

## **BLACK WITCH MOTH**

**(Revised)**

She emerged from her cocoon in the light of the moon. She was as dark as the night sky without its stars. Slowly her sable wings unfurled to the stunning magnificence of her seven inch wingspan. Within minutes she was airborne. Impelling her onward was the knowledge that a male of her species was waiting to fulfill her. On through the night she flew, at an altitude so high, it was impossible for other nocturnal moths. Just as It was beginning to grow light, she spotted a leafy eave under which she could rest. Into the corner of the eave she went, spreading her wings for both rest and camouflage as her hours of quiet began.

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I awoke just as the new day was dawning. Coming into fuller consciousness, I became aware of a burgeoning sense that something new and different was aborning. What, I didn't yet know. Will was still sound asleep, and so I slowly and gently slid out of the sheets and, barefoot, headed out towards the kitchen and the backdoor that opened out to our long, leafy back yard. It still amazed me that I was just minutes from Hollywood and freeways, and yet you would not know it looking out my back door. All that was visible was grass and trees and bushes. There was another house next door, but it, too, was hidden in both bushes and trees.

I hadn't been standing there long before Will came up behind me, and wrapped me in his arms. Will is a big man. Not in the sense of tall, but big like an ancient Mongolian warrior. His hair is dark and Asian silky, and he wears it just long enough to sweep it into a knot at the back of his head. But it was his eyes that always mesmerized me. They were almond shaped and

upturned at the outer corners with long lashes and irises almost as dark as his hair. I always imagined that Genghis Khan lurked somewhere in his DNA.

“What are you doing up so early? I know your rehearsal with the guys went way into the night,” I said softly as I didn’t want to disturb the early morning quiet.

“I missed you,” he replied.

We stood there sharing a lovely, peaceful moment when I looked up to see an enormous, beautiful moth resting in the far corner of the back porch eave. At least, I assumed it was a moth as I knew they are generally nocturnal creatures. It was stunning in its size, and of a type that I had never seen before. Very quietly I said, “Will, look up into that corner. Have you ever seen anything like that before?”

I could feel his long, soft hair brush the back of my neck as he turned to look up.

“That is huge,” he whispered. “Let’s try to find out what it is.” And he left me to go grab his phone. I stayed outside just a little longer after he got a picture or two, as I marveled at this creature’s dark beauty. Curiosity took over after a couple of minutes, and I went inside to see what Will had found out.

“It’s called a Black Witch Moth,” Will said with just a touch of wonder in his voice as he read from the internet. “They are the largest moths in North America. The ancient peoples of Mexico believed that if you see one, it’s because someone has put a curse on you. There is not a whole lot known about them, and they are a fairly rare sighting here in California.”

Scanning ahead he read, “The caterpillar stage likes to eat, among other things, Acacia leaves. And guess what? I’m pretty sure that’s an Acacia tree out in the back, near the avocado tree.”

“Oh Will! Wouldn’t it be great to get to witness some of this amazing creature’s life cycle? Still, looking at you now, it’s hard to imagine how such a beautiful morning could have anything to do with a curse.” For just a second, after I said that, the image of Sybil came to mind. Sybil, of the dark hair and darker still eyes, who lived next door and was married to Levi, a talented carpenter, and Will’s best friend from childhood.

I moved toward Will, pushed his phone down and looked into his amazing eyes. The thought of Sybil disappeared. “In the meantime, I know you and the guys have another rehearsal tonight, and I’ve got work, followed by a class tonight. So maybe a little more sleep is in order?” I suggested, looking under my lashes at him with a silent invitation. Back into bed we went.

We lived in a funky little house that I loved. It was small and old, but charming in its own way. Ours was one of two houses surrounded by greenery of all types and, obviously, both had been built around the same time. Our kitchen with its one little window by the stove, looked out on Levi and Sybil’s dirt driveway.

Upon meeting Levi, I had found him to be immediately likeable. He was Will’s opposite as he was tall, with dark blonde hair and blue eyes. He had a quiet, inviting demeanor, whereas Will had an electricity that immediately drew attention without his saying a word. Levi had welcomed me with a big, quick hug when Will had taken me over to their house for introductions.

“It’s great to have someone other than my Sybil looking after this big lug!”, Levi said with a smile. “This guy may play an amazing guitar, but he can’t do laundry for shit,” and he laughed.

Sybil, on the other hand, had given me quite the calculating once-over. It was clear — to me anyway — that she did not appreciate my moving in to what she apparently considered ‘her’ domain.

“If you have any problems coming up with ideas for Will’s late night dinners, I have plenty I can share with you. Trust me. I know his favorites by now.” She said this while smiling at Will, and only glancing at me.

*Thank you for nothing Mrs. Wanna-Be-the-Queen-Bee* I thought, but did not say. Instead, in an effort to keep my first ‘meet the neighbors’ moment genial, I just smiled and said “thanks”.

Will and Levi had found the two houses while looking for places to rent after Will’s last band had broken up. The two best friends were overjoyed to find two separate properties right next door to each other. The houses were similar, but had one difference: our house had a bathtub/shower combo, and Levi and Sybil’s house only had a shower. None of this meant a thing to me, however, in that moment. My focus was on Will and me and on the tender intimacy and visceral connection we were finding in our relationship.

Because it was a new band, Will and the guys were rehearsing almost every night. Sometimes in a rented studio, and sometimes at one end of our living room sans the amplifiers.

On one of the rare nights when there were no rehearsals, Will and I curled up on the floor with pillows under our heads and put on Stravinsky’s ‘The Rite of Spring’. Will reached behind us and grabbed some sheet music from the book shelf just above our heads. I rested my head on his chest as he read the musical score to the ballet while we listened.

“You are amazing Will. I truly not only love you, I admire you in so many ways.”

“And you, PattyLou, and your smile” Will said while holding me close, “ are the light in my life”.

It was a magical time. We were so young, We were so in love. And we were so excited about the life we believed was ahead.

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Her glistening sable beauty was at its peak. Her pheromone glands released the heady scent that was hers alone. Before long she sensed the presence of a male of her species. He was stunning in his perfection. He released his pheromones and they began the dance and flight that eventually sent her almost plummeting to the ground with exhaustion. She was exhilarated as he mounted her and completed the reason for her existence. Their union was brief. Now, she must seek the perfect home for her eggs. She must lay them in just the right vegetation, so her offspring could feed. Just ahead was what she sought, a beautiful, full acacia tree. Beating her wings she half flew, half crawled to a fissure in the bark. It was just the right size for keeping her eggs safe and she quickly expelled them. At last, she could rest.

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“Will!” I called running out of the bathroom. “We’re pregnant!!”

“What?! Are you sure?,” His eyes went wide with surprise and excitement.

“Yes! Look at my test!” I held it out and tried to stop dancing with joy, so he could see the very definite plus sign.

“Oh, wow. Oh, my god. This is freakin’ unbelievable. You’re pregnant **and** I just found out a major recording company is really interested in the band! They’ve arranged for a few gigs around town, while they decide if they want to sign us. Minor Deeds and you and I and baby

are going to make some money!” Will threw his arms around me, and lifted me off the ground. His head went back and he whooped with ecstatic happiness. We both started laughing like idiots, as he twirled around holding me tight and close. After he put me down, I could see the teary shine of joy in his remarkable eyes.

My pregnancy progressed smoothly and Minor Deeds started to build a following. Will’s nights were long and late, and he was writing music like a fiend during the day. Being a part-time legal secretary for a talented Beverly Hills attorney, I worked throughout my pregnancy, trying to get a little ahead for the planned maternity leave. On weekends Will and I looked for used baby furniture amongst our friends and relatives. Most of what we found needed repainting, as did the tiny second bedroom that would now be the nursery. When the birth of our baby arrived, we were ready.

I was in my hospital room waiting for my next feeding time with our baby boy, Gabriel, when my sister Jeannie came in to visit.

“Wow, Sis! He is one handsome baby boy,” she said with a big smile on her face. “Will is at the nursery now just eating him up with his eyes. Sybil is there too, looking at both Gabriel and Will.”

“What do you mean ‘Sybil is looking at both Gabriel and Will’?”

Jeannie laughed and said, “I don’t know. It was hard to tell who was getting more of her attention, Will or the baby. But you know, Sybil. She’s just a big flirt,” and shrugged her shoulders. Jeannie continued, “Gabriel looks so much like Will! I can hardly see you in him at all.”

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Up in the Acacia tree, the eggs were hatching and the larvae were starting to make their way out of the fissure in the tree's bark. The night was dark and intimated that it might offer some protection, but this was the most dangerous of times. Not a moment would offer safety. Each larva was oblivious to the danger and obedient only to the prime directive: eat. The quiet rustling sound of the leaves in movement was like the Siren's song. There was no resisting it, in spite of the peril lurking everywhere. Those rare few larvae that were successful at hiding and growing would briefly be magnificent in the world of caterpillars.

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Because Will's VW bus was filled with band equipment, it was my Mom who brought Gabe and me home from the hospital. She carried Gabe to the front door, while I carried my small overnight bag. I opened the door, and Will stepped up to me. Putting his arms around me, he bent me over slightly backwards like in a Hollywood movie, and gave me a delicious kiss.

"You are such a glorious sight, Mama!" he exclaimed. "I have missed you!!" He then turned to my Mom and Gabe, and took Gabe in his arms. We all went into the house, and to Gabe's new room. The "new" nursery was literally 3 steps from our room. The colors were happy and there was a rocking chair for nursing. As far as I was concerned, it was perfect.

Until it wasn't.

Being home with Gabe, I noticed changes in Will that work, and the pregnancy with its hormonal fog had previously kept hidden from me. Along with Minor Deeds' growing popularity had come new friends and new temptations — and pressure. It was subtle, but I

could sense that the pressure to succeed had started to take root in Will. Access to an ever increasing supply of drugs, old and new, seemed omnipresent.

One early morning, Will arrived home red-eyed and stinking of cigarettes, sweat, old cologne, grease and burnt coffee. I had gotten out of bed to meet him as he came in the front door.

“What’s going on, Will? We both know the gig ended hours ago.”

“O god, PattyLou, don’t start in on me now. I’ve been sitting in Denny’s, writing music. And yes. I ate a big, greasy breakfast and drank a pot of coffee. I’ve got two new songs I need to have ready to rehearse this week. And yes again. I needed to come down from the buzz of creating live music and snorting a little coke with the guys. Can you understand that?

Please?”

I put my arms around him and it was like holding onto a live wire. He was literally vibrating as if his nerve endings were overloaded with adrenalin and stimulation. I didn’t know how he could stand it. “I love you, Will, but I’m worried. It’s hard to see you looking and being so...so agitated and burnt out at the same time. Can you understand that?”

While cleaning out the little closets in what was to be the nursery, I had found partial bottles of Adderall and Ritalin prescribed to people other than Will. He told me he’d forgotten they were there, but then went on to tell me about being prescribed Dexedrine at the age of eight years old. The doctor had prescribed it as a means to help with his weight control. My Mongolian warrior had been considered “fat” as a child, and still carried the burden of that description. His father would never take Will on the hunting trips to their Nevada ranch. He only took Will’s older brother. Will was considered a chubby hindrance and not as much of a he-man as his brother. Will liked music.



At the time he told me this, I felt not only sorrow for his self-identification of being “fat”, but a nebulous sense of foreboding about what “success” might mean to our lives. Now, I stood there holding Will and wondering if there was anything I could do to bring him back to the Will I had first known.

I promised myself I was going to try to create small islands of peace and calm whenever Minor Deeds was off for the night. I would cook Will’s favorites, put on some music, and he could sit on the floor and play with Gabe. These became special nights not only for Will, but for Gabe and me. It was a chance to have some time with Will free from the pressures of the band and getting ahead in the music world.

I was shocked and then pissed off when on one of our evenings, Sybil showed up at our backdoor and asked if she could use our bathtub.

“Do you mind?” she said with a smile. “I’ve started taking ballet classes and I am sore! Levi is happy just having a shower in the house, but there is nothing like a bathtub soak to ease my newly sore muscles.”

I would have been happy to say ‘Go back home, Sybil, pay some attention to Levi, and leave us the hell alone’. Will, however, jumped right in and said, “Sure. Go right ahead. I get it.”

*Sheesh, I thought, actually you don't get it.*

It wasn’t too many days after Sybil’s ‘bathtub visit’ that I woke up one night and could hear Will in the kitchen. I was overjoyed to get a moment to share with him as Gabe was asleep. I happily got up and padded into the kitchen.

Will was standing by the stove and quietly talking to someone through the little window that looked out onto Levi and Sybil's driveway. I could hear Sybil's voice.

"Hey, you two. What's up?" I asked.

Will's head snapped around, and he said, "Hey, babe. Sybil had a bad dream that woke her up. She saw the light on and came over to talk."

Sybil said with an annoyance in her voice that surprised me, "Well. I guess I'll head back to bed. Thanks for the conversation and consultation Will."

*What the hell, I'm thinking. She can't talk to Levi?*

Sybil walked off, and I noticed that she was quite clearly only wearing a barely-covering-her-rear tee shirt. I laughed and asked Will, "So is Sybil taking up life as a groupie?"

Will, much to my surprise, actually spoke up for her and said in a serious tone, "No. She and Levi are having some problems and she just wanted to talk."

"Wait. You said she was having a bad dream that woke her up."

"Yeah. Bad dream. Problems with Levi. Light on in our kitchen. She came over. Who cares? What I know is I'm damned tired. Let's go to bed and take advantage of Gabe being asleep. What do you say?" He gave me a mischievous wink, patted my bottom and grabbed my hand.

It was on one of my happy-to-be-home weekend days that Gabe and I set off to go visit my sister, Jeannie, and her new baby. We had only gone a little way when I realized I had left the

all-important diaper bag at home. I turned the car around and, within a few minutes, walked back into the house with Gabe in my arms. As we headed towards Gabe's room to pick up the diaper bag, I saw Sybil reclining next to Will on our bed. Will looked like he had just stepped out of the shower as his hair was wet and combed straight back. He had a robe on. Sybil was dressed. She jumped up and came toward me radiating the heat of her anger.

I had stopped just outside the bedroom, literally shocked into silence.

"We weren't doing anything!" Her voice and tone were filled with a vehemence I couldn't understand. She brushed past me and headed to her house next door.

My legs felt weak and shaky, and all I wanted was to be someplace else. It didn't feel at all like they 'hadn't been doing anything'. Will hadn't said a word, and looked almost as shocked as I felt. I finally managed to say, "I'm going for a bit of a walk, Will. I need...a moment." I turned with Gabe still in my arms and headed quickly out the front door. I desperately tried to find some thought process that would allow me to laugh at being in a situation I had previously only seen in movies or read about in novels. The best I could achieve was to paste a weak and painfully false smile on my face.

When we got home a few minutes later, Will had left - according to his note - for rehearsal. I called my Sis and made a lame excuse about Gabe throwing up in the car, and needing to figure out what was going on with my boy. I wanted to tell her everything, but knew that whatever I told her would wind up common knowledge amongst the entire band.

Later that night, Will tried to assure me that Sybil had just come over to talk. He had been sitting on the bed after his shower "looking at some lyrics" when she walked in. Our doors

were usually unlocked and open to the fresh air during the day when Will was home.

According to Will, Sybil said she was concerned about Levi and needed to talk to somebody.

“On our bed, Will?”

He looked at me, pulled me into his arms, and said, “Who cares about that or those two and their problems anyway? I want to spend the rest of this evening with you and Gabe.”

Will and I put Sybil and Levi out of our minds, and before we knew it, the day arrived for Minor Deeds to head off on their first California tour. Will was beyond excited, and in spite of some anxiety about the need for this trip to be successful, he couldn't wait to get on the road. I didn't know what to feel.

The day before the band was due to return to L.A., my sister Jeannie called. Like me, she had stayed home because of her job.

“Hey. Guess what? I just got a call from Rick.”

“That's great, Sis.”

I could hear a quick intake of breath and then Jeannie said, “Well, the interesting part was when Rick told me that Sybil and a girlfriend had driven up to Santa Barbara where the band is playing.”

“Hmmm. I didn't even know she was gone. Wait. Levi's out of town in San Diego on a job. What the hell is she up to?”

Jeannie was quiet for moment and then said, “Rick and I agree that she is distinctly bored with her marriage and Levi. I’m thinking she’s looking for a little more excitement in her life. Like maybe hanging with someone who might just be famous before too long.”

“Oh god. Just hearing that makes me feel sick to my stomach. Oh, hell. What a crazy, witch of a woman!” My heart was racing and my chest felt like a huge boulder had taken the place of my lungs. What was going on between Will and Sybil? Somehow, some way, I was going to have to keep it together until I could look Will in the eyes and ask him. I, who never sweat, could feel drops rolling down my sides from under my arms.

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The caterpillar had eaten its fill. It had survived. The invisible forces of a monumental change were driving it to an area near the trunk of the tree where multiple branches would provide the best place for what was coming. From an area beside its jaws, silken thread began to emerge. First, the thread was used to attach it to the branch. Then more and more thread was spun, and slowly, the cocoon was built. Inside the cocoon the caterpillar would go through one magnificent molt and become a pupa. The forces of creation — against multiple obstacles — would maintain the Wheel of Life.

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Will returned from the tour while I was at work. I walked in from the drive home with Gabe in my arms as he had fallen asleep in the car. I went into his little bedroom and laid him down in his crib. Will was standing still in the middle of the living room, and the music of Erik Satie was softly coming through the speakers. As I walked back in, he looked at me with an expression of both luminous wonderment and great sorrow in his eyes.

“You’re glowing. You look like a gemstone.”

*Oh lord*, I thought, *he must have taken a psychedelic*. I realized it would be utterly pointless to try to have a real conversation. So I walked over, put my arms around him, and we just stood there for a while, quietly hugging. I took a deep breath. He smelled like Will. Soap, lingering aromas of food and marijuana and his own special musk. I stepped back and saw tears in his eyes and on his cheeks. I wiped them away. I felt a little hope. Maybe Will was crying simply because he loved me.

The next day I came home from work and found all of Will’s clothes and guitars gone. There was a note on the bed. “PattyLou, I can never be what and who you need.” He ended it with “I’ll never forget your smile.”

I wanted to burst out crying, but couldn’t, for Gabe’s sake. My throat hurt so much from needing to cry that I was afraid I was going to gag. I had to get out of that bedroom... immediately! With Gabe still in my arms, I walked into the back yard. As we walked around, breathing in the greenery and the fresh air, I remembered the Black Witch Moth. I wondered if she ever found her mate...laid her eggs...completed her cycle.

With Gabe still in my arms, we walked over to the acacia tree. Just above our heads, hanging from one of the branches jutting out into the yard, but very close to the tree trunk, I could just barely see what looked like a large, dark, smooth object. Maybe it was her cocoon. The start of a new life cycle for her. I hoped so.

Gabe and I walked back into the kitchen. I could see Levi through the little square kitchen window. His truck was parked in the driveway with piles of clothes in boxes and household stuff in other boxes sitting on the ground next to it. He was furiously throwing all that stuff into the back of the truck.

“Levi,” I called after I opened the kitchen window, “what’s up?”

“My whore of a wife moved out today while I was at work. She left me a fucking note! Bitch! What the fuck? I can’t fucking believe this is happening. I hope she rots. Jesus! I’m sorry, PattyLou, but I can’t deal with you or anything right now. Just stay inside and let me finish this and head the hell off.”

I closed the window, and with this horrible feeling of being caught in an avalanche of loss, I started trying to fix Gabe something to eat. *Now what?* I asked myself. *I won’t stay here, dammit!* But the brief cleansing flame of the anger spluttered and died as the hurt rushed in like a storm surge. *How can he do this to Gabe? And to me, the once-upon-a-time ‘light in his life’?* The illusory temptations that had been placed in front of him — including his best friend’s wife, I thought bitterly — had won. I could feel myself being compressed into a dark mass of hurt and sadness.

I grabbed onto the kitchen counter with both hands, understanding that for Gabe’s sake, I had to find a way out of this almost overwhelming pain. I was going to have to accept that all the dreams that had included Will were never going to come to pass. Starting right now I had to find a way to move into a new life for myself and Gabe. I turned my head and looked into his sweet, innocent eyes. Looking at him, I was reminded of the infinite potential Life still had to offer. Where there is potential, I thought, there is hope. There is hope.