

Pests and Proboscises:

My Study of Insects

Renouncing Revenge:
Heartbreak to Healing

Metamorphosis of a Dream:
One Woman's Transformation

Chocolate Crickets DIY Recipe

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Pests and Proboscises

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The Butterflies are back

The butterflies are back, soaring through the sky
The butterflies are back - everyone knows why
It's migration time, and everywhere you go
Butterflies are landing, like orange snow.

How many butterflies? No one can answer
But kids are following the little air-dancers
Wherever they go, they're bringing joy
Even the babies see them as a fun toy.

When we go to bed, we're full of sorrow
But we know we'll see them no later than tomorrow
When we wake up with smiles on our faces
We follow after the little dancing graces.

Now the butterfly season is over and gone
The colorful beauties of which we were so fond
But don't worry, they'll be back next year
And repeat the cycle to which we're so endeared.



Image credit: California State Parks- Oceano
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Protecting Your Monarchs

The monarch butterflies are going south for the year, but there might be a few caterpillars clinging to the branches of your milkweed. So, before you try to trim or chop down your milkweed so as not to distract monarchs that are journeying south for the winter, you might want to try these tips to make sure you're not killing any larvae or eggs:

- Check the underside of leaves. Many small caterpillars will be on the lower part of the plant. This provides both protection from predators and shade during the daytime.



Image credit: Kristin Yarbrough

- Check the stems. When moving from place to place, the bigger caterpillars are often found on the stalks, and sometimes even on the ground. Make sure you don't pull out milkweed while the caterpillar is gone, and then realize it has no food.

- Search carefully near the outer parts of the plant: top leaves, stalks, and even outer leaves near the bottom. While butterflies usually lay eggs on the top leaves, they can also occasionally be found near the bottom.

- Keep size in mind. Eggs are about as big as a sesame seed. Larvae range from the size of a grain of rice to an adult pinkie finger.

Tasty Little Buggers: Don Bugito's Coconut Brittle Mealworms

The snack I ate last week came, disguised, in a tan and sky blue paper bag. I looked at the content description on the back. This was not what I had ordered! Oh wait, it was what I had ordered. The crunchy delight of Don Bugito's coconut brittle mealworms.

The small paper bag advertised the worms as an eco-friendly, nutritional, authentic treat that was handmade in San Francisco. When I looked inside, however, I gasped in horror. The mealworms were visible in the mix, curled up with bits of caramel partially covering them.

Squeezing my eyes shut, I finally screwed up the courage to take a bite. I slowly placed it in my mouth and chewed. It tasted... good? Yes. Definitely. Crunchy, sweet and salty, with a hint of roasted flavor. This was unexpected, especially since it was, well, insects. But many insects can be very tasty if you add the right ingredients.

Later that night, I tried to prank my dad and get him to eat some mealworms that I had saved. I thought he couldn't refuse some totally normal, innocent, delicious caramel brittle. After all, I told him I had eaten them earlier, and saved some just for him. How could he say no to that?



Image: Kristin Yarbrough

Turns out he could. At first he fell for it, but when I showed it to him (even though I made sure not to show him the original bag), he quickly muttered, "Nope!" and walked away. The mealworm deliciousness went somewhere else after that.

So if you want to get edible insect snacks to play a prank on someone, this isn't your best choice. You should probably get something that doesn't show whatever unbeknownst ingredients are hidden inside. But if you are looking for something for a dare, or are just feeling adventurous, this is a good thing to purchase.

What Ants Eat

Apple cores, moldy bread,
Nuts that are rotten and things that are dead
This is what an ant feasts on
Supper's not over 'til everything's gone.



Image: "Ants 'n' Oranges," by Emyr Jones (CC by 3.0 US)

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Bring food to the perishing bee population
while maintaining a beautiful and healthy garden!



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Blue Giant Hyssop plants



Renouncing

Revenge

Renouncing Revenge

Eleven-year-old Emily Forester leaned against her shovel, panting. Only one ant bed remained, and it would not be there much longer if she kept working at it with such hardworking perseverance. Mopping sweat from her forehead, she clambered down from her stool in the shade of the old, rickety shed and got back to work. She must work faster. Her father, the late Brian Forester, been murdered by yellow jackets, so she must repay insects in return.

Emily paused, replaying the scene over in her mind. A tear trickled down her cheek. It had been a bright, sunny day, one of the first in spring. Emily had been climbing a tree outside in the woods behind the family's cabin in the woods, and her mother had been picking flowers for the table. Her father had been working on the annual spring trimming on the many trees in the part of the woods that came directly up to their house. He and Emily had been in the same tree, despite her mother's many warnings. The two of them had been laughing so loudly that neither had heard the faint droning that grew steadily louder.

"Hey, Emily," he had called. "What did the walrus say to the—"

Suddenly he screamed. Falling to the ground, his face turned beet red. Emily paled. Only then did she see the swarm of yellow jackets buzzing away. She ran to get her mother.

Hours later, Emily tossed and turned in bed. She couldn't sleep. Her mother was still at the hospital, waiting for news. She had promised to call her the second she heard anything. But it had been hours. What if her mother had forgotten, and her father was already...

Emily shook away the thought. Her father couldn't die. He just *couldn't*.

The phone rang. At last! Emily leaped out of bed, not bothering to put her pillow back on. She was eager for any news. Well, not any...

"Emily?" Her mother sighed over the phone. "Your father is... dead."

"What?" She choked. "No! He can't be! He can't." Emily swallowed back a sob. Trailing back to bed, she found herself on the floor. Her world came crashing down around her.

Her father was dead.

The clang of the patio door broke her trance. Grace, her chocolate Lab, came bounding toward her. "Grace!" Emily shrieked. Grace cowered. "How did you get out?" Emily asked in a gentle, quieter voice. She carefully stepped toward her. "Silly me. I must have left the door partially open." She reached the the small, playful puppy. Grace looked up at her with her adorable eyes.

Emily crouched down by her dog. "I know you miss me when I'm outside so much." She sighed. "I miss you too. But the woods aren't safe for a dog without a leash. And you know why I have to be here." She gestured around her. "I will destroy every insect I see, even if it's taking all the time at home I have." Grace looked up at her with her wide, chocolate brown eyes. She looks so adorable, Emily thought. How could she bear being away from her for so long? "Come on," she sighed, standing up. "Let's take you back inside."

The next day when Emily got home from school, she was met by Grace, who knocked her down the moment she came inside. Tossing her backpack, schoolwork, and lunch bag aside, she plopped down on the floor next to the energetic dog. "You look happy!" she cooed. Grace proceeded to chew on her shoelace. "No! Stop it." Emily removed the end of her shoe from Grace's mouth. "You have dog toys for that." Emily sighed. "But I'm guessing you're lonely." Grace looked up at her as if she could understand. If only she could speak, Emily thought. Then she could tell me what she wants. She stood up, stretching. "Well, I'm going outside." Emily was almost at the door when she heard a soft whimpering. She glanced

back. Grace had turned her back to Emily, and was curling up dejectedly. “Hmmm...” she considered taking Grace with her.

“What could one day hurt?” She grabbed the leash from its place on the counter. “C’mon, girl,” she called. “We’re going on a walk.”

Grace bounded through the colorful fall woods, dragging Emily behind her. “Please go a little slower,” she panted. Grace stopped for a moment, giving Emily a look that clearly said “you can’t make me.”

“Fine, then.” Emily quickened her pace to a brisk jog.

They were coming up to her favorite part of the woods. A small, clear stream ran over the muddy ground, perfect for rinsing over your forehead on a hot day. Even though it was fall didn’t mean it wasn’t hot.

Today, the stream was a little smaller than usual, but it still held enough water to wade in above her ankles, feeling the relaxing sensation of the flowing water. Grace, however, took one look at the stream and darted away (or at least she tried to). Emily tripped on the twisted leash, splashing water all down her back. “Hey!” she sputtered. “Cut it out!” Grace gave her a “who, me?” look.

Emily laughed. “All right, I guess you don’t like it. Let’s go on, then.” They ventured farther into the woods, away from the stream.

When they were far away enough that Emily could no longer hear the rush of water, they sat down on a large boulder that she had found a few years ago, when she used to hike in the woods all the time with her dad. The memories were endless. They would splash water on each other, have picnics in trees...

A tear fell onto her nose. Grace leaned up and gently licked it away. Then she leaped down from the boulder, trotting away a few feet before slowly turning in circles, heaving her rear end down. Suddenly she stopped, her gaze transfixed on something crawling up the side of the boulder.

Emily’s heart caught in her throat. It was a yellow jacket! Terrified, she slowly backed away. Before she realized what she was doing, she screamed, dropped the leash and broke into a run.

Emily was fully fifty yards away before she realized what she was doing. Gasping in horror, she turned to see Grace’s bushy tail wagging as she trotted into the bushes, the leash dragging behind her like a long purple vine.

Later that evening, Emily had wandered farther than ever before into the ever-darkening forest. Distraught with grief, she had searched endlessly for a glimpse of brown fur, but all she had seen were squirrels, chipmunks, and the occasional armadillo. Now it was becoming too dark to walk safely, and she was no closer to finding her lost pet than when she had started.

Overcome with exhaustion, Emily collapsed on the ground, only to realize she had no idea where she was.

Emily was lost.

Emily woke to the sound of chirping birds. Except they had never seemed so *loud* before! She sat up and looked around. AHHHHH!!! What had happened? Everything was huge! The supposed tree she thought she was leaning against was really a small stick, and the leaves could have been tents. She stumbled to her feet as she heard hushed voices.

“The poor child has just woken up! We need to introduce ourselves and-”

“But we already know who *she* is! She’s the insect killer! She could-”

“Don’t be silly! She is our size now. She must learn that it is only the Stingers that are evil. They killed her father. We didn’t! Then she might stop the terror.”

“Oh, all right, Blossom. I guess we should.”

Emily finally saw who the voices belonged to. She backed up, terrified. No. It couldn't be...

Two figures entered the clearing. One was a huge brown stick bug, tall and gangly, yet somehow elegant. The other was... Emily gasped. A honeybee! Beautiful, soft and furry, its back and yellow stripes almost glowing in the morning light.

“Hello!” The little bee waved cheerily. “Oh, sorry. I'm Blossom. This is Crackle. And your name is?”

“E-Emily” Emily stuttered.

“Hello, Emily. Please come with us. We will explain everything.”

Blossom and Crackle took Emily to an enormous beehive, about the size of a large airplane hangar. “We are part of a group of insects that are trying to defend ourselves from a group of evil insects. They are called the Stingers. Their group includes wasps, yellow jackets-” Emily shuddered “-hornets, and for some reason, mosquitos and stink bugs, even though they don't sting. We are mostly bees, stick bugs, ladybugs, and butterflies. All other insects are neutral. Anyway, the Stingers got the big idea that they would try to take over the world and rule over humans. And us. This-” she gestured to the hive “-is our headquarters.”

A ladybug suddenly flew up to them. “Miss Blossom?”

Blossom sighed. “Please, just call me Blossom.”

The ladybug squirmed. “Sorry, Miss- er, Blossom. We just got report from our spies at the enemy base. The Stingers are developing a weapon. They call it the Resizer. It accidentally shot off last night. Now is broken.” She hesitated.

“Yes? Go on,” Crackle prodded gently.

“The Resizer will allow the Stingers to grow to the size of humans. They just need one more thing for it to be completed.” She swallowed nervously. “The re-sized human.”

Emily strapped on her new Insectoid-wings, an invention that she had made after studying several different insects' wings. They were the size of a butterfly's wings and as tough as wood. For the materials, she had snuck over to her house to tear pieces off of several model insects, and tied them together with string (now a arm-thick rope at her size). Finally, she and Blossom had gone over the structure together, testing the imitation wings against her own.

Now it was time to try them out by going on a flight through the woods. She, Blossom, and Crackle were going together, as there was safety in numbers, especially near the Stinger base.

“Are you ready?” Blossom called. Emily nodded. She was still getting used to being around the oversized (well, oversized for her- she was the one who had been resized) insects, and was wondering how she would escape. Although, in her heart, she knew they would never attack her.

“Well, then, what are we waiting for?” the eager bee hovered in mid-air, poised to take off out of the hive.

Emily chuckled, her spirits lightening. “Crackle, of course! He insisted on taking heavy armor with him. He thinks that the whole Stinger group is just outside the hive, waiting to attack him.”

Suddenly Crackle appeared, his head covered by an acorn cap. His arms and legs were wrapped in flower petals. “They will! You should all bring weapons. You'll regret it, I'm sure.” He sighed, twirling his pebble slingshot.

Suddenly, Emily realized something. “Crackle, how will you fly? You don't have any wings.”

He shook his head. “I'm not flying. I'm gliding.” He immediately brightened. “Can you give me a lift?” Blossom dove to where Crackle was standing. She picked him up, and lifted him to where a few large

leaves poked into the hive opening. He carefully pulled himself up into a branch. "Perfect wind!" He licked his finger and held it out.

Blossom frowned. "Crackle, you can't tell how fast the wind's blowing from *that!*"

Crackle shook his head. "I'm not. I'm seeing which way the wind is blowing." He jumped down a branch. Pulling as hard as he could, he yanked a large orange leaf from the tree. Leaping off the branch, he floated to the hive floor.

Emily was fascinated. "But if you only glide down, you can't get very far... can you?"

Crackle nodded. "Yes, I can! If I'm getting too low, I just tilt the leaf a certain way. The wind will carry me a lot farther." He grinned proudly at his knowledge of leaf-gliding.

"Come on, you two!" Blossom called. She was standing at the entrance to the hive. "Enough chatter. Let's flyyyyyy!" She took off into the wind, soaring away until she was a tiny speck in the distance.

Emily hesitated. Would the wings really hold her? "Well," she thought out loud, "there's only one way to find out!" She walked with small, shaking steps to the edge of the hive. Taking a deep breath, she closed her eyes and jumped.

Emily opened her eyes. There was no sudden crash to the ground, no snap as her wings came loose and broke. Only the cold, deliciously fresh air, and, far beneath her, the ground. She. Was. Flying!

Emily looked back to see Crackle drifting sideways towards her. She leaned to the right, and swooped down to meet him. "So that's how I steer." She slit her hands into the slits that would propel her forward. "Come on!" She called to Crackle. "Let's catch up with Blossom."

"Shhh," Blossom warned as they drifted above the trees. "We are approaching the back of the Stingers' headquarters."

Crackle chuckled. "Otherwise known as their hindquarters." Blossom glared at him. "Sorry. Couldn't resist."

Emily stared at the ravine they were coming to. "*That's* their headquarters?" She shivered. "Must be pretty spooky."

"Luckily, neither of us have ever gone inside. And I hope that will not change." Blossom looked uneasy. "There are many booby-traps inside, just in case there are any insects brave enough to go inside. Like us. Sorry." She suddenly shoved Emily and Crackle toward the ravine, following them from behind. Screaming, Emily lost control of her wings and plunged into the ravine.

The three of them landed in an empty hallway. "You could have killed us!" Emily whisper-yelled.

"Sorry, but I thought you wanted to destroy the weapon!" Blossom was nearly in tears. "Now is the perfect chance." She pulled out three shiny fabric pieces from a bag Emily hadn't noticed before and gave one to each of them. "Mirror fabric," she explained. "It's like an invisibility cloak in books, but scientific. They will keep you hidden from the Stingers." She tied hers around her neck and draped it across her back. Crackle and Emily did the same. "Follow me."

They crept along several hallways that reminded Emily of a Labyrinth. "The weapon should be in the center of the headquarters," Crackle whispered. "We're getting close." They slinked around for a while more before stopping in a perfectly round room. "Here!" Blossom stopped. "I heard a description from our spies. This is the one."

Emily studied the room. It looked so... ordinary! Except a large, circular box in the middle of a circular table in the circular room.

She turned back around just in time to see Blossom pick up the box. "Stop! It's a trap!" she cried, too late.

And that's when the alarms rang.

"Blossom!" Emily cried as her friend fell, screaming, into a deep pit, which immediately closed. Picking up the box off the floor, she crept into a closet with Crackle just in time to see two mosquitos and a hornet fly into the room.

"Whoever's there," the hornet said in a nasal voice, "show yourself." He slowly circled the room. After a few moments, however, they flew away.

"Lucky for us, Crackle," Emily turned around, "that- hey!" Crackle had flown out of the ravine, box in hand. Emily caught up to him. "Stop! You forgot about Blossom!"

Crackle turned to face her. "It's too dangerous!"

"I know!" Emily shouted over the noise of the wind rushing through the ravine. "It's dangerous. I get it. But we have to save Blossom!" She stopped. There was no denying it now. She had come to think of the little bee as... a friend.

"Emily!" cried a voice behind her. She turned and gasped. It was Blossom, struggling to fly in the blustery air. Emily soared over to her.

"How did you get out?" Emily helped pull her along to safety.

"Apparently, the Stingers don't guard their booby traps very well. I simply waited until the insects in the room with you were gone, then flew up and pushed the dirt back easily." She grinned. "It wasn't very heavy. In fact, I'm feeling strong enough to race you back to the hive!" Laughing and swooping, the three friends flew off in the chilly fall evening.

The next day, all of the insects in the hive gathered to see what the weapon looked like. Emily gently pulled off the cover.

"A stone?" Murmurs arose. They had been expecting something more complicated.

"Will this let me grow to my normal size?" Emily asked Blossom softly.

"I don't know," she replied, looking nervous.

"It's broken, remember?" Crackle cut in.

"Not anymore." Emily realized, and grinned. "The weapon needed me to work again. It has me now. So I should be able to transform back." She took a deep breath and leaped off the hive floor, clutching the heavy stone in her palms. Landing gently on the dirt, she placed the stone on her feet.

The next thing she knew, she was her original size again! Blossom came buzzing out to meet her. "You might want to keep that," she said in a tiny, squeaking voice. She winked. "It might come in handy." She flew off and came back clutching Emily's wings. Landing on her nose, she dropped them into Emily's outstretched palms. Emily smiled and walked back through the woods.

When she reached her house, the first sound she heard was a loud barking and yelping. A small, brown, dog bounded towards her. "Grace?" Emily shrieked. "Grace!" She knelt down, enveloped in a sea of kisses.

The patio door clanged shut. "Hello, dear." Emily turned to see her mother in the doorway. "Back from your campout already? Sorry I didn't answer your call right away."

Emily stopped, confused. "I didn't go on a-" she stopped. She knew who had called. "Yeah, mom. I had a great time."

Her mom nodded. "Did you bring a beehive or something home to destroy?"

Emily shook her head. "No, I don't want to do that anymore."

How to Make Chocolate-Covered Crickets

If you are looking for an exotic food that doesn't look *too* gross, these are the perfect little treats to finish off an after-school snack. However, they will take a while to make, so make sure to start making them two days before you plan to eat them.

1. Buy live crickets from the pet store. I got a dozen, but you can get more if you want. Never, ever substitute crickets that you catch yourself.
2. Put the crickets in the fridge overnight. This will make them go into torpor.
3. In the morning, boil a pot of water. Quickly drop the crickets into the water. Only take them out once you're ready, otherwise they will wake up and it will be difficult to drop them in.
4. Remove them from the water after about three minutes and allow them to dry.
5. Roast the crickets for about 20 minutes at 225 degrees Fahrenheit. Take them out and let them cool. Then remove the legs and antennae. Some people will be squeamish about this and want to cut them off with scissors or a knife, but I recommend pulling them off so no leg or antennae parts remain on the crickets.
6. Melt semisweet chocolate chips and Crisco shortening ($\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon Crisco to every ounce of chocolate) on a saucepan at low heat so it doesn't burn. Drop in your crickets and stir.
7. Scoop out the crickets and lay them on a cookie sheet with parchment paper. Freeze overnight.

The finished crickets should be salty and sweet, with a crunchy finish. If your family does not want to try them, that's okay. But you can always tell them that hot dogs are probably more disgusting than these.



Images credit: Kristin Yarbrough



A (Metal) Mosquito on the Wall

As I am a relatively sane person, I knew that some company was spying on everyone at some time or another. But never in my wildest dreams would I have thought it would be Amazon. Yes,



the very company that provides us with most of the things we 'need', yet are too lazy to go to the store to get, is probably watching us on some screen at this very moment. Amazon plots to make us spend as much money as possible on their products, from outrageous shipping costs to 'hot' prices. If by hot they mean so painful to look at that they burn your eyes, then yes, they are very hot.

The way I found this out is unbelievable. Most likely the only people who will believe me are my son and the computer hackers at Amazon itself.

Image: Mosquito, by Rainer Hungershausen (CC by 3.0 U.S.)

It all started with the whining of a mosquito in my ear. Slapping it against the glass, I wondered if I really should be murdering these tiny, unsuspecting little... okay, maybe not. I was actually thinking, "Die, insolent beast! Die!" Well, maybe it wasn't that dramatic either, but you get the point. Definitely not a fan of insects. I went to get a towel and wipe it up... and stopped. Wires. That's what I saw. Tiny little crushed wires, sticking out from bits of aluminum. I stared, my mouth open, before wiping it away. Turning back to my computer, I silently typed into the search bar *metal mosquitos*.

The results were astounding. Apparently, the military used insect-sized drones to spy on what other bases were doing. I pulled up a Wikipedia entry. *The Black Hornet Nano*, I read, *measures around 10x2.5 cm. (4x1 inches), and provides troops on the ground with local situational awareness.*

I clicked on another entry from a different source. *The MAV is an insect spy drone, disguised as a mosquito, already in production and funded by the U.S. government. It can land on you, and it may have the potential to take DNA samples or leave RFID tracking nanotechnology on your skin. It can fly through an open window and attach to your clothing.*

I broke out into a cold sweat. Although I hadn't really ever done anything wrong except for murder, it still doesn't feel good to be spied on in your own home. Oops! I meant murder of *insects*. My thoughts raced. Was it the government that was spying on me, or was it another company?

Luckily, I was a trained computer hacker. Quickly forming a list of companies it could be, I logged onto Fed-Ex's main website and cracked a few codes. Nothing. A few employee notices, orders, and upcoming schedules, but nothing that seemed like a plot.

I checked the next one. UPS. This also yielded nothing but a secret birthday party for the boss. Next up, Horizon lines. This one had no notifications, just empty space. Only one left.

Amazon. It made perfect sense. When you ordered anything, Amazon could carefully hide a few drones, then ship them directly to you. With shaking fingers, I typed in *Amazon.com*, cracked the codes and double-clicked.

I did a double take. Written on the screen in large font was *You have discovered our secret plot. Now you will pay!!!!*

I uneasily shut the lid to my computer. Suddenly there was a crash at the door.

I quickly darted toward the door. When it creaked open, I saw that my son had beaten me to it. "I found this." He handed a small, crumpled package to me, frowning. I unrolled it.

"Mind your own business- or else!" I read aloud.

He looked at me oddly. "What's this about?"

"The oddest thing." I told him about the mosquito drone, the articles, and hacking into the Amazon web site.

He shook his head. "But who could have delivered the message so quickly after they realized you had found out?"

I shrugged. "No idea, but let's be quiet. They might be listening right now."

There was another crash. This time, we were by the door, but by the time whoever had put the mysterious cardboard box that lay on the doorstep was gone.

"AHA!" My son leaned down and plucked the box off the ground. "This must be the package that I ordered from-"

"Amazon?" I cut in. "Don't open it!"

But it was too late. The package burst open, releasing several whining, droning mosquito drones. They swarmed off into the house, soon disappearing into the shadows. I looked at my son.

"Never, ever trust another package from Amazon."

"What about our Amazon Alexa?"

I stared at him blankly. "What about it?"

He shook his head. "Don't you get it? The drones are small enough to fit into the speaker cracks. The Alexa is wired up to everything; our lights, our doors, our remote-control toaster..."

I cut him off. "Wait. We have a remote-control toaster?????!"

He grinned. "Got you there!" His smile faded. "Well we actually do have a remote-control toaster. I just got it yesterday. But no, I haven't had the time to set it up with Alexa."

"What can I do for you?"

I jumped at the sound of the voice. Oh, wait!

"It's only Alexa," I said. "Us talking about it must have triggered the response." I had a sudden realization.

"Caleb," I gasped. "If Alexa is hearing everything we say, since it needs a verbal trigger, then isn't it spying on us, too?"

"HmMMM," my son muttered, and he looked strangely disappointed. "Yes, I guess you're right. Well, we should immediately-"

"Activating lockdown," we heard from the kitchen. Caleb bolted over to it immediately. Unplugging the cord, he wiped his hands on his jeans.

"Well, I guess that's under control." Just then we heard the front door shut tightly and lock, trapping us in the house. With shaking hands, I walked over to the window and looked out. Or rather, tried to look out. The windows had somehow been covered with dark cloth, making it impossible to see out. Sinking to the floor, I sighed in hopeless despair.

"Well, there's nothing to do but stay in our rooms and try to keep the drones out." I stood up and shut myself in my bedroom/office. Just then I heard another bang and a loud yelp, immediately covered by a "Shush!" Then there was silence. I finally realized what had been going on. Arming myself with a Super-Soaker, I crept out of my room and into Caleb's. Sure enough, he was on his phone, scrolling through the Alexa app. I decided to give him a scare.

"AHA!" I shouted. "Caught in the act!" He jumped twenty feet, busted a hole in the roof, and came back down. Before he could follow me, I checked the lock on the front door. Yes, it was unlocked. I cocked my water gun, took a deep breath, and burst open the door. Screams ensued as I chased my son's friends, who had helped him by locking the door, covering the window, and banging on the door. And also hacked *my* computer to make it seem like I was on the Amazon web site.



Ask Bug Lady Katie



Dear Katie,

My mom and I are starting a flower garden for butterflies in our backyard. The area always has plenty of sunshine, and is located near a water spigot. We can also rig up some irrigation if we need to. I am wondering: what are the best butterfly-attracting plants to grow in Florida? I have seen several monarchs in my backyard before, and also some zebra longwings, so I know they live in my area.

Sincerely,
Natalie

Dear Natalie,

There are many types of plants that are suitable for a Florida environment. However, you will want to have a good combination of plants for both adult butterflies and larvae. For example, you said that you have seen monarchs and zebra longwings in your backyard. The larval host for monarchs is milkweed, and passion vine for zebra longwings. You may also want to get some pentas, lantanas, and porterweed, which also attracts hummingbirds.

Please trim your milkweed, if you decide to get any, when the monarchs start migrating south for the year. This will keep them from settling too far north, rather than south.

Yours truly,
Katie Yarbrough
Editor-in-Chief, Pests and Proboscises

Ballad to the Clumsy Caterpillar

There once was a caterpillar on a little milkweed
So clumsy and hopeless was he
That all the other caterpillars laughed and said,
“A graceful butterfly you’ll never be!”

Oh, again and again he would tumble and fall
Tumble and fall onto the ground
That by the time he was two weeks old
You could only see bruises all around.

But he was so smart, so quick-witted and sharp
That he knew the names of all the trees
Though his peers and relatives thought him queer
He had no hypotheses.

He wished and he wished for beautiful wings
To carry him over she sky
And stop his falls when he rushed toward the ground
But it never happened; he started to cry.

Everyone teased him, never left him alone
He had no friends on which to call
He was so lonely, and so broken-hearted,
He started to talk to the wall.

One day, as he went down the milkweed stalk,
He felt a bit fatigued
He decided to build a sleeping bag
By then he was tired indeed.

His little green cocoon was so snug, so warm
That by and by, he dozed off
His sleep was so peaceful and lovely and restful
And there was no cutoff.

But after a while, he began to wake
The light startled him like a male hen
He broke out of his cocoon, tottered at the rim,
Thought, “Oh, no, here we go again!”



Image credit: Kristin Yarbrough

But as he plummeted toward the ground
Something broke his fall
As he slowly drifted to the ground
His plant behind him, straight and tall.

He looked behind himself with a surge of joy
On his back were two glorious wings
He no longer cared what others thought
Should they treat him with scorn or should they sing.

Bring in the Good Bugs, Get Rid of the Bad!

Feed the gentle ladybugs while ridding your garden of pesky aphids.

Order your eco-friendly, all-natural
bug-killers today!



Image credit: Hippodamia convergens, by Mathesont (CC by 3.0 U.S)

Fleeting Moments Like Fireflies



Image: "Fireflies" by Takashi Ota (CC By 3.0 U.S.)

Oh, the gloriousness of the Michigan fields
I look out the window and see only sky
And grassy hills reaching out to meet me

The bang of a door
The patter of feet
I call out to my cousins
We all rush together
In a hearty embrace
With huge smiles everywhere

Running to the house
We stomp our shoes
And cry more hellos
Race down the stairs

Nighttime comes
With its fireflies
Like fallen stars
Glowing around us
And lighting up our faces
Like the bonfire, yet so small
But with the same power

Now it's time for bed
But the bliss is not over
Storytime comes
With its suspenseful treasure

Wake up the next morning
At first confused
Then you remember
Wake up, wake up
It's time for more adventure

Gulp down the pancakes
Race across the lawn
Stuff down the mulberries
Joyful shouts drift across the yard

Bolt up a tree
“Who can get there fastest?”
Everything’s a race
But no one cares who wins

Scratches go unnoticed
And bruises are ignored
But when we get too hot
It’s time to jump in the pool!

Monopoly and Uno
Scattered over the floor
In a dark room
They’ve gone off to explore
To the fort, to the fort!
Come shouts of joyful pleasure
Laughing as we lunge for the chickens
Wth happiness beyond measure

Metamorphosis of a Dream



Rhonda Stephens sighed, walking into her house and shoving the door shut. She had just come home from her detested job as a letter carrier for the local post office. She hated it, but she had to make a living somehow. She wished she had a job that she at least liked a little bit. Rhonda had always loved gardening, but how could she make money from that? She had had enough. Putting down her bags, she slinked into her room and kneeled.

“God,” she whispered, “please help me find a new job. Something that I love to do.” Curling up in her bed, she relaxed, slowly falling asleep after her long day.

The next day after work, she checked her mail. Junk ads, political letters... wait. What was

Image: “Chrysalis 15,” by The Last Cookie (CC BY 3.0 US)

This? A letter from the local gardening club! Slowly she tore it open.

“Dear Rhonda,” she read aloud. “We would like you to attend the upcoming gardening club meeting. There will be plants for sale, gardening advice, and information on how to preserve our natural world. The meeting is on October 5th, 6:30 P.M.”

Rhonda checked the address. “I can be there,” she murmured. She peered at her calendar. “September 30th.” She marked the date of the meeting. Then she picked up her telephone and dialed the number from the invitation. “Hello?” She paused. “This is Rhonda Stevens. I’ll be there.”

5 days later...

“This is our gardening center,” the club manager informed Rhonda. They were walking along a brick pathway leading into a large greenhouse. “There are many sections.” She gestured to

where a few women were putting milkweed pots into a long row. “Those are monarch caterpillars. They are raising them as part of a science project.” Rhonda looked closer. There were dozens of small, worm-like white, black, and yellow caterpillars slowly inching their way across the green leaves. “They have other kinds of caterpillars too.” In awe, Rhonda walked closer. One of the women looked up.

“Hello! Would you like to take home a caterpillar?” she asked cheerily.

Rhonda nodded. “Yes, please.”

The woman picked up a small plant. “You won’t need a very large plant for just one caterpillar.” She deposited a fat, wiggling larva on the milkweed. “Keep the milkweed in plenty of sunlight. And don’t be worried if it stops moving for a little while, it’s just shedding its skin.” She smiled. “And once it goes into its chrysalis, don’t disturb it. It’ll take about 1-2 weeks to emerge. When you see through the chrysalis, place the pot outside so that the butterfly can fly away. After you are finished, I suggest planting the milkweed in the ground. That way, other monarchs can pollinate it, and perhaps release eggs. Then you can start the cycle all over.” She stood up and handed the milkweed to Rhonda. “Here you go. Remember to water it regularly!”

After the meeting was over, Rhonda drove home, her heart racing. An opportunity had finally opened up! Could this be the answer to her prayers? She decided to look into it. As she snuggled into bed, her dreams were of soaring over the sky as a butterfly, never stopping except for food...

As the weeks past, Rhonda cared tenderly for her little larva, watering the plant when needed and making sure that its milkweed habitat was in just the right amount of sunlight. She grew to love caring for the butterflies, and wished she could incorporate this into her job. But, alas, this was impossible. Or so she thought...

1 year later...

As usual in her local butterfly raising business, Rhonda was busy. Her shipment of bleach solution, made specially for caterpillars, eggs, and butterflies of both monarch and queen species, when they got a disease called *Ophryocystis elektroscirrha*, O.E. for short. Such a disease damaged the matured butterflies’ wings, making them unable to fly properly and vulnerable to predators. This would make them worthless to her customers, whom she sold live butterflies to for releasing in special events, such as funerals and weddings. She also sold them to museums, zoos, and even made her own exhibits. This is why she sprayed the eggs, larvae, and adults with the bleach solution to cure them.

Rhonda headed to the breeding house. Here she kept some remaining butterflies to lay eggs on her milkweed, and that would start a new cycle. It saved money on buying eggs from farmers and other butterfly-related organizations.

Rhonda sighed, thinking about how pleasing her job was compared to her old one. Here she was, making a very good amount of money in her dream environment, whereas her old job was getting her a modest sum, stress, and general displeasure. She had gotten her idea from a man making a 90 dollars a dozen for special events. She knew that was the job for her. Her life was perfect.

My Amazing Trip to Butterfly Land

This is my wife's fault.

I woke up on Saturday, February the 31st, with the task of driving to Butterfly Land to buy yet another milkweed for our family. Little did I know what would overtake me.

I started by going out to breakfast by myself at Bamboo Crush, the popular Chinese diner, for soybean milk and deep-fried dough sticks.



Image: "Fortune Cookies 2" by Ksayer1(CC By 3.0 U.S.)

When I came out, I stepped into my new Chevrolet Corvette, and started the car. I was about to pull away when I heard a *boink!* on the hood. I squinted as a broken fortune cookie slid down the windshield.

Your car is about to be squashed by a giant fortune cookie.

I immediately leapt out, startled by the fortune. A shadow crossed my face. I looked up... and screamed.

There was a huge fortune cookie the size of a

tow-truck headed for my car! I watched as it crashed down on the roof and shattered the glass. The giant, poster-sized fortune read *sorry*. I moaned.

Thirty minutes later, I was walking slowly towards I 280 highway, only to find it was closed. There was a forty-mile detour pointing directly to Butterfly land. I sighed and started down the road.

Once I had gotten 39 miles, I finally was back on the road I was supposed to be going on, according to my directions. Cadbury lane. It actually had a Cadbury chocolate egg factory on the street. I heard a large cracking sound as I approached, then the ground rumbled.

I was about to be run over by giant Cadbury eggs!

Screaming, I suddenly had the energy to run all the way to Butterfly Land's location. But what I saw made my jaw drop.

It had been completely flattened by the eggs!

Flutter down a peaceful stream with the butterflies at Flutterby Streams!

Forget your troubles as you enjoy a peaceful ride down a stream surrounded by butterflies. Book your spot today!



Image credit: DSC00375, by USFWS-Pacific region (CC by 3.0 U.S)

The Cloud Kingdom

Paige took her face out of her favorite book just long enough to stuff the last bite of blueberry bagel into her mouth, and dived back in. She always dreamed of doing things like the main character did--powers, living in a magical world, and most of all, flying. Of course, that was impossible. But it hurt nothing to wish...

Paige was snapped out of her daydream by her mom entering the room. "Paige! You know your grandparents will be here in two days. You can read when your chores are done. For now, will you please clean your room?"

Paige sighed and put her book away. She was excited about her grandparent's arrival, but there was only so many times you could polish a dining room table, or sweep the small porch of the Tennessee cabin they had rented for their summer vacation. But, she reasoned, it would be over the day after tomorrow. Just two more days...

After her work was done, Paige tied her shoes, tucked back her strawberry-blond hair, and went out to explore the mountainous forest. She had just darted out the door when--

"Paige?" Her mother made her way towards the door. "I need you to stay inside for now. Tomorrow you can go outside. Besides, you have summer spelling homework to do."

Walking inside, Paige inwardly groaned. The day before, she had seen a fawn next to the brook that ran past the cabin, but had to go home before she could watch it long. Today she had hoped to find it again, or something even better. But, she thought, she *should* practice her spelling. She would have a better chance of beating her grandmother at Scrabble if she did.

Resigned to an afternoon being inside, Paige entered her



Image: "Lonely Chalet," by Katrien Berckmoes (CC By 3.0 U.S.)

small, messy room. She hadn't bothered to make her bed or take the time to clean the dirty clothes off the floor. She wouldn't be spending much of her summer vacation in here, anyway.

Paige plopped down in her bed and grabbed her list of spelling words. There weren't many, since Paige, though in sixth grade, had a ninth grade spelling level. *Saskatchewan, Czechoslovakia, aeronautical, delinquent, apparatus*. She raced through spelling.

"Dinnertime!" her mother called. Paige groaned again. Now she definitely couldn't go.

Paige woke up bright and early the next morning, and immediately got dressed. Then she remembered that she had promised to cook pancakes for breakfast. She usually didn't mind, but she just couldn't wait to go outside! It felt like there was an invisible magnet drawing her to the woods.

After three pancake attempts and one hair-washing, her mom took over while she got dressed. Sticking some pancakes in a plastic bag, she grabbed her camera and headed outside.

She scampered past the old oak tree that marked the end of her yard and the start of the forest. Long ago, this tree had probably stood majestically over the cabin, spreading its leafy branches protectively around the roof. But now it looked as if it were about to fall over, its bare, bony limbs creaking and moaning in the wind.

Paige made her way towards the brook. Somewhere, she would find the perfect picnic spot. She shrieked as the icy water unexpectedly splashed her jeans. She looked down. A long, silver fish made its way downstream. Hmm. This would make a good fishing spot. Paige had always loved being by the water, though she couldn't explain it. She sat down for a moments, then stood up again. Exploring couldn't wait for anything. Traipsing through the woods and past the brook, she she slowed her gait as she heard a rustling sound in the bushes.

What was it? Another deer? A raccoon? Even--she shuddered at the thought--a bear? Paige hid herself in the bushes opposite the noise.

"Hello?" she called out cautiously. If it was a deer or other harmless animal, it would be scared away. But that was better than being attacked by a hungry bear.

But then she heard a shriek. A hand emerged from the bushes. It was just another girl! Paige raced over to help her.

"Hello?" she said again. "Do you need help getting untangled?"

A muffled voice issued from the bushes. "Please, go away. I'm fine."

Paige frowned. "Are you sure?"

"I'm fine," the girl repeated. "You can go now."

Paige started to walk away. She had gotten as far as the brook when she realized something. She had forgotten to ask the girl where she lived! Maybe they could explore the woods together.

Paige raced back to the spot where the girl was. And stopped.

The girl had gotten out of the bush and was now crouching in front of it.

No. It couldn't be...

The two parts of what she was seeing didn't match up. Human arms, legs, head, torso. But...

Spreading out from her back were two beautiful orange and black butterfly wings.

Alyssa was a Cloud Girl. The Cloud People lived high above the earth, in the clouds, as the name suggested. With human-like bodies, but insect wings, they rarely ventured to the ground, where people would capture them and put them in a zoo or take them away for scientific experiments.

For the first eleven years of her life, Alyssa had lived in the Cloud Kingdom, where everything went well, and there was harmony between everyone; the boys, the girls, the young and old. But last year, spring dawned with unexpected heat.

Alyssa remembered very well the first night she had heard about this. Dinner had been finished, and she was putting the dishes out on the bottom of the family's cloudyard to wash in the rain. Her mother's voice came floating through the open window.

"Light work today." Her mother worked at the rain-gathering yards, where she gathered cloud patches that became too dense and compressed them to make rain.

"Is that so?" her father sounded preoccupied with her baby brother, washing his small dragonfly wings with water vapor. Water was too heavy to use and would damage their delicate wings.

"Yes, dear. I would expect more condensation to be forming at this time of year. It is... concerning."

"I'll ask King Nimbus about it when I report to duty in the morning."

"You know that won't do any good. Rumor has it..." her voice became too low for Alyssa to hear.

Alyssa inhaled sharply. Was this another drought? There hadn't been a drought in three hundred years! Every Cloud girl and boy was taught the history of the Cloud Kingdom at a young age. The kingdom had rapidly evaporated and would have disappeared forever if it were not for the work of the Water Master. Every citizen of the Cloud Kingdom had a bit of magic in them, but there were a special few-- those who belonged to the King's council-- who could command the elements. There were several: Fire, Ice, Plants, Transfiguring, Lightning, Light, Metal, Wind, and Water. These Masters were immortal. However, the

Water Master had disappeared long ago. If there truly was a drought, the fate of the kingdom would be up in the air (no pun intended.) Alyssa swallowed hard. There was nothing to do now but wait.

At dinnertime, her father cleared his throat. "I am afraid I have some bad news. There has been a drought declared. Even now, the kingdom is shrinking ever so slightly." His glossy dragonfly wings shook.

Alyssa's younger sister, Fiona, burst into tears. She was only seven, and didn't know what a drought was. How could she be upset?

"What's wrong?" Alyssa stood up to comfort her sister.

"We're going to have trout for dinner again. I hate trout!"

"We're not having trout," Alyssa soothed. "Daddy said there's a drought. That means the kingdom is shrinking!"

Fiona's eyes widened in fright. "What will happen?"

"I don't know." Alyssa sighed. "I don't know."

The family was outside for their nighttime flight when they heard the beating of many wings. Seconds later, trumpets sounded. "Make way for the king!" Alyssa looked down the line of people, and couldn't believe her eyes. King Nimbus himself was coming to them!

"Where is the girl Alyssa, from the Transfiguration clan?" the king shouted. Alyssa flew forward, trembling.

"Here, Your Majesty."

The king approached her. "Alyssa, you have been chosen for a dangerous endeavor. You will be going to the human world. Find a girl your age, and bring her back here. She will be vital to finding the Water Master."

Alyssa stared. "I'm going to find the Water Master?"

The king nodded. "I believe she has gone to the human world. The girl will know where everything is."

"Well, then," Alyssa said, flying back towards her house, "I'd better prepare."

The girl was as scared to see her as Paige was to see the girl, she could tell. Her wings were beating wildly. She stepped backward into the bushes, muttering, "I think she's the one."

"I-I thought you had gone back," she stuttered. "I-I-I..."

Paige was intrigued. "Who *are* you?"

"Alyssa."

"No, I meant how do you have *those*?"

"My wings?" she looked down and brushed a twig off the bottom of her left wing. "Everyone has them. Where I come from, anyways."

Paige had now decided that the girl was harmless. Alyssa seemed to think the same. "Where do you come from? And why are you here?"

"Well, It's a long story. I come from the Cloud Kingdom..."

By the time Alyssa had finished, Paige had definitely decided to help her. "Oh, I see. The drought, along with the global warming and the radioactivity of the thermonuclear fusion, is causing the clouds to evaporate. So, I'm the one who is to go back with you? To the Cloud Kingdom?"

Alyssa stared at her, then nodded. "But for now, go back to your house. Tomorrow, meet me here."

Paige nodded. "Anything else?"

"Bring plenty of food. I'm almost out, and it's a long flight back to the Cloud Kingdom."

"Okay." Now Paige was sure she was in for an adventure. Like the ones in her books, and the ones she dreamed about every day!

Then she remembered something. "My grandparents are coming tomorrow! What will I do?" Alyssa frowned. "I'm sorry. I don't know." "I'll think of something."

However, by the next morning, Paige still did not have one idea about how to handle her grandparents' arrival. She would just have to miss it, she thought, and either hope that they would understand, or believe her about Alyssa.

After breakfast, Paige grabbed her shoes, a couple of apples, and some protein bars from the pantry. She hid them under her bed in a backpack. On second thought, she would need some water, too. She snuck back to the kitchen and snatched a few bottles. Then she crept back to her room. There were still a few hours until she needed to meet Alyssa, so she picked up a book and began to read.

Paige crept along the side of the back porch, opened the creaky wooden door as quietly as possible, and snuck out. Turning to close the door, she stopped.

Her mother was on the porch.

"Hello, dear," she called. "Where are you going?"

"I'm out for a walk in the woods, Mom." Paige fidgeted nervously.

"Your grandparents will be here in an hour. Don't you want to be here when they arrive?"

Paige inhaled sharply. Had it really been that long? She only had until nightfall to prepare. Surely her mother would notice something was up.

"I wanted to.. Find something for Grammy. Some sort of flower." Paige grimaced at the lie she had made up.

"Well, okay, but be back on time, will you?"

But Paige had already bolted for the wood, trodding the now-familiar path to the thicket where Alyssa stood, motionless, a small monarch perched on her finger.

Paige slowed her pace, not wanting to scare the butterfly away. It looked like Alyssa and the monarch were almost communicating. But this was impossible! Oh, wait, only as impossible as a girl with butterfly wings.

Finally, the butterfly flew off. Paige emerged from the brush into the thicket.

Alyssa lowered her hands, her midnight black hair waving in the breeze. "This is bad." She sat down. "The clouds are thin enough that when the sun is shining directly through them, you can make out the faint image of the castle. Luckily, most humans don't notice much, or they'd be sending up planes to investigate. But this means we are running out of time."

Paige suddenly noticed something. "Alyssa? How are we going to get to the cloud kingdom? Oh, oh, oh, we could sew wings onto me! No, that wouldn't work... How about we cannonball me? Wait, is the Cloud Kingdom soft? I wouldn't want a hard landing. Anyway, you're the only one with wings."

Alyssa shook her head. "Not for long."

Paige's heart skipped a beat. "Do you mean..." she stopped, breathless.

"I told you I belonged to the Transfiguration clan. Now, my magic is very limited. I am not as powerful as the Transfiguration Master. But I see no reason why I can't make you wings. Now, what kind do you want? I can make swallowtail, zebra longwing, monarch, or painted lady. I haven't had much experience with this, so I'll only be able to do the basics."

Paige considered it. "I'd like Pipevine Swallowtail, please. Your wings are beautiful, but swallowtails have always been my favorite type of butterfly."

Alyssa nodded. "Two Pipevine Swallowtail wings, coming right up!" She closed her eyes in concentration.

Paige closed her eyes, too. The next moment, she felt an odd growing sensation coming from her back. It continued for about twenty seconds, then stopped. She opened her eyes.

Alyssa was staring. "Oh, Paige!" she cried. "Your wings!" Alyssa led her to the brook.

Paige gazed down at her reflection in the murky water. Emerging from her back were two large, delicate wings! Paige turned around and craned her neck over her shoulders for a better view. She gasped.

The top of her wings were like a swallowtail's. But the bottoms were... blue!

"Do you know what this means?" Alyssa gasped. "You have Cloud People's blood! Not entirely, mind you, or I wouldn't have been able to make you part swallowtail. But you're half-blood, and your wings prove it. I can't make anyone who is part of a clan have entirely different wings, because everyone in a clan has the same wing types. My family all has monarch wings. Well, except for the boys. They have dragonfly wings. But all the clans are marked by their wings. Your wings are part Red-spotted Purple."

Paige turned to her. "Then what clan am I in?" she asked, her heart racing.

Alyssa swallowed hard. "Water."

Paige had quickly gotten used to having wings. Now they were soaring through the air under the cover of night towards the Cloud Kingdom.

"Almost there?" she shouted to Alyssa, who was flying about twenty feet in front of her.

"Only one more mile to go!"

Paige zoomed ahead and caught up to Alyssa. "A *mile*? Just how far have we gone?"

"Well, it's about four miles up to the Cloud Kingdom, plus two miles to get aligned with it... so I'd say we've been about five miles, one more to go. We're going much faster than it seems. It's only been an hour."

Paige chuckled. "Well, where are we going to land, once we get there?"

"Don't worry about that!" Alyssa swerved slightly to the left. "The ground *is* made of cloud, after all. Fly up through the bottom! Just watch me!"

Paige looked up and realized that they were quickly approaching the Cloud Kingdom. Except... where was it? Suddenly she realized that Alyssa was no longer in front of her.

Paige stopped in mid air. "Alyssa?" she called frantically. "Alyssa!"

"Here!" Alyssa called from... above her? "Just fly up!"

Paige looked up. Nothing. Only the sky. "Where are you?"

"I'll explain in a minute! Just do it!"

Paige started upward. All of a sudden there was a flash of blinding light. When she could see again, she gasped.

Her surroundings were amazing. There were houses made out of almost everything in nature. There were some that were made out of ice, somehow kept from melting. There were some that were a tangle of vines and branches. And if she had seen correctly, there was even one that looked as if it was made entirely of metal!

Paige was in the Cloud Kingdom!

"Sorry, I forgot to tell you about the mirroring effect." Alyssa swooped down beside her. "The Light Master created it. It's so no one can see the kingdom from up close. They can see clouds from the ground but if they fly up to check it out, nothing. Pretty cool, huh?"

Paige nodded, still confused. "But where *is* the Cloud Kingdom?"

Alyssa looked at her like she was crazy. "Right here, of course!"

"No, I mean what continent does it float above?"

“Oh, that. Well, It’s not always in one place. The Wind Master blows it where we need to be on the occasion that one of us is to go to earth. So, we’re all over the place. Now, come on. We need to see King Nimbus.”

Alyssa led Paige through the streets of the Cloud Kingdom. Paige noticed with interest the differences between the streets of it and earth. For one, there were no streetlights. They were close enough to space that the stars shone brighter here. The houses from the Light clan also made it bright enough to see by, even at nighttime, as it now was.

They rounded the corner of a large building, and Paige gazed with awe at the largest castle she had ever see. It was made entirely of ice, with large turrets and balconies overlooking every side. There was no drawbridge, however. This was a place of peace.

Alyssa walked up to an important-looking man and simply said, “Please tell the king I have returned.” She stood still for a moment, then leapt into the air. Paige soared after her.

After entirely circling the castle, Alyssa landed on a large balcony and bowed to the man who was standing there. Paige did the same.

“Your Majesty, This is Paige. Paige, this is King Nimbus.”

King Nimbus looked astonished. “What is this I see? Two types of wings in one?”

“Your Majesty, I believe she is a half-blood, and not wholly human. She has traces of Water blood.”

King Nimbus nodded. “Then, my child,” he said, addressing Paige, “you will be even more helpful to us.” Paige was confused. “But how?”

“This has remained secret for many years.” King Nimbus sat down. “But I think I’d better tell you two.

“Long ago, until just after the first drought, there was another clan--Mind. The Mind Master was very powerful. He prided himself in being the most powerful Clan Master After the Water Master, saved the kingdom, however, the Mind Master realized the Water Master’s power was stronger than his own. He grew jealous, and tricked her into going to earth. Neither of them have ever been seen since.”

“But what happened to the rest of the Mind Clan?” asked Alyssa.

“The Mind Master used his power to make them think that they were part of other clans.”

“And how am I helpful in this plan to take her back?” Paige inquired.

“The Water Master, If you truly have Water blood, she will trust you. Now quickly, you must go. The Cloud Kingdom is getting smaller as we speak.”

“Yes, Your Majesty.” They bowed again and flew off.

“One more thing,” he called after them. “The Water Master might have found a way of concealing her wings. So watch carefully. You can follow this butterfly to her. It will know where to find her.” He released a small Red-spotted Purple, which quickly darted ahead of them. “And take two light-cloaks!”

“What are light-cloaks?” Paige asked Alyssa as they flew close to the border of the kingdom.

“Oh, they’re pretty much like your invisibility cloaks. Except they’re real. It makes us invisible to humans. I already have them in my bag.”

“Then let’s go!”

It was dark and stormy when they got back down to earth. Huge gusts of wind blew them off course, yet there was no rain. The butterfly was struggling to fly ahead of them.

They were about 50 feet above the ground when Paige recognized something. “Hey, that’s my house!” Suddenly she swooped down. “I dropped the bag with the cloaks!”

They landed softly on the turf, and Paige picked up the bag. She heard footsteps coming. “Quick! Put on your cloak! It’s my mom!” Alyssa disappeared under the cloak. Paige simply draped it over her wings. They vanished.

“Paige!” Her mom shrieked. “Where have you been? You said you were just going for a short walk-- your father’s frantic, he was going on a search--You’re in big trouble, missy!” Paige forlornly followed her mother inside.

She walked into the kitchen. No one was there. It looked like her grandparents had already gone to bed. She pushed open the door to the porch and stopped.

Her grandmother was sitting at the kitchen table, her hands cupped. Something was in them. Paige peered intently for a closer look.

It was the butterfly.

Paige gasped, then immediately backed away, her hand over her mouth. Her grandmother was murmuring softly, probably to the butterfly. Now that she thought about it, her grandmother had always had a liking for insects. But how she had managed to capture the butterfly was a mystery. It was fluttering around wildly, yet it wasn’t going anywhere. Had it been injured?

Forgetting that she was trying to stay hidden, Paige crept over to it. Her grandmother turned and saw her.

“Hello, Paige, dear. Where on earth have you been?”

“Well, you see, I-” Paige stopped. Should she trust her and tell her about Alyssa and the Cloud Kingdom? Probably not.

Her grandmother patted the seat next to her. Paige sat obediently, like a small dog that knew when it had been overpowered.

“Now,” she said, “why are you wearing that cloak?”

Paige stared at her. Weren’t the cloaks supposed to be invisible to humans?

“I-I-” she stuttered.

“You’d better take that off, Paige. It will slip off anyhow, and you don’t want to be around people when that happens.”

Paige stared again. Was she somehow part Cloud Person, too? If so, it would explain why she was. But still...

“Now, Paige, let us take a look at this most interesting butterfly.” She released it onto the table. It fluttered wildly for a moment, then saw Paige and calmed completely.

“It seems to like you,” her grandmother said, looking at Paige intently.

Then Paige knew. It all fit together. “Grammy,” she risked, “You’re the Water Master, aren’t you?”

Her grandmother nodded. “Call me Brooke,” she said. “It has been too long since I’ve been by my first name.”

“Okay... Brooke. Please, the Cloud Kingdom is evaporating. You need to make it rain!”

Brooke nodded. “But first, I need to clear some things with you. What did old Nimbus tell you about me?”

Paige thought. “He said the Mind Master was jealous of you and tricked you into going to earth.”

Brooke snorted. “First, it wasn’t jealousy that made him bring me to earth. It was love.”

Paige gasped. “So- Grandpa-”

“Yes, Paige. Anim, your grandfather, is the Mind Master. Anim means ‘mind’ in Latin,” she said at Paige’s questioning glance. “In the Cloud Kingdom, we aren’t able to marry outside our own clan. Anim and I had to leave.” She sighed. “Sadly, our powers have grown weaker as we age. We are still immortal, but everything else is leaving. This might be the last time I use my powers.”

“How have you hidden your wings all this time? I mean, It’s been over three hundred years.”

“Light. The same way the Cloud Kingdom’s bottom is covered so humans can’t see it, our wings have been covered in the same way. The Light Master was my best friend. She helped us escape undetected.”

“Is Mom a Cloud Person, too?”

“Yes. But she does not know it. I have hidden our true identity away until now.” She stood up. “Come. It is time.”

The two of them made their way outside. "Alyssa!" Paige whispered loudly. "You won't believe it! My grandmother's the Water Master!"

There was a slight noise, and Alyssa suddenly appeared two feet in front of them. Paige jumped. "You scared me!"

"Sorry." Alyssa turned to Brooke. "It is an honor to meet you, O Water Master."

Brooke chuckled. "Please, Brooke will do."

They headed toward where Paige had first met Alyssa. Once they had arrived, Paige slipped the cloak off her wings. Brooke also waved her hands, and the light covering grew to encircle all of them. But, since they were within the circle, they could still see each other and everything around them.

"Are you ready?" Alyssa asked Paige.

"Me? It's Grammy doing the work."

Alyssa shook her head. "No. Her powers are too weak to do it alone. You must help her, Paige."

"But how? How do I do this?"

"Just envision a large body of water draining out into the world." This was Brooke speaking.

"What?"

"Just do it. It works."

Paige closed her eyes in concentration. A moment later, she felt herself lifting off the ground. What felt like hours (but was probably a minute or two) passed before she felt rain on her back. Opening her eyes, she tumbled to the ground.

"We did it!" she cheered.

Alyssa grinned. "You saved the kingdom!"

"No, we saved the kingdom. I couldn't have done it without you."

Alyssa blushed. "Wait. Where's Brooke?"

She had already flown away. "Stay there!" she called. "I'll be right back!"

Paige turned back to Alyssa and found her gaping. "Paige! Your wings!"

"What?"

"They're- they're completely blue!"

Paige looked at her reflection in a large puddle that had already formed on the ground, and saw this was so. But not the blue of the Water Clan. No, these were deep, sky blue.

"What does this mean?"

"I don't know."

They heard voices approaching, and covered themselves with their cloaks. Brooke emerged, with her mother and father, both pale-faced. Behind them was her grandfather, with a wild grin on his face. "I told your parents everything," Brooke said. "Alyssa?"

Alyssa nodded and stepped forward. "Close your eyes, please." Wings quickly grew out of their backs. Her mother gasped. Her eyes flew open.

"We can't possibly live here anymore!"

Brooke shook her head. "No." She grinned. "We're moving back. I don't care what King Nimbus will do."

Two days later, Paige stood with Alyssa next to their new underwater house in the Cloud Kingdom. Paige and her family had special wings so that the water would not damage them.

"Hello, there." Her grandmother flew up to them. "Care for a quick flight?"

In response, Paige leaped into the air. "Come on!" She paused. "Grandma?" Paige asked. "My wings have turned bright blue. Why is that?"

"Why, didn't you know? My powers have greatly diminished. I am still immortal, but I do not have the same strength as three hundred years ago."

She smiled. "My dear, you are the new Water Master."

Letters to the Editor

Sienna Woodrow
6702 Blue Canary Ln.
Brandon, FL 33511
November 1st, 2018

Dear Madam,

I loved your past article about the types of insects and other odd foods that natives used to eat. I have always wondered when people decided to take the risk of pulling some sort of freaky bug out of the ground, and trying to eat it. They didn't know if it was poisonous, or would harm them in some other way!

I am planning a prank on my brother and his friends, and so I am wondering: What insects are edible? I need at least two different types that I can prepare without peanuts, as my brother is allergic to them. They also should be prepared in a way that makes them look like any other snack. If the prank goes well, I might send you the results.

Your adventurous (and slightly mischievous) admirer,
Sienna

Katie Yarbrough
81143 Waterfowl Ave.
Chattanooga, TN. 37401
November 9th, 2018

Dear Miss Woodrow,

Your prank sounds exciting! I loved to play practical jokes on my family when I was your age. However, don't go too far, as your brother might resolve to get back at you. Stick with the insects that are not as nasty as others.

Here are some edible insects:

- Grasshoppers
- Crickets
- Earthworms
- Mealworms
- Grubs

Remember to cook every insect you plan to serve, and disguise them. You might want to make it look like his favorite snack. For example, you could chop up crickets into jelly bean-sized pieces, dip them into chocolate, and serve them as Milk Duds. You should be prepared. If they ask you to eat one before they do, have some *real* Milk Duds ready, and eat those instead. After they eat the so-called "candy", you need to have some sort of catch-phrase ready. Say something like, "Wow! Do you really like them? I thought that the crickets were too crunchy," or something similar. Then run.

I would love to hear the results!

Hopefully waiting,
Katie Yarbrough, Editor-in-Chief
Pests and Proboscises

