

A GARDEN IN THE VILLAGE

I walked my path alone
Always looking, always searching,
But in the end, alone,
Never quite sure of where I was going

At times my path would connect with others
And we'd walk side by side for a while
But then our paths would reach a fork
And we'd walk alone again

As I walked, my hand outstretched,
Many gifts would touch my palm,
A rose, a song, a friendship ring,
Or another hand would rest in mine for a time

Sometimes men laid caterpillars there
A delicate creature, a curious thing
But it would soon leave with the man
When our paths diverged and I was alone again

One day a man walked along side me
And days turned into weeks and into months
And the caterpillar that laid there
Settled into my palm and made its home

We could see the path diverging further up ahead
And the man and I looked at each other Knowing
That this is where it would end
And I offered up my hand so he could take back his fuzzy friend

But to our surprise the caterpillar looked nothing like it had
It had burrowed down into my flesh
And begun to wrap itself into a cocoon
And it was clear that it would not leave

I was scared. I was petrified.
I did not know this man, not *really*
And I knew little about cocoons
And even less about the butterflies they would become

Fear made me wish I could pluck the cocoon
Out of my palm, undo the wrappings, and give this man back his caterpillar
But somehow stronger than this fear, was the vision
Of a beautiful butterfly that would never be if I did this awful thing

So I swallowed my fears and carried them with me
All the way to his village
For I felt, to leave him now, at the fork in this path,
Would only hurt this growing thing that was a part of him

Entering the village I felt that I was no longer guided
By the spirit in me
But rather the commitment I had made back on the path
To help protect and nurture the miracle growing in my hand

Yet I soon realized that the man
Had no means to protect and no means to nurture
He had only his smile and his loving heart
Which left me anxious and feeling alone in this village of strangers

How could I protect and nurture this cocoon
And care for the butterfly that would soon emerge
If I too had no means, no friends to call on,
And only one hand with which to work

I thought of running, back to my path, back to anywhere, but here
Yet I knew I could never run from this cocoon
Because it was a part of me now
And this smiling, loving man was a part of it too

Then one day when I was out looking for answers,
I stumbled upon a villager who told me about a garden
That was staffed by people who loved butterflies
And loved the women who carried them

I went to the garden and was greeted at the entrance
By a gardener who squeezed my arm and smiled warmly
At the growing life resting in my palm
And suddenly I didn't feel alone

She made a point of getting to know me and
Asking me what I needed
And whether I had fears or concerns
And suddenly I felt I was loved

I told her I needed new mittens
For my old ones no longer fit over the growing cocoon
She said, "Of course you do dear"
And she took me to the mitten grove where mittens grew on puffy trees

I told her I needed someone to look at my fingers
For they were especially weak from supplying the caterpillar with nutrients
She said, "Of course you do, dear"
And she took me to the finger orchard to see a specialist

I told her I needed a travel seat to carry my butterfly once it emerged,
And protect it from harm
She said, "Of course you do, dear"
And she referred me to a class that would give me the seat
And teach me how to use it

I told her I needed to learn what would happen as the butterfly emerged
And how to care for it immediately after
She said, "Of course you do, dear"
And she signed me up for butterfly emergence class
And a New-butterfly Care class

I asked her if it was too much to ask for a Coach
For someone to stay by my side during the emergence and coach me through it
"Of course it isn't" she said
and gave me the number for a Doula.

I told her I needed to know how to feed my butterfly
Especially if I went back to work
She said, "Of course you do dear"
And she referred me to a feeding class and
Told me how to get a feeding pump to take to work

I told her I needed to know how to feed *myself*
For until I found work, we truly were without means
And she gave me a look of such kindness
And showed me to a grove
Where I could apply for my very own fruit tree

I told her that with all these needs and fears
I wasn't sleeping well and was having trouble coping
She said, "Of course you are dear"
And she called a counselor who would visit me at home

I asked her about the years to come
And how I should raise my butterfly
And she laughed and said, "Now you're getting ahead of yourself,
When the time comes I'll get you into a parenting education class."

I asked her how all of this was possible?
Who was in charge of this magical place?

And she led me to the center of the garden
Where stood a magnificent tree

And as I stood staring up at this beautiful, stoic giant
I noticed that on the tips of every knotted limb
Danced the fluttering wings of butterflies
Every color, shape, and size

And I asked, "But how is this possible?"
Who keeps this tree alive and growing strong?
"It's up to the villagers," my gardener said with a smile,
Fortunately enough of them love butterflies."

She walked me back to the entrance of the garden
And I hugged her fiercely, thanking her
"One more question..." I asked, "What's the name of this place?"
"Healthy Start," she said, and waved goodbye.