

The Butterfly in the Cocoon

A short story about safety, loneliness, and the courage to unfold.

By Margaret Lewis



A colourful butterfly emerges from a black-and-white cocoon.

When I am out in the world, I look like a butterfly in flight. My wings seem bright and certain, carrying me as though I belong wherever the air takes me. I flutter, shimmer, and move easily among others. I become light to be around — a butterfly who can settle beside anyone, if only for a moment.

This is the version of me people meet first — or at least, it is the butterfly I let them see: open-winged, sunlit, and sure.

Yet that brightness does not follow me everywhere. When I return home and the doors close behind me, my wings fold in. I do not disappear, but I become smaller. My world narrows to one quiet corner, one room, one safe place where I can keep the outside away. I am no longer vivacious, graceful, or carefree. I am a moth resting where no one can see me.

For a long time, I thought one of them had to be the truer version of me. Now I know both are real: the butterfly who opens her wings for the world, and the moth who folds herself away where she feels protected.

That need for protection is where my anxiety lives. It becomes my cocoon: a place that feels safe because it keeps the world out, but also keeps me trapped inside myself. Within it, I am enclosed — inside my home, inside my room, inside my own thoughts.

Anything that asks me to fly beyond it can feel too vast, unless I am becoming the butterfly everyone expects me to be.

Even so, somewhere beneath the fear, I still believe I can be more than these two selves.

I want to be more. But when the world feels too close, anxiety thickens around me like silk. It tells me the cocoon is safer than the sky, and I retreat into it — still hidden, still guarded from everything beyond it.

In those moments, I wonder: will I ever truly believe I am more than the version I show? Or will leaving the cocoon mean losing the only safety I know, leaving me exposed, vulnerable, and alone?

That question follows me back into the dark. Am I the butterfly that stayed too long in its cocoon, mistaking protection for survival until its wings began to fade while the others rose — vibrant, weightless, and free — carried by warm breezes? I still want that freedom for myself. I used to believe it could happen.

Now, I am not sure it ever will. So I pretend. I act as though I am liked, loved, and valued. I pretend loneliness is something I welcome, not something I fear. I make others believe that I believe I am already a butterfly — not a moth still hanging from a tree, hidden inside a cocoon, waiting to be seen.