

A new morning awoke and the forest birds chirped and sang in the canopies while the sun poked its head out from the brown earth below. The sky silhouetted beautiful shades of orange and yellow on the forest floor and the wind blew gently through the trees, whose leaves glistened in the light of the rising sun. It was on this day that a very special moment took place on one of these leaves. A little white egg was ready to hatch, and with it, a new life would emerge and see the world for the very first time.

The egg glistened in the sunlight and wobbled in anticipation, while the eggs proud but nervous mother protected it from falling with her large white wings. The sun looked down at the leaf with amusement and showered it with light to soften the eggs shell; the egg wiggled slowly, reacting to the sunlight, and soon a tiny antenna popped out. The sun brightened its rays and then a second antenna poked out. The white butterfly leaned towards the now hatched egg with delight and looked closely at her child's eyes; they were a soft sky blue. The newborn caterpillar inched slowly out of its egg, covered in sticky slime, and crawled instinctively into its mothers open wings. "You begin your new life today little one" she said with a smile. "I'm going to call you..." she paused, "Navin. Yes, that is a beautiful name, isn't it? It means *new*." A look of approval spread over the sun's face before it returned to sharing its warmth with the rest of the forest. Navin curled up into a tiny ball at the sound of his new name, and gently drifted into his very first sleep.

The little caterpillar grew in size quickly and everyday he became more and more curious about the world around him. One morning Navin and his friends were hungry, and so they set out to look for some leaves to eat. The caterpillars crawled along a spiny branch and came to an immediate halt when they found a gigantic leaf, which they immediately started munching on. While the caterpillars were filling their bellies a majestic butterfly swooped above them and perched

delicately on to a small twig; the beauty of its vibrantly coloured wings twinkled in each of the caterpillar's envious eyes. "One of these days we'll turn into one of those pretty flying things" said one of the entranced caterpillars, his eyes glued to the marvelous creature. "It's true!" cried another caterpillar, "My mother turned into a butterfly and she's the prettiest butterfly in the forest!"

"Same with mine!"

"Mine too!" called out the other two caterpillars. Navin took one last look at the butterfly nestled above him and told himself that no matter what he would become the most colourful butterfly to ever live. A smile swept over his face as he thought this and everyone went back to nibbling on the leaf until the sun fell asleep and it was time to wriggle back home.

After a few long days of climbing up the tree, crawling along its branches to eat leaves and then returning home to sleep, Navin noticed that the other caterpillars were getting significantly fatter. Navin wondered anxiously why his friends were getting fat while he remained small and thin, "I eat just as much as them..." he thought. The next day Navin journeyed to the big leaf only to find none of his caterpillar friends wiggling about. He turned around and inspected the branch hoping to spot them. A tear formed at his cheek and splashed on the bark floor when he saw the four cocoons hanging in the treetop. Navin went back to the leaf and ate by himself until it was time to go home; he couldn't get to sleep that night.

Navin was exhausted when he woke up as he had spent the whole night squirming and shuffling in bed. He was so worried about not turning into a cocoon that he decided he would climb up to one of the higher branches and seek help from some of the older caterpillars. The worried caterpillar yelped frantically to the others, "Help me! All my friends are cocoons and I haven't changed yet!" The other caterpillars huddled up in a circle and whispered amongst themselves. The biggest caterpillar moved towards Navin, "Alright, we'll help you, but only on the condition that you do everything we say."

"Yes, anything, please!" replied Navin.

“Ok. Well a friend of a friend was in the exact same situation as you once upon a time, and what he did was hang upside down on a branch all day until he turned into a cocoon!”

“Ahh, why didn’t I think of that?” Navin beamed. The apple green caterpillar wiggled as fast as he could, which was not fast at all, to the end of the branch and looked down. It was quite a drop and there was a chance he could fall and hurt himself, but Navin wanted to turn into a butterfly so badly that he would risk anything to do it, and so he crawled along the branch and hung upside down from it. “I’m feeling a bit light headed,” he groaned.

“Do you want to turn into a butterfly or not?” smirked the big caterpillar, who went back to nibbling on the leaf. A long time passed and the sun had begun to sink into the earth. Navin, who was still hanging upside down, could not feel his antennas and thought it was a sign he was transforming into a cocoon. “I feel it!” he cried. “Hey fellas, I’m transforming! I can feel it in my gut!” Navin closed his eyes and tensed his tiny body in an attempt to fasten the process; he could feel it coming now, any second. Navin opened his mouth and all that came out was vomit, he plummeted off the branch and fell head first onto the branch below him. Navin looked up to see a group of blurry caterpillars spinning and snickering amongst themselves. “I can’t believe he actually listened to us!” “Yeah, what a dumb caterpillar!” The treetops were filled with laughter.

Dizzy and depressed, Navin made his way home. “Mum, I can’t turn into a butterfly... What’s wrong with me?” A tear formed and ran down his cheek. Navin’s mother looked down at her son and swallowed her breath. She began to speak softly, “Little one, you have to be patient, becoming a butterfly is something that will happen to you when you are ready.” Navin looked up at his mother attentively. The butterfly struggled for words, “In the mean time just enjoy being a caterpillar, your time will come soon enough” Navin’s eyes sunk to the floor. “But all my friends are butterflies and... and” he stuttered. “You can always make new friends, Navin”, his mother suggested. “I guess so” he said, unconvinced.

Navin lay on his bed and stared at the moon outside, its soft white glow stirred his imagination and soon he was flapping his wings and fluttering towards its inviting light. Navin's eyes were fixated on the moon as he flew towards it. With each breath the moon got bigger, and he got closer towards it. Navin's flight was disrupted when a flash of thunder violently struck the night sky and snapped him out of his dream. The sky moaned in pain and showered blades of water in retaliation. The rain continued aggressively and soon a thick mist covered the moon's glow. No sleep visited Navin's eyes that night.

Eventually the sun woke up from the earth's belly, and when it did it stretched its arms and let out a big yawn, which woke up most of the forest's critters. The birds were the first to greet the new day; they sang their morning songs while the wind whistled in unison. Beams of playful orange light shone through Navin's window and danced on the foot of his bed. A little blue bird with a plum shaped body glided into Navin's room and landed carefully on his windowsill. The bird scrunched up its feathers and darted its eyes left and right, it then relaxed and let out a beautiful song, its notes sustaining into the cool morning air. Navin's eyes widened as he gazed at the bird and listened to the melody that was pouring out of its beak, hoping it would last forever. The bird paused for a moment to scratch its feathers, and Navin, thinking that the bird had finished its song, clapped his hands in admiration. In a flash the fruit shaped bird tensed its wings and took off towards the open sky. Navin wiggled as fast as he could to the open window and glanced out, desperate to catch the bird with his eyes.

Suddenly, a cool wind blew inside, and with it came news from a far away place. The wind spoke to Navin about a story that he was passing through the forest's many trees - a story of a caterpillar that had attained a state beyond butterfly. "This caterpillar" the wind said, "has woken up for the very first time, and sees the world for what it really is!" The wind sounded very excited. Navin looked at the wind dumbly and wondered how anything could be greater than being a butterfly, he pictured the butterfly he had seen with his friends, and he desired that form, that beauty, with all his heart.

The cool wind circled the room and managed a warm smile. "From what I have heard on my travels, much can be learned from this wise caterpillar." Navin frowned, not forgetting the trick that had been played on him earlier, "I don't need some stupid caterpillar to teach me anything." He turned his attention away from the wind and continued to scan the still sky outside his window. "This caterpillar's teachings have caused quite a stir in the forest," the wind persisted. "I know for sure that the blue bird you scared away will be on her way to see him," the wind winked and Navin's eyes brightened, but he hid them. The wind wished Navin well and reunited with the air outside. Navin continued to look out the window and thought privately about the blue bird and its song, which only remained as a faded memory.

The sun retreated back into the earth - as it did at the conclusion of every day - and allowed the moon's glow to light the sky in its place; spiky shadows cast off all the tree branches and zigzagged across the forest floor. A light drizzle of rain emptied out of the night sky. Under a small mango tree, somewhere in the dense forest, the Buddhapillar meditated patiently. His companions, two little brown caterpillars, sat next to him, hungry for more wisdom to part his lips. The Buddhapillar, who was in the deepest state of meditation, gently touched the earth with his hand - a thunderclap broke the night's silence and the entire forest floor trembled. Day or night, sun or rain, he thought, it is all the same. All is one. A smile swept across his face and he gently opened his eyes, seeing the world in a completely new light. Both the sky and earth knew that at that very moment the Buddhapillar had woken up; the moon peered at him through a silky veil of mist, and smiled.

The sun pried Navin's eyes open with its bright rays of light and forced the new day upon him; he rolled over in his bed and groaned. The birds chirped and whistled outside, as they did every morning, but Navin ignored them, he grew impatient with life's routine. "Why should I get out of bed and face this day?" he thought, "When it is exactly like every other day?" Many days like this had passed since the great disappearing act of his caterpillar friends. Now their

empty cocoons remained in the treetops as painful reminders that they have moved on with their new life, leaving Navin behind.

Navin climbed out of bed and peered out his window, desperate to catch a glimmer of hope in this new day. Navin dreamed of finding something so exciting that it would relight the flame that once burned so passionately inside him. No matter how many leaves Navin ate he would still be hungry; his soul starved for something more substantial. A golden leaf fell from a tree above and dropped past Navin's window. He watched carefully as the leaf danced in the sky, floating effortlessly with the wind and offering no resistance, yet moving unpredictably as though it were following its own path. Navin slumped away from the window, sighed deeply, and feeling hungry, made his way to the leaves outside.

The sky was a curious shade of orange this morning, and the leaves were beginning to fall. Navin decided against climbing to the safety of the tree leaf today and instead thought he would wander the forest floor in search of something new. He remembered that the forest was a large place and knew he would find excitement somewhere in its depths. As Navin walked towards the door a voice boomed from behind, "Where are you going, little one?" It was Navin's worried mother.

"Outside."

"But it's dangerous outside," she countered,

"But it's boring inside," Navin answered back.

"Yes... but I need to be able to see you while you are eating, and I can't see you if you're roaming around the forest by yourself," she paused for a moment. "Eat the leaves on the nearby branches if you are hungry."

Navin wiggled to the door, opened it, and called out loudly to his mother "I'll be safe. Don't worry about me!" The butterfly swooped through the door and landed in front of her naive son. "You could get eaten Navin," she said sharply.

"Eaten?" he repeated. "By a leaf?"

"No, by a bird. Bird's eat caterpillars." A cold shiver rushed up Navin's spine.

"Birds would never do that!" he shouted.

"Yes they would, there's a lot I haven't told you about the forest I'm afraid."

Navin looked out into the forest and it appeared to change shape. In an instant his perception of it had transformed from a place of mystery and adventure, to a place of threat. Birds hovered in the orange sky, scanning for food. Feeling defeated Navin wiggled back towards the door. This was Navin's first taste of danger, his realisation that the forest wasn't always a safe place, and that he was not indestructible. Navin shrugged and turned around. "Good boy," his mother said cheerily as she hovered back inside. Navin stood at the edge of the door and stole another glance at the forest; suddenly he remembered the blue bird. Navin closed his eyes and thought about the bird's beautiful song. He wondered how something so beautiful could exist in such an evil place. A cluster of birds circled the tangerine sky, two of them descended on a spiny tree branch and cooed gently.

Navin turned his head and looked at his mother, who was floating gracefully above the kitchen sink. Her eyes twinkled from the sunlight crashing through the windows, and for a moment Navin missed her hugely, even though she was right there in front of him. He did not know that this would be the last time he saw her face. Navin took a deep breath and shut the door quietly behind him. On the other side of the closed door he heard his mother let out a gigantic sneeze. The sound echoed and rustled the forest trees, which caused a family of tiny squirrels to scatter into the darkness, it also made Navin laugh. The snickering caterpillar was soon interrupted by the sound of his gurgling stomach, and so he unknowingly set tail on his adventure into the forest that he would never return from. Navin told himself he was looking for a new leaf to nibble on and would be back before sundown, but deep down he knew he was looking for something else. Somewhere in the forest, under a wet mango tree, the Buddhapillar made a silly face; his two caterpillar disciples laughed and laughed until tears of joy streamed down their brown cheeks.

Navin travelled great distances in the mysterious sea of green - he saw giant boulders, fallen cocoons, mighty ant warriors and towering blades of grass - he must have passed at least five trees, Navin thought. He had never seen trees from the ground up before; they stood like gods reaching their arms into the sky. When the wind blew, their long branches waved and it looked like they were saying hello. The sun began its slow descent when Navin finally decided to stop and rest, and so he leaned his back against a large and strangely soft rock to catch his breath. Just as he was beginning to relax Navin was nudged by something slimy. The caterpillar jumped backwards and froze at what he saw - hundreds of white, ghost like caterpillars devouring what appeared to be a broken insect.

Navin was stunned, he didn't know whether to squirm away in fear or surrender to these ghoulish creatures. Somehow the question "Who... are you?" escaped his trembling lips. The ghost caterpillars turned their heads and looked at the small caterpillar smilingly. "We're maggots," they all sang in unison. Navin had never seen maggots before in his life, and so he did not know a thing about them, except that they looked like scary ghosts. "What happened here?" Navin stuttered, "Why are you eating that poor bug?" The maggot's eyes, which were still looking at Navin, glowed in anticipation of the approaching night. They stared at him blankly for a moment and then returned to eating. One of the maggots kept his eyes on Navin and whispered to him, so as to not disturb his feasting friends, "This insect died, and now we are eating it, would you like some?" The smell made Navin sick, he felt like throwing up but bravely held it in. Before he could answer the maggots dropped off the dead insect to reveal its ruined body; every scrap of its shell and flesh had been eaten, leaving only a mangled carcass behind.

The maggots crawled away in single file, looking to scavenge another meal. Navin watched in horror as ants rushed over to finish off the poor insect corpse. The ants swarmed the carcass and tore it apart into tiny little pieces, which they then each carried on their shoulders before scuttling off into the darkness. Ants,



he would one day learn, lived in the trillions and dedicated every second of their day towards protecting and honouring their beloved Queen. The ants scurried around the forest day and night to bring scraps of food to her, and would even fight living insects much bigger than they were - frightening creatures like giant spiders and centipedes - in order to get the food back safely. The smaller ants would stand on top of each other's heads and turn themselves into big walls to protect her, and they would tell her that she didn't look fat, even though she did. Needless to say, the ants loved their Queen, and devoted all of their energy to loving her. The ant Queen smiled from the love that she felt for her children, and the ant hive danced with joy. It would be a long time before Navin realised this love that existed between the ants and their Queen, and between all insects and animals for that matter. However, at this point Navin was terrified of these ant-monsters who snatched corpses in the night.

The moon replaced the sun and night had fallen - the forest was once again blanketed in total darkness. Navin, who was at least five trees away from home, started to feel scared. He forgot which way he came from and it was so dark that he could barely see in front of him. The sound of distant howling and occasional barking terrified him. The spooked caterpillar curled up into a tiny ball and wished with all his might that he was home, safely sheltered under his mother's wings. In response to his wish the sky flashed a frightening yellow, while a big grey cloud roared and shot a powerful bolt of electricity at a nearby tree. Pain shot up the old tree's spine, which then split in two and collapsed onto the ground. The sky was visibly upset by the cloud's bad behaviour, and so it cried fat droplets of rain onto the curled up ball that was Navin. The sky would mourn that particular trees death until it had no more tears left to cry.

Two little brown caterpillars hurried under a giant leaf to protect themselves from the falling rain, which was becoming more and more aggressive. The leaf struggled to stay still and almost blew away in the wind. The Buddhapillar, however, remained unmoved by the sky's display of strength. He was rooted in the earth below like a large tree. His hands, which were cupped in his lap, slowly

filled with water. Despite the blistering cold, a blazing fire warmed the inside of his belly, and behind his closed eyelids were glowing embers of serenity. The Buddhapillar focused his mind's eye on the image of a still lake - he was so absorbed in this meditation that he felt as though he was physically there at the lake, making circles in the water with his fingers. As time went by the clouds in the blue sky above the lake made all sorts of exciting shapes and then faded away into nothing, then back into more shapes, then back into nothing. Meanwhile the Buddhapillar felt his body expanding, and eventually found himself inside the lake, only to realise that he was the lake. The water was very muddy, and grains of dirt floated and bobbed at its surface. The dirt, however, slowly sank to the ground with each deep inhalation of the Buddhapillar's breath. Eventually, all the dirt remained at the bottom, and the lake became as clear as the now cloudless sky above it.

Rays of sunlight focused on Navin's curled up body like a laser, and eventually he uncurled and shook the water off himself. Two dogs covered in mud watched him curiously. One of the dogs inched closer and sniffed the caterpillar to gauge whether he was friend or foe. Navin jumped up in surprise and screamed out "Please don't eat me!" The dogs laughed so hard that they fell over and rolled around on the floor, getting muddier in the process. "Why would we waste our time eating something as small as you!?" they exclaimed. Navin looked at his little body, and then at the big dogs, and he realised how small he really was.

"What are you doing in the forest all by yourself?" the larger of the two dogs asked, "Don't you know it's dangerous to travel alone?" the smaller one added helpfully. Navin thought about this for a second and replied honestly "I don't know..." Both dogs looked at each other and as they did their eyes lit up. "Are you... ARE YOU, the awakened one?" both dogs yelped in joy at their grand discovery. Navin was utterly confused, seeing as he did just wake up, but couldn't understand why that was so special to these dogs. One of the dogs pushed a large oval shaped fruit towards him with its wet nose. "Eat this," he

pleaded. "Behind its skin is the juiciest flesh that this forest can provide, it is our gift to you, please take it and may it give you energy." Navin's head was still cloudy and it took him a moment to realise that the dogs were mistaking him for that caterpillar the wind had told him about, the Buddhapillar. "I'm not who you think I am. I'm just a caterpillar," Navin replied hesitantly. The dogs laughed happily, "We know you are just a caterpillar, we have heard many times from others, that is what makes you so special. You have brought hope in this world. If someone as small as you can become enlightened, then so can everyone else!" Both dogs hurried off into the forest, full of content that they had finally met the Buddhapillar, and above all, ecstatic that the unbelievable was true and the impossible, possible.

Navin climbed on top of the giant fruit and pondered. He was very hungry but couldn't figure out how he was going to penetrate the fruit's skin. He tried as hard as he could but couldn't even make a dent. Navin finally gave up. He did not get to taste the mango's sweet nectar. Instead he laid his back against the fruit and stared up at the formless clouds above him, and as he did, he thought about the Buddhapillar.

Just as the clouds passed above Navin and the mango, so did the time, and soon minutes turned into days and days into weeks. Navin sat by the mango the entire time and watched life pass him by. He had resigned from his journey, knowing all too well that he was too far from home to ever return, and was too small to survive all by himself. Navin was feeling weak, and knew his time was running out. He no longer cared about whether or not he turned into a butterfly; the only thing that remained in his mind was the Buddhapillar. Navin had never met this mysterious caterpillar, but he had heard countless tales from the many insects that had passed by Navin and his mango - which was very quickly stolen from him - and knew that he *had to meet* this legendary being while he still had a chance. Navin mustered the little energy he had left and followed the direction the wind was blowing, positive that it was the right path to take. Along the way Navin happened upon small a puddle of water and drank from it thirstily, as he

drank he noticed his reflection for the first time since he left his home. His face was withered and gray, his eyes sunken, and wrinkles branched out in every direction on his skin. Navin stared at his reflection for what felt like an eternity, and as he did a memory of his father's old, wrinkled face flashed in his mind, a face he had not seen since a few days after his birth.

As Navin looked deeply into own reflection an icy sensation formed at the tip of his tail and then jolted up his spine with the speed and ferocity of a tornado and exploded at the top of his head. The feeling that followed was as though he were a flower that was blooming open to absorb the sun's light; warmth, which vibrated throughout his caterpillar body and resonated across the entire forest, replaced the cold he felt before. This vibration slowed down, as though his body was absorbing it, and then it turned into a big smile, and Navin couldn't help but let out a big laugh. "Ahh! Now I see," he said to the sky, and he went on to drink from the puddle in peace.

With a newfound energy Navin climbed the nearest tree all the way to its summit, and wiggled his way onto a dangling twig. He sat there in total silence and gazed out into the open sky, which did not appear to be any larger or closer than it was all the way on the ground. He looked at the fluffy white clouds as they transformed effortlessly into a thousand different shapes, and then evaporated into the blank canvas that was the blue sky. Even though Navin was now old and wrinkled and could feel that his time was slipping away - that he would soon leave his body - the thought didn't touch the motionless caterpillar's mind, for he felt more alive now than he ever did before. Watching the clouds he realised that everything was impermanent, and that everything must die in order to be reborn, to become new. Destruction and creation are one in the same. Navin sat for so long that he witnessed the sunset and the moon take its place, and he saw the sun rise from the earth again, like a fiery orb of energy. From this high up he marveled at how the sun gradually lit up the darkness by showering it with light. Every single day this amazing process happens, but he had been blind this whole time to the beautiful clockwork of nature, its constant folding

and unfolding. Time appeared to stop, and the sunrise hung motionlessly in the pastel orange sky. Navin closed his eyes peacefully, but was not greeted with dreams, instead all thoughts ceased to exist, and without realising it a cocoon formed around his entire body. He eventually emerged from his cocoon, but he did not emerge as Navin, the old caterpillar - he had no recollection of ever being Navin. The butterfly saw the world with fresh eyes, and when it opened its wings for the first time it flew. Two small children holding nets saw the butterfly flutter gracefully over their heads. One of the children swiped at it with his net and exclaimed proudly "Yes! I caught it!"