

Butterfly Path

By Virpi Penna

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Henny lays on the bow of the ship and stares into the water. She is trying to count the waves, but there are so terribly many of them. Father waves, mother waves, little baby waves. There are also dangerous monster waves. They gobble up the other waves and grow larger and larger until in the end they are so enormous that they could maybe even swallow the whole ship...

Just then Henry yells, "Island ho!"

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Finally, Henny thinks. They haven't seen anything but sea for ages. Henny squints her eyes and stares at the little dot off in the distance, which slowly grows larger. Now they are so close that Henny can make out a forest.

“There are trees there!” she exclaims.

Father, Mother and Henry also stare excitedly at the approaching island. Only little baby Neil is dozing peacefully in Mother's arms. He does not know yet that there is a world out there besides the sea and the boat, their little home.

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Near the shore the boat gently runs onto the sand—the rest of the way is wading. The sand feels silky. They take it in their hands and let it flow through their fingers. The sun makes the sand glisten.

“Hopefully there aren’t any crabs here,” Henry says.

“Or sea urchins,” Henny adds.

The water is crystal clear. Henny and Henry see fish and clams, but they don’t hang around collecting them, instead racing each other into the interior of the island.

“Last one’s a rotten egg!” Henry shouts.

Father has made it to shore and is tying up the boat. Mother comes after and sits down on the sand. Little one-toothed Neil is sniffing and snuffling in Mother’s arms.

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The silky, warm sand reaches all the way to the edge of the forest. The forest looks mysterious.

“We’re going to explore the island,” Henny and Henry say.

“Go ahead, but remember to be careful,” their father says.

“And try to find a spring,” their mother says hopefully.

The forest is bordered by tall bracken. Henny and Henry push their way through it.

“Yuk, what is this?” Henry squeals all of a sudden.

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Henry has stepped on something cold and slimy. Henny bends down to look.

“It’s just an old mushroom,” she laughs.

“It feels disgusting!” Henry says, grimacing.

When they have gotten through the ferns, Henny looks for a long stick. She feels safer with it. The air is hot and humid, like a rain forest.

“What on earth is that?” Henny says in wonder. “Henry, come look!” she exclaims.

Henny has found a tree with an enormous butterfly cocoon on its side. Bigger than Henny herself. Many of the trees have similar cocoons.

“Amazing,” Henry says. “What kind of butterflies will hatch from those?”

“What if they’re just giant grubs!” Henny says in horror. A fascinating looking path winds through the trees.

“Who could have made this path?” Henry wonders.

“Perhaps the butterflies,” Henny suggests.

“Ha, not the butterflies,” Henry laughs. “Butterflies fly, not walk.”

“Let’s call it the butterfly path anyway,” Henny says, pleading. “It sounds so beautiful.”

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The path leads the children to a spring.

“Lovely! Finally some fresh water!” Henny and Henry exclaim joyfully. They take water in cupped hands and drink. “It sure does taste good. Wait until Mother hears about this!”

Henry is hot. He rolls up his pants and goes wading.

“Let’s go swimming,” he suggests.

“Good idea,” Henny says and jumps into the spring. “This is cold as ice!” she shrieks.

The children splash water on each other, screaming and giggling. Suddenly something miraculous happens. Their laughs begin to turn into colorful butterflies in the air. The butterflies take flight before their eyes like dandelion seeds or soap bubbles.

“Let’s go tell Father and Mother,” Henry says.

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Quickly they run along the butterfly path back to the beach. Mother and Father are building a tent sauna on the beach.

“We found a magic spring!” Henny and Henry yell.

“A magic spring?” Father and Mother say. “This we must see.”

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The parents follow their children to the butterfly path.

“Enormous!” they exclaim when they see the cocoons.

“Are all of the animals here that big?” they wonder.

“Like maybe the snakes or spiders,” Henny and Henry suggest.

Finally they arrive. Henry and Henny jump into the spring again.

“Look!” they yell out.

They wallow around in the water, splashing and giggling, but nothing happens. At least there are no butterflies anywhere.

“You come in too, Father; this really is a magic spring,” Henny says imploringly.

“I certainly will not; I’d catch my death,” Father says, shaking his head.

“We’ll see about that,” the children say and start splashing water on their father.

“Stop that right now!” their father yells, laughing, but the children just keep splashing.

Mother comes to their aid and pushes Father into the spring. Now the parents see the miracle too. Again Henny and Henry’s giggles turn into small butterflies, and their father’s guffaws into great, dark ones. The laughter is so contagious that Mother, with Neil in her arms, rushes into the spring as well.

“Make room; I want to see what kinds of butterflies my laughs will turn into,” Mother says. “This is the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen!”

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In the evening the children rest on the sand and play with Neil. Henry has found a branch with a beautiful seed pod on the end. Inside the pod the seeds jingle around like in a rattle. Neil bats at the branch, giggling. Henry remembers what kinds of butterflies came from Neil's laughs.

“Let's go to the spring tomorrow too,” she says to Henry.

“Sure, first thing in the morning,” Henry replies. Henry sniffs the air. Mother is baking pies in the boat, and Father is heating the sauna.

It smells lovely.

When they have been on the island for three weeks, the first rainy day comes.

“Aha,” Father says, looking at the boat thoughtfully. “The engine could use a little work.” Henry knows what Father's words mean. Father wants to get back to the water again.

“This has been a good island, but now it is time to continue our journey,” he says in the evening.

Father draws a picture of the island on his map and marks it with a green circle. The green circle means that it would be a good idea to come again sometime.

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Many days go by in preparation for their departure. The engine has been serviced, and the kitchen cabinets are full to overflowing with delicious jams and juices; the water barrels are full of fresh water. Now it should be time to leave, but what does Father still have on his mind? He goes into the forest and returns with one cocoon.

“We have to see what kind of butterfly this will turn into,” he explains and carries the cocoon onto the boat. Henny is afraid; Father shouldn’t take it.

“That is not a good idea,” Mother says as well.

But Father is stubborn. He lays the cocoon on the deck under a canopy on a soft bed of hay.

“That should be a nice place for it,” Father says.

Now they set sail. It feels comfortable to be on the boat again after so long. Henny and Henry sit on the deck carving wooden boats. They whole time they keep an eye on the cocoon, but it just lies quietly on the hay. Has it died? Henny wonders sadly.

“Father shouldn’t have taken it,” she says the Henry.

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One night Henny wakes to a bang. Henry has fallen to the floor; there is a storm on.

The cocoon! Henny thinks with a shock. Hopefully it hasn't fallen into the sea. The children run onto the deck. The sea is full of monster waves that rock the ship with their terrible force. The cocoon must be gotten to safety quickly.

“Oh, no!” Henny shouts in dismay.

She sees the wind grab the cocoon and send it flying like a piece of trash over the rail far off onto the sea.

“Father, Mother, wake up! The wind took the cocoon!” Henny and Henry shout. The parents rush to the deck.

“Oh, no ,” Father groans.

The cocoon is gone; the hay is gone. *But someone is nestled under the canopy.* Someone blue and delicate. Mother takes her large scarf and wraps it around the creature. Father carries it to the kitchen sofa. The creature is shaking.

Henny looks at it. It does not have wings. But it does have antennae. And hands and feet. Is it a butterfly or what? she wonders. A wingless butterfly. Henny starts calling the creature Wingless.

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Mother cooks vegetable broth and offers it to the creature.

“Drink this,” she asks, but in vain.

“Maybe it would eat berries,” Henry suggests.

“We don’t have any berries, but we do have jam,” Father says, hurrying off to get a jar. “Take some of this,” he presses the creature.

Wingless takes a spoonful. Then Henny offers an apple. Wingless takes a bite of it.

“She is clearly starting to recover,” Father says, delighted. Mother serves everyone warm broth. Henny and Henry start playing storm ball on the floor.

Henny notices that Wingless is watching curiously. Does she know how to talk, Henny wonders.

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The next morning the storm has died down. Wingless sits on a coil of rope wrapped in Mother's scarf and stares at the sea. If only I could speak with it, Henny thinks.

Father has turned the boat around, Henry comes to report.

"Good," Henny says. "Now you can go home," she says to Wingless.

The trip back to the island feels long. Wingless just sits and sits on the coil of rope.

"If only we could get her to play," Henny says.

"Let's play tag," Henry suggests.

They set off running around the ship. Henry touches Wingless and shouts, "You're it!"

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Wingless takes off after Henry and is on his heels in a second. She tags Henry and laughs gaily. Wingless has a nice laugh, Henny thinks, remembering the magic fountain again. From then on their days are full of fun. Henny and Henry have made a friend.

Then comes a rainy day. Does Wingless know how to draw? Henny thinks and gets the pencil box out of the cupboard; Henry brings paper. Henny draws the magic spring and butterflies. The picture turns out very well. Wingless also starts to draw. She draws a figure that looks like herself, but who has beautiful, large wings.

“Lovely!” Henny sighs.

“Why don’t you have wings?” she asks, even though she knows that Wingless will not answer. Wingless draws many butterflies on the picture.

“How beautiful,” Mother says in admiration. “You probably miss your family. Don’t be sad; we’ll be there soon,” Mother says.

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And finally a familiar green hump becomes dimly visible on the horizon.

“Look, Wingless, there is your island,” Henny points. The island does not look deserted anymore.

“They have hatched,” Henry observes, astounded. Henny and Wingless are the first to the shore. And oh, how everyone rejoices! The lost child has been found! Henny is also happy because Wingless has finally gotten home.

Still, she wants to cry. Wingless has been a good friend.

“We will surely come here again,” Mother says, trying to comfort her.

“Soon,” Father promises.

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Henny wants to see Wingless' laugh butterflies.

“Let's go swimming in the spring,” she suggests.

They run along the familiar path to the magic spring. This really is the butterfly path after all, Henny thinks. They jump into the spring hand-in-hand and laugh themselves half to death. Wingless' laugh butterflies are transparent and golden.

After swimming, Wingless takes the children deep into the forest. They come to a meadow, from the center of which rises a bluish-grey hill.

“Cocoons!” Henny says, the sight taking her breath away.

All of the cocoons have been brought here. They shimmer like silver and gold in the rays of the setting sun. Wingless takes two cocoons from the edge of the pile and gives them to Henny and Henry.

“They're so light,” Henry says in wonder.

Cocoons in tow, they return to the forest. There, under a bushy tree, is Wingless' home. At the base of the tree someone sits crocheting. This must be Wingless' mother, Henny guesses. The mother takes the cocoons and unravels them into thin threads. Now Henny sees what she is crocheting. Beautiful, flowery wings.

Henny smiles at Wingless.

“Those are your wings,” she says.

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In the evening a party is held to celebrate Wingless' return home. The children collect twigs and branches from the forest. With these they build a large fire. Now Henny and Henry get to see how to fly with lace wings. As the fire grows higher and higher, only those who have wings are able to add twigs to it.

“Will your wings be ready soon?” Henny asks Wingless.

“If they will be, we'll have to give you a new name,” Henry says.

“You could be Bluewing,” Henny suggests. And before the bonfire is lit that night, Wingless has become Bluewing.