real world, leaving me friendless. With Bron's exit ended friendship defying boundaries of nationality, culture, religion and age. By now, I had started believing that love was ephemeral, lasting long enough only to be lost. It could be a tangent, an arc; never a complete circle.

Ultimately, the day arrived. I managed to sneak into Bron's garden, climbing successfully over the fence and tiptoeing in; mustering all my courage. There were thickets and wild flowers glowering menacingly to the sun's hide-and-seek. Far end stood Bron's khaki green, paint-peeled Wendy house with a windcock in deep slumber. A deathly silence loomed as time stood still like a forgotten dream. I knew

A House full of Butterflies

the Wendy house, had entered it before; today, I was more curious than ever. Darkness seeped as I peeked through the cobwebbed keyhole. I tried pushing open the door, only failing miserably. I must have done something good for in my last earnest attempt, it finally gave in.

Lo and behold! Out flew a kaleidoscope of butterflies in their flight to freedom. I didn't know where Bron was. I could feel her wings enveloping me. Bron had set us free – me and the butterflies.

1000 words