

The Butterfly Effect

by Daniel Harris

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The art of the raconteur is different than that of a writer, or even the actor. The success of the raconteur's stories is in the verbal performance. Utilizing the mimicking of voices, gestures, and sound effects, a true raconteur uses the full resources available to him to enhance and enliven his story. Embellishing the truth is an accepted practice.

What follows is a short story I frequently deliver in the style of the raconteur. The use of the first person makes such stories much more effective. The Butterfly Lady story is slightly along the lines of the fabulous, though I had a Vietnamese colleague who had heard that such places and practices do, or did, exist in Southeast Asia.

The telling of this story is usually preceded by some mention of a member of the order Lepidoptera, specifically the blue morpho Eugenia butterfly, or, not infrequently, the wonders of the red light districts of the world's cities; or even a discussion of the butterfly effect and Chaos Theory. You know, the flap of a butterfly's wings in Ulan Bator, Mongolia causes a severe nor'easter six weeks later in New England.

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This, is the butterfly lady story.

Now it turns out, the story doesn't begin with the butterfly lady, herself, but with her brother.

You see back in the sixties, early sixties, it was a good deal for a musically talented kid to get a job in a band playing in the Borscht Belt, you know, the Jewish Alps, up in the Catskills in New York State. Places like Kutchers, and Browns, The Concord, Grossingers...places like that.

Now I was spending some time in one of those bands and it was a big place. I forget which one. I played in most of those resorts, at one time or another.

This was about 1963 or maybe 4 and the band I played in was the show band. The members of the band were pretty much straight-arrow guys: Old time top level giggers and young music conservatory students like myself. We played for the headliners... you know Steve and Eydie, Joey Bishop, Frank, Dino, Barbara, Sammy, those people.

And then there was a Latin Band. The Latin Band was all these crazy Latinos from the Bronx. They were, you know, wild guys. They'd play the gig at this hotel and they would all pile in a car and drive like maniacs for two hours back to the Bronx and play there until 10 or 11 o'clock in the morning at some Latin dance club. They'd show up back at the hotel in the late afternoon They would beg the chef to give them some food, grab a few hours sleep and then start playing their gig at nine o'clock at night.

Well, there was one guy in the Latin Band, who was not Puerto Rican, Cuban, Dominican, Venezuelan, or Latin anything. He was a Jewish guy named Aaron. And he was a really good flute player, an OK clarinet player, and not a bad saxophone player. But what really put him in favor with those Latin guys was that he was a fabulous piccolo player. He would get that thing going and the place would just go crazy.

Well, during the summer that I was playing there, and when Aaron was also playing there, a rumor starts circulating among the staff that one of the bellhops had been found naked tied to a bed in one of the female guest's rooms. The lady guest had checked out and left said boy haplessly bound to the bed with a dildo inserted in his bum

Well... whatever the story was, among the musicians, of course, imaginations ran wild. And, Aaron says to no one in particular, "Listen, you know I have a younger sister. She's pretty wild."

And we're thinking, "You have a younger sister and she's pretty wild? How would you know that?"

Well he wasn't too particular about things, he just said, "Well you know she attends Bennington College and she's independent."

Anyway, a few years go by and I'm studying at a famous Ivy League school, Yale to be exact. I'm sitting in a bookstore on the floor reading a book. It was one of those used bookstores on Chapel Street. This young woman comes up to me and says, "I think you know my brother."

And I said "Really. Who is your brother?"

And she says "Aaron, the flute and piccolo player."

And I say, " Yeah, I know Aaron. I mean I don't know him well, but one summer we played at the same Catskill resort and it was great. He was a terrific player, a funny guy and everything. What's he doing?"

She says, "He's studying medicine. He's up in Boston, you know doing his residency and getting to be an MD.

"I said well, that's cool. So what do you do?" She says : "I'm in Slavic studies.

"Slavic Studies?"

"Yeah, I just came back from spending the summer in the Soviet Union. It was one of those travel fellowships to go abroad and learn how the enemy lives."

And I said "Well, that's kind of cool. Ah, what else do you do?"

And she says: "Sort of, well, nothin'. I've passed my prelims and I'm starting to write a dissertation on how the grammar of the Russian language fosters fascism and dictatorships. I'm kind of bummed out on everything. I don't know. I may look for another line of work."

Anyway we had coffee or something. Her looks didn't encourage a repeat encounter, though I would occasionally run into her on campus.

Time goes by, and I'm living in an SRO in Manhattan. That's Single Room Occupancy as in cheap flop with bathroom down the hall, hot and cold running junkies, hookers, rats and roaches. Well, I get a call from the contractor at Radio City Music Hall and he says, "Listen, I need a sub for the show on Saturday afternoon. Not

Saturday night, just the matinee performance. And I was given your name. Can you could come in and read the show?"

And I said, "Yes. Sure, I'll do it." Of course, I was nearly starving, so any gig that paid that kind of money was a godsend. I took the gig.

They had a little rehearsal in the morning, a talk through really, so we could mark up any strange repeats, cues, transpositions, or cuts. And I went to the rehearsal and after the rehearsal most of the guys went to Studio H. Now Studio H is actually Herlihy's Bar. But all the technical people at Radio City, NBC and Roc, called Herlihy's Bar, Studio H.

Most of the musicians went to Studio H and I went to Studio H, also. But I'm nervous because I need the money and a good rep, so I don't drink anything. I'm sitting in my tux by myself at a table with a coffee and a sandwich, which is all I could afford. I'm thinking about what I have to do. And this woman comes up. And, it's Aaron's sister!

And I say: "Wow, What are you doing here?"

And she says: "Well I work for... I can't remember: AP, UPI, Reuters, or one of those news organizations that had offices in Rockefeller Center.

And I say: "Oh, that's really cool. So what's exciting about your job?"

"Well I was just in Vietnam for six months...it's the height of the Vietnam War...and I had an interesting assignment."

"Really, what was that?"

"Well you know, they give these guys R&R. They rotate them out and they go to Guam, Manila, sometimes they go to Hong Kong, but the big one they go to is of course Bangkok, Thailand. And you know it was crazy. So, my boss says, 'You go to Bangkok and report what these guys do on R&R. Don't get too juicy, but write a good article.'"

So she says to me, "Well, I get to Bangkok and of course it's just a smorgasbord of sex, drugs, alcohol, and thrill games. These guys are a big source of money for the locals."

Well, she witnessed everything you can think of. You can imagine these GI's have been under a lot of stress and they're doing drugs, drinking a lot and they are going to the red light district where they are getting all kinds of stuff done to them.

It's terrific. But, you know, she's getting a little excited by all this action. As she said: "I was getting a little hot in the pants. I'm watching all this stuff all the time and nothing is happening to me."

And so I said to myself, rather she said to herself: "Maybe there is something for me here."

One day she happened to be in a medium sized city outside of Bangkok. And she's made some inquiries among the usual sources: cab drivers, bartenders, and hairdressers. "Do you know if there is a place that caters to women here? You know a place a woman can go to and have a good time, good experience. But not just the usual stuff maybe something a little different. The usual stuff you can get anywhere, something pleasurable and different. Maybe even a little kinky."

She finds out that there's a place she can go to. Well, she goes to this place and it's an old British rubber baron's mansion. She knocks on the door, and is introduced around and she says, "I was given this address by so and so, and he said that I could have some sort of special treatment. A treatment that would be extraordinary and memorable for a woman."

And they say, "Well of course. That's possible, but we ask that there be some discretion about this and it will not be cheap."

And she thinks, "Well, I haven't any place to spend my money." And so they worked out a price and, they say, "OK. Come back tomorrow and we entertain you."

So she returns the next day, on the back of a motor scooter of course, because those are the taxis. She enters and, "Pleased to see you again and we are here to give you greatest pleasure."

They took her into this room and it was like the spa of spa for beauty treatments. Mud packs, and this and that. Massage, baths, the works. And she said they depilated her everywhere and made sure her arms, underarms and legs were hair-free and smooth; all

over smooth and very sensitive from the razor and waxes. They gave her a beautiful haircut. Did her nails. Everything.

"Just amazing, she said, this isn't really a sexual experience, but, you know, it's pretty nice."

And they said, "You not done yet."

And she says, "Well what do you mean "you not done, yet".

No, no this not 'sperience.' This is prep-er-LA-tion. The prep-er-LA-tion, for the 'sperience.

So she says "Okay."

How does it get any better than this? And she there, lying on this wonderful, wonderful couch. Comfortable. It's kind of a table-height couch. But she said it had a certain comfort, like a big hand holding you.

These three women came in and they started applying this emollient. This very wonderful smelling stuff about her neck, her body, her breasts, and all over her belly, her buttocks, her thighs, her lips, her knees, her ankles, and the even soles of her feet. Everywhere.

The whole room started taking on this wonderful aroma, she said, it was just to die for. Just the aroma was making her hot, she said. There must have been some pheromones or something in there that just ... just had her aroused to the very edge, but not quite at the edge. The fingers of the girls who were applying the emollient seemed electric, sending tiny shivers up her hypersensitive skin.

So, they say, "Move up." and they bring these stirrups. Like they have in gynecological examination rooms. She starts getting very nervous. They bind her arms and feet with soft velvet ribbons.

She says, "Well, now, wait a minute. I don't want to do something where some guy with an elephant-sized Johnson sticks it to me. Or some water buffalo, or other farm animal, or some machine gets involved."

"O, no,no.no.no. No worry, No worry, No worry. Velly nice here. Is wonderful place. Is beautiful. Quiet music. Is beautiful. Belly nice, belly nice, nice here. Beautiful place. Good for you."

And the environment was very, very inviting and reassuring. All the lighting was indirect. The light bulbs were hidden someplace. It was as if the light were filtered through opium golden thin skin.

And the three girls leave.

So, she's in this room. Dimly primordial pre-dawn lit room. And she thinks to herself "Now what?"

And it's very, very quiet. Almost too quiet. And she's aware of her breathing. And she can hear her heart beat, which is very rapid. And she's ... very sexually aroused....She's nervous...and not quite ... ready. And yet she's anticipatory ... and fearful ... and she's not sure. And then there's this amazing sound.

The sound was barely audible. It was a rhythmic and pervasive, yet mysterious drumming. Divining the source of the sound was like a Zen koan. It could have been a hundred drummers beating out the same rhythm on microscopic drums with hummingbird feathers. The result was a subliminal rhythmic throbbing.

She opened her eyes and sees blue ellipses fluttering about the room. They were everywhere: scores, hundreds, and hundreds. Maybe even thousands.

The ellipses are the iridescent patterns of the wing beats of hundreds of Blue Morpho butterflies illuminated by black light.

It was better than opium. It was better than an acid trip. It was just amazing. She thought maybe they doped me with opium, or some rare Asian hallucinogen. She was enjoying the trip.

And then these butterflies alighted so carefully, so lightly, and ever so lightly and gently on her body. One landed on one of her nipples and just ever so quietly and carefully started sucking the emollient from her nipple. And more started sucking her breasts and her belly and her ears and her nose. They landed on eyes, her lips, and in the curve of her neck ... around her shoulders and on her belly, and of course in her sex ... they crawled into her sex and onto it and little mouth parts of the butterflies ever-so-gently ... ever-ever-so-gently... just taking one ... little taste of the emollient at a time ... just one little butterfly taste ... a little minor suck, like a little tiny lick ... the tiniest of tiniest licks, but scores of them were doing

this ... and her body started to undulate and it started to rock ... and it started to move around and she was straining against the velvet ribbons with which she was bound ... and she wanted to scream but she was afraid to scream for fear that it would end.

And she was bound and pent, and pent and bound and she was moving and her belly was undulating out of control...and her back was moving up and down on the table. And her legs were shaking, and shaking and almost starting to cramp. More butterflies arrived on her body. When they would fly off, the air from their wings caused another sensation. And there was the sensation of hundreds of butterfly feet touching her flesh and mouthparts kissing and sucking her everywhere and of air and blowing and licking. The small probing proboscises of the butterflies were stimulating all the seven Hindu orifices of a woman and the vast skin of her body.

And she was arching and reaching and seeking and finding newer and higher levels of pleasure. The sensations were brushing the threshold of pain. She began rocketing through layers and layers of orgasms. Meta woman sounds starting from deep inside her hips, passing through her undulating belly and rattling her straining throat and uvula in a final explosion of raw guttural sexual moans and whimpering cries. Her perspiration ignited the emollient and excited the butterflies to greater feeding frenzies.

And then, finally, she forgot everything.

Well, she said. She didn't know what time later she awoke, but she was nicely dressed in a silk robe. All evidence of the emollient had been removed. Her hair was well done. Makeup had been applied, which was something she rarely, if ever used, but it seemed to fit her newfound sense of womanliness.

And her clothes were freshly cleaned and laid out beside her.

After she dressed and was leaving, they greeted her in the large front room.

And they said in that very direct Asian way, not exactly interrogative, and not exactly imperative: "You have good time."

And that, my friends, is the butterfly lady story.

* * *

Now, I have been relating this tale regularly since the late 1960's when I first heard it from my reporter friend. I never thought that anyone would begin to verify the truth or facts of such an event, much less try to duplicate the very experience.

A lepidopterist of my spouse's acquaintance claimed no blue morphos lived in South East Asia; only the male blue morpho is blue, and that the prehension of food is with the feet not the mouthparts, which remove food from the legs and feet. Humorless scientists have ruined many a good tale.

As it happens, a few years back I was traveling with Eugenia, the woman, who at the time was my European music agent. While riding the TGV from Paris to Marseilles for a series of concerts, the subject of travel came up. Being rather close friends I related the story of the butterfly lady to her. The story took many kilometers, as I had to translate it into French, since Eugenia was adamant that I speak French in France, even though Eugenia was a native English speaker born and raised in Chicago.

After I had related *L'histoire de Madame de papillon*, she questioned me very closely about some of the details. Since, I am frequently almost "out-of-body" when in raconteur mode, I was perhaps not as convincing in the details as she would have desired. Having spent the previous two weeks in Poland and Hungary, French was neither on my tongue, nor in my ear.

Eugenia told me that she and her college roommate had traveled extensively in Indo-China, and had never found a place that catered solely to women. Even later traveling on her own in South East Asia, she never discovered any establishments catering to women. She even admitted to going to a Bangkok entertainment house that specialized in transvestites and sampling the services of a most beautiful young Tamil man, who enjoyed dressing like the famous Tamil film actress, Shriya Saran. Among his entertainments was a

huge repertoire of “Bollywood” songs, which he sang in that particular nasal Indian soprano voice.

I filed this information away as future story material, and during the next year or so, never thought about *madame de papillon* or my friend's experiences in Bangkok's fleshpots. About a week ago, I received a letter postmarked from Bangkok. The address was written in Eugenia's beautiful Palmer script. Inside was a post card. It was a “story” card with the life cycle of the blue morpho butterfly beautifully engraved on the front. On the verso was written *C'est vrai. [It's true.] Merci bien. E.*

PS: A slightly different version of this story was published in the *Mad Hatter Review* Number 13. Shortly after it appeared, I received an e-mail from a Vietnamese man who claimed to be an aide-de-camp to a well-known North Vietnamese General.

He said that he, the general and a number of other high ranking officers of the North Vietnamese Army and the Viet Cong attended a special dinner in a city outside of Bangkok prior to the January 30, 1968 Tet Offensive. After the dinner they were entertained by a viewing of a live naked female American reporter being bound and then sexually stimulated to exhaustion by blue morpho butterflies. It served as a symbol of the power of the masses to overcome the mighty and reinforced the Communist Tet Offensive battle cry: *Crack the Sky, Shake the Earth.*

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"The Butterfly Effect" is listed as a notable story in the 2013 Million Writers' Award for stories published in 2012.

