

Butterfly

by

e10

There it was! Marlise's heart raced and she bolted towards it, stomping over the undergrowth and stumbling on slippery moss, her gaze fixed upon it, up in the trees. Adrenaline rushing, she panicked as it disappeared behind a bough, and she slipped as she stepped on a log below her before finally reaching the colourful creature.

That wasn't it. In fact it wasn't a creature at all; it was just a red leaf waving in the wind, the hot sun lighting it up like fire. That wasn't the butterfly Marlise was after. The enigmatic *Sephrilius Macrostus* had eluded biologists and collectors since it had been first glimpsed almost a hundred years earlier, and it was not being any kinder to Marlise. She had been in this kilometre-square of hot South American jungle for a week with no results other than a dozen cases of mistaken identity, mostly with leaves or common butterflies.

Marlise slumped in disappointment and let her heavy backpack drop off her shoulders, resting it against a tree. It was so hot. Her long-sleeve shirt provided protection against mosquitos, but she would have to ditch it since she was sweating like nothing before. Awkwardly pulling her arms from the sticky garment, her chest bounced out in freedom, the buttons on the tight shirt having been the only restraint on her voluptuous body. Now she wore only a thin white T-shirt and the sports bra that was meant to provide her with 'comfort and support', according to the advertisements. *Yeah, maybe for a size B*, she thought to herself.

She reached down and flicked several ants from her toes. Despite having been recommended boots for her jungle trek, Marlise had been forced to swap them for sandals because of the sticky, sweaty heat. Her pants hadn't lasted long either, ending up back in her rucksack in favour a pair of tight shorts. Marlise let herself down to sit on a rock, dropping her net on the

ground beside her. She was not the world's greatest butterfly collector, in fact she was a clumsy and unscientific one, but she could not be criticised for her passion. She was the most dedicated amateur collector, having made trips all over the globe to further her collection. The *Macrostus* would be the jewel, the grand prize. Despite having been spotted only once in history, it was reputed to be the most beautiful and vivid butterfly ever seen. She knew the drawings by heart.

Marlise pulled a water bottle from her backpack and drank thirstily, the moisture spilling out and down her chest, providing brief relief from the heat. She sat despairingly and uncomfortable, wondering if she should have come at all.

There it was.

Marlise's jaw dropped. It was right before her. There was no doubt. It was more brilliant than anything she had ever seen. The curls on its red wings shone a bright yellow, making it look like a flame, and when it flapped its wings the flame came alive, dancing like real fire. No breath came from Marlise's mouth as she stared at its brilliance.

Suddenly it flapped again and lifted into the air. Her hand shot to her side, grasping for her net, unable to let her gaze fall from the beautiful creature. Transfixed by its fiery wings, she only half registered something even more strange about it; it seemed to have something on its back.

When Marlise's hand found the net and made a giant clumsy wipe, the winged creature was already too high, and she stumbled forward. With her gaze fixated on the butterfly, she followed it in a trance, blindly treading through the thick undergrowth with her neck craned. The fluttering animal led Marlise through trees and over logs as it made its way gently through the jungle to some unknown destination.

Marlise stomped through the jungle, paying no heed to the unlucky plant life finding itself beneath her sandals, she was not even aware of stumbling downwards when she broke into a small gully, and paid even less heed to the small river bordering it. She was transfixed on the elusive butterfly, which flew to a tree and touched down lightly on one of its branches about five metres from the ground. Marlise's breathing became still as she saw it stop, but her impulsiveness took over and she rushed for the tree.

However, there was more activity around her than just the butterfly that she watched in the tree.

Marlise's first step fell on something unexpected. Sitting on small twigs sunken into the soft muddy ground with its short, sparse grass, was a quaint box-like makeshift structure, comprised of thin strips of bark and twigs. It stood no chance under the flat sole of Marlise's thundering sandal, and it and its contents were flattened to a wooden pancake in the mud under her foot.

Her second step met with something similar, but this small structure had a different fate to its neighbour, since it was struck by the momentous swing of Marlise's other foot, and splintered on the front of her sandal, its walls bursting outwards. This was not all. There was another tiny unlucky item that was sent flying from Marlise's toes; a small figure that waved in panic as it hurtled uncontrollably through the air, striking a tree root several metres from where the stomping amateur biologist's foot landed, and falling silent.

With her gaze fixed on the elevated butterfly, Marlise did not see the community of small twigged structures between her body and the tree in which her target sat. Out of these random hut-like shapes poured more figures, startled by the giant intrusion. The first of these figures were unlucky enough to find themselves directly in the path of the giant feminine creature whose existence they had never even comprehended, and Marlise's foot came down heavily upon them and the two dwellings next to them. When her sandal lifted as she stomped past, there were two flattened bodies in the bottom of the foot-shaped depression in the mud, which encompassed two more pancakes of broken wood.

In milliseconds there was furious and panicked activity around Marlise's feet, of which she was completely unaware. With her next step she ascended a tree root, her foot finding solidness on the thick root that protruded from the ground, but also standing on this tree root, which was like a balcony that overlooked the village of huts, were several figures, armed and raising weapons towards the giant intruder, though their fierce expressions disappeared as the huge female lifted her foot over them, not even aware of the warriors' presence. As her sandal crunched down on these figures Marlise slipped on the dampness and stumbled. The three figures had been crushed instantly under the momentous flat sole, and had only served to

cause the giant owner of this devastating, crashing foot to slip as they smeared under it.

Marlise righted herself from the stumble and fell against the tree with her hands. Even with her gaze upwards at its boughs, she failed to see the intricate workings around it. From the forest giant's base led a fine pathway comprised of miniature match-like twigs embedded in the bark like a spiralling staircase, leading up and around the giant trunk. Dotted at intervals where there was a knobby protrusion in the wood big enough to support them (which was only a few centimetres) were tiny structures, not dissimilar to those found on the ground behind the distracted woman who gazed past these constructions.

Her net far too short to reach the beautiful creature nestled in the boughs, Marlise clutched at a branch to lift herself closer to her target, and even with her first grab she met with one of the tiny structures. It disintegrated in her grip, pieces of wood splintering out from between her fingers like putty. A small figure ran along the bough on which it sat, and attacked her little finger in fury with a tiny spear barely half the length of a toothpick, but after an unsuccessful kick to lift herself, Marlise dropped back to the ground. With her second jumping attempt her hand again grasped the branch and came down upon this figure. She was barely aware of the dampness running between her fingers as a tiny body was squelched in her grip.

When Marlise found loose footholds, her body fell into the tree and she clung onto while scrambling for a better hold. In doing so, her chest smacked into the trunk, where the matchstick staircase led to a dwelling with a normally-scenic view. In its last moments, the view from the window for its two inhabitants was of a white expanse of curving mountains bearing down at the unsuspecting structure. The house popped, its walls splintering under the pressure of Marlise's breasts, which continued to squeeze two helpless figures, pinning them in the rubble against the tree.

When the clumsy scientist slipped slightly, the figures fell forward, and with half a roof worth of crushed building materials, tumbled into the crevice that lay between her breasts behind Marlise's white T-shirt. Marlise barely registered this intrusion into her brassiere, concentrating instead on her next leap upwards, which awarded her a solid grip on a branch above.

With this movement, she lost a foothold, and she kicked out to her side to find another. Her leg slapped into the trunk as she met a lower branch with her sandal, but there was another unlucky structure that found itself located on the part of the trunk that was hit hardest by the inside of Marlise's bare thigh. The tree house exploded. This time the remnants were free to float to earth, including two figures housed inside.

The first tumbled past the giant leg that had destroyed the miniature structure to the ground below, but the second tumbled along the ridge of the giant smooth thigh, before free-falling to an unlucky landing on the top of Marlise's sandal, striking her foot and sliding forward. The figure slid between her toes, and was attempting to right itself when she lifted her foot, attempting to gain another step, and it fell through the gap and into the sandal under her foot. The small figure let out a panicked noise but Marlise didn't hear while she stared at the butterfly, and when she stepped up onto the next branch there was a squelching in her sandal and dampness oozed between her toes.

Marlise winced as she looked up the trunk she was clinging to, to see the beautiful butterfly spread its wings and lift from its perch.

"No!" she whined, "don't go!"

As if it heard her, the creature ceased its flight and landed on a bough only a metre higher, and Marlise's spirits lifted. With a burst of energy she regained her balance and set her gaze on a thick branch above her. What she couldn't see, however, were half a dozen or more small wooden structures that contained frightened figures, who were barely as tall as half the length of Marlise's finger.

With an adrenaline-powered leap, Marlise surged up, grabbing a nearby bough, and swung her leg over the large branch with the huts on its surface. With her target only feet above her, she didn't notice or feel the tiny huts that found themselves crushed under her crotch. To make the chances of survival worse for the unfortunate figures underneath her, Marlise slid forward on the bough, leaning to the trunk. The front of her tight shorts steam-rolled over the structures closer to the trunk, smearing the inhabitants between her legs.

Marlise was in reach of the butterfly. Excited beyond belief, she grasped onto the long handle of her net and took an aimed swipe.

She got it!

Marlise's heart raced as she brought the net to her body, the beautiful butterfly flapping in its soft mesh. She felt shaky as she pulled the net open, and her mouth dropped at the awe-inspiring beauty. She looked over every inch of its brilliant wings flapping gently, with their wondrous and bright patters. Then she saw something unexpected that made her pause with a shocked look on her face.

There was something on its back.

Marlise's eyes narrowed and she squinted, trying to clarify what she saw. She made out something that looked completely out of place. On its back was a pad that looked like a horse's saddle. There were tiny threads that looked like reins, and holding them, was a man.

The last thing Marlise saw as she lost her grip with the fright, were the trunk, boughs and leaves disappearing upwards away from her as she fell through the air.

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Her head ached, and in her blurred vision Marlise saw red spots dancing above her. Slowly they focussed and the red dots became fluttering shapes, and with a gasp of pleasure she recognised them to be *Macrostus* butterflies. They swooped above her in graceful circles, with vivid and beautiful colours.

As she watched, the last memories she had had before falling from the tree with fright came flooding back to her, and she recalled the figure on the back of the butterfly. What had that been? Were her eyes deceiving her? *Was that really a man?*

Marlise's senses tried to answer her question for her, pressing and nudging her awareness, and eventually she had such a strong feeling of something being wrong that she shook her head and struggled to prop herself up onto her elbows. The sight that greeted her answered the question instantly, and

she froze. Her body looked like a carnival of activity. Had she not been pinned down by aching pain, she would have screamed and run.

There were figures all over her. Figures of people... there were *people* all over her.

Marlise's mouth dropped. She was completely frozen with shock, not believing the sight of the landscape of her own body with dozens of inch-high human figures scurrying across and around it. She was prevented from panicking by her inability to move, and this actually assisted her in coming to grips with reality, and her sense of shock evolved into one of wonder.

"Oh my God..." she mouthed in awe. Her hand broke free and with a grunt of pain she leaned on her other arm as she brought it over her stomach, from which she plucked one of these figurines by the legs, bringing it to her face. It was a man, and Marlise brought him to her nose, turning him about as he dangled upside-down before her eyes between her fingers, struggling and swinging. "What *are* you?"

The man's kicking caused his foot to come loose from the Marlise's giant clamps of fingers that held him in the air, and he dropped from her sight. Her eyes cast downwards to see that he had landed head-first between her breasts like a spear, and was now wedged upside-down. The comical scene caused Marlise only to blink, and as she shifted her arm to pluck him out, her breasts moved slightly apart and he came loose, disappearing down into her cleavage. She disregarded him and turned her attention to another man, whom she plucked for further inspection.

She had discovered a new race, or even a new species, and Marlise's wonder turned to excitement as she realised the fame she would receive for such a discovery. As her emotions went from state to state, her awareness slowly returned and she began to calmly look about her, though her sense of wonder only increased.

Immediately beside her were crowds upon crowds of these miniature people, in waves that stretched for half a metre to all sides. Floating in this sea were tiny structures, which she realised were dwellings when she cast her eyes to the empty areas further away, where she could see that they sat on small sticks in the mud, raising them above the short grass in the small clearing. To her other side was a very slow-flowing creek that gargled very quietly.

Marlise was returning her attention to the small man in her fingers when she yelped at a sting on her thumb and dropped him. Her face scrunched into annoyed pain as he struck her chest and tumbled down her bare stomach to the top edge of her shorts, the spear with which he had attacked her following him. He immediately picked this implement up and stuck it into the smooth, soft skin of Marlise's abdomen.

It pierced barely two millimetres and was no more painful than a normal mosquito bite, but in fairness, Marlise dealt the miniature man the same treatment as a mosquito receives, and her hand came instinctively down at lightning speed and there was a clap as her palm hit her skin.

"Ewww!" exclaimed Marlise as soon as she had realised her action, withdrawing her hand to see the splat of the man on her bare skin. He had been an inch high, but was now a square-inch stain in the giant woman's palm and on her smooth skin above her shorts.

Thousands of observers watched this act in horror, and some took her small slap as a giant gesture of war, and those near or on her took it upon themselves to commence an attack.

"Ai! Ooh!" yelped Marlise as scores more tiny bites of spear-attacks pricked her sides and waist. Flustered and wincing, she brushed at herself in panic, trying to escape the continual pricks. Her fingers found figures standing on her body and jabbing at her skin below their feet, and she hurled these men away in panic; flying through the air in a giant arc until they struck the ground or trees metres away from the woman who had flung them.

Suddenly there were piercing stings on the inside of her shorts, and Marlise screamed, realising that some of these toothpick-bearing warriors had climbed up into her pants and were attacking the sensitive skin of the inside of her thigh. Her hands shot to her crotch and clapped over the inside of her legs, and she sensed lumps under the fabric. Her fingers clamped and squeezed, and there were small crunches from her shorts as she felt a cool wetness on the inside of her thighs and against her crotch, knowing she had crushed some of these men between her fingers and her legs.

Now perturbed, Marlise attempted to stand. She rocked forward and made it to a crouching position, balancing with her fingers making clearings in the

crowd beside her. With her chest straightening, several figures rolled and tumbled off her body, landing in the sea of people below her and creating drop-like waves out of the figures that reeled away. After a short pause while blood rushed from her aching head, Marlise began to stand, and with her shorts shifting and loosening, half a dozen people tumbled from inside them and out the legs, striking the backs of her calves unnoticeably.

Slightly giddy, Marlise stumbled when she straightened, and with this small step she inadvertently found four or five small figures under the toe of her sandal, which sunk into the soft soil with several crunches. Marlise noticed this and looked down, immediately feeling guilty at seeing tiny limbs protruding from the front of her sandal. Strangely, the crowd was not put off and they surged forwards, swarming around her feet and up and into her sandal, which was an action quite contrary to their attacks moments earlier.

Marlise exclaimed in discomfort at the wriggling that ensued between her toes, and at the tickling over the top of her foot. When she looked down it appeared that she stood in shallow water, as her feet disappeared under a swarm of bodies. She grimaced and complained, as if they would understand.

“Oh, come *on!*”

When she tried to lift her foot, her sandal dangled slightly and the people that were between her toes slid underneath and found themselves on their backs in the depressions made in the sole by Marlise’s giant toes, which came down upon them when she put her foot down. She felt squelching crunches under her foot in her sandal, and her face scrunched up in a grimace of frustration and guilt.

Discouraged from further movement, she looked around and decided upon a leap to the safety of an empty area. Her judgement was poor though, and when she leapt, flicking tiny people from her feet as she did so, her foot landed flatly and heavily over two tiny houses, and they splintered into a mat of twigs under her sandal.

Thinking quickly while torn between her want of escape and her desire to study the strange, tiny people more closely for her scientific rewards, she made it with several safe steps to her net, which still held a captured butterfly, and retrieved it, turning to see the mass of people swarming

towards her new position. Intelligently, she knelt and held her net close, and when the first of the running people arrived below her knees she scooped four or five up between her fingers and deposited them into the net.

After half a dozen more palm-fulls of people, Marlise had captured most of the people in the first group to arrive and stepped back (crushing two more dwellings underfoot) to avoid the bulk of the crowd.

Needing time to think, she turned and began walking over the undergrowth in a random direction, but she did however have enough time to think to pull out her GPS unit and note where she was. She would need to find this place again tomorrow.

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When Marlise arrived back at the hut, having navigated the dense jungle for more than an hour, she was exhausted and emotionally worn out. She had ignored the collection of jumbled bodies that swung in her net as she walked, instead trying to collect scattered thoughts in a still shocked mind.

The hut was reasonably well-equipped. It had once been a customs office for a small road on a border in the South American countryside but was now disused thanks to changing political conditions and had since provided shelter for tourists and trekkers who had various reasons for visiting the jungle; and Marlise was not the first to be hunting the enigmatic butterfly.

The storeroom had been refitted with a bath and water-heater, and the cash-register (that had rarely been used owing to frequent corrupt dealings) was gone, replaced by a kitchen bench. There was a hammock and a proper bed draped with mosquito-netting, and a writing desk with stool.

Marlise dumped her backpack, which she had stumbled upon by sheer luck alone, having completely forgotten it in the day's excitement, and gently placed the net-full of the strange, tiny people into the bathtub, where they would have little chance of escape. Sweat continued to pour down her body, and she went straight for her water supply, quenching her thirst from a wide-mouthed bottle, waves of water splashing down over her hot skin. Her damp clothes clung to her body and she tore her shirt off with relief at the breeze that washed over her torso, and after kicking her sandals from her sore feet

(ignoring the red messes in the soles) she dragged her shorts down over her long sticky legs and sat down in her underwear and bra.

After fifteen minutes in which she simply sat, eyes closed and moving only to swat the occasional mosquito, her fatigue departed and was replaced by the eagerness that drove her joy of science – as unscientific as it was. She overcame her aching body and stood, her gaze fixed on the bathtub containing the object of her attention, which came into view over the lip as she neared. The small population of maybe thirty or forty people had escaped the net and were scattered over the slippery floor of the bath. Marlise stood at the edge and looked down at the action below her, spellbound by the tiny figures' movement, which changed to her direction as soon as she arrived.

Why are they coming towards me? she wondered. After her accidental decimation of more than two dozen of their populace, she would have thought that they might have run *from* her and not *to* her.

After observing them for several minutes, Marlise knelt to the floor and leaned over the edge of the bath, reaching downwards and collecting a handful of the clambering people, closing her fist over them and turning for the desk. When she sat, sketching paper and pencil before her, she reached for an empty jar, which was a critical tool for butterfly collecting, but when she held her fist over its wide mouth she hesitated. Despite the fact that these creatures were an inch high, their human appearance made her think twice about treating them the same as she would a normal specimen, and she instead deposited them on the table before her sketch pad.

The people got to their feet and looked up at Marlise's face above them, waiting, somehow expectantly. Marlise looked back down into their tiny eyes and wondered where to start. She had never classified a new species before. *Do I give them a name?* After moments of deliberation she concluded to at least begin with the basics, and reached over, plucking one figure up for measurement.

As she brought the tiny person, a man, towards herself the others took a cue and bolted for her, following her hand. Marlise jolted in surprise and lifted her arms away, only to watch several figures continue sprinting directly towards her until they sprung from the edge of the desk.

Three small men struck the sweaty skin of Marlise's thighs below the table and rolled down between her damp legs. Her eyebrows furrowing in surprise and bewilderment, Marlise pressed her legs together tightly to prevent the bodies from wedging further between them, and used her free hand to scrape the men out from the hot cleft, again depositing them on the table. With a hop she pulled her seat forward and pressed her stomach against the edge to prevent the people again taking the liberty of springing off it.

This time the people remained scattered between the paper and her chest and seemed calmer, so Marlise turned her attention to the specimen of a man between her fingers, grasping a ruler and holding both to her face.

'23 millimetres height' she wrote on the top-left corner, followed by '6 millimetres at the waist'. Changing her mind, she instead drew a human figure and began entering the proportions onto the diagram as she measured them. 'Skin colour:' she began before wondering how to describe it. The figures appeared a tanned Caucasian colour, so she wrote exactly that.

"Can you speak?" she commanded to the man in her fingers, her breath washing over his tiny body not more than eight inches from her mouth. She tucked him under her hair to her ear, but after several minutes of this test and hearing no sound, she entered the word 'voice' with several question marks onto her paper, though of course her method of testing was completely inappropriate considering there was no way that these tiny beings would speak English even if they could speak at all.

Marlise had no idea what else to write to describe the tiny people. She went through the five senses in her head; *sight* she had already done, *sound* had appeared negative, *smell* was next, though she wasn't sure if it were useful. Despite this she brought the man to her nose and sniffed hard. He struggled in the lack of air as it was drawn past him in to him a devastating hurricane of wind, and was almost sucked into her nose, but all she could write was 'sweaty', though that was more a description of her own state, which was all she could smell.

What do I write for 'feel'? wondered Marlise. She rubbed her thumb and forefinger over the tiny man and entered 'fleshy' and 'delicate' and was unsatisfied with her description of his texture, though she couldn't really discover much more while being gentle. A thought crossed her mind, but she quelled it. Pausing, she rethought it, and after glancing at the other half

dozen figures under her face, thinking of the thirty more in the bath and perhaps thousands more back in the clearing, she changed her mind and turned her eyes back to the tiny man in her fingers.

Looking into his face, which stared back up at her, she pinched her thumb and fingers together and bit her lip, watching the reaction. She felt the small crunch and saw a look of surprise and agony on his pea-sized face, before it disappeared as she rubbed her fingers back and forth. The man's body became a squelching lump and eventually a smear on Marlise's fingertips.

Strangely satisfied by the experiment, Marlise entered 'squishes easily' and 'smears'. Wiping her fingers on her brassiere, she noticed that in her concentration she had leaned forward and her breasts were pinning several figures to the desk. She retrieved one of these and brought him before her face, going over the senses that she had already covered. There was one left.

"Taste," she said aloud, her eyelids lowering relaxedly as her gaze fell on the tiny man.

Marlise brought him quickly to her lips but hesitated, her mouth ajar and the man writhing and pushing against her teeth. After several breaths washing over and back past his unwilling body, she closed her lips on his figure, sliding her fingers in and out as if she were eating a strawberry. The man fell through her teeth and onto the tip of her tongue, which carried him back and pressed him to the roof of her mouth. Marlise pushed the man back and forth around her mouth, pressing him into one cheek and the other, though her mind was more on the novelty of having a tiny person inside her mouth than on identifying his taste, and when she passed him to the back of her mouth, tilting her head and feeling him touch her throat, she had little to describe him. With a swallow she felt the lump of his body pass into her throat, and she touched her neck lightly, smiling somewhat at the strange feeling.

When she lifted her pen however, she had no idea what to write and realised that the experiment had not determined much at all. She took another of the men, clad only in a tiny cloth of some sort around the waist, and tossed him quickly into her mouth. With much less delay this time, she moved him with her tongue and laid his resisting body flat along her back teeth. Marlise was half aware of his arms pressing up in opposition on her upper back teeth when she clamped her jaw shut. *Crunch.*

Under the heading 'Taste' Marlise wrote 'crunchy' and 'good'.

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By the time Marlise had finished this quick study of her new trophies she was exhausted, and as much as she wanted to continue experimenting with her ground-breaking discovery, she needed rest. When she stood, a man who had become stuck to the damp fabric of her brassiere while she studied fell from her chest and struck the ground at her feet. Instead of stooping to pick him up, Marlise brought her bare foot forward and pressed down on his body with her toes, feeling him squelch and become a wet patch under her skin.

Because he was a human (of sorts) and not just a bug, Marlise felt somehow empowered, like a queen, and it was in this moment that she had a revelation and realised why the people were acting so unafraid of her, sometimes even approaching, despite the obvious danger that she was to them. They were idolising her. They thought she was their queen.

A broad smile spread across Marlise's face. Gliding to the bathtub, she stood over it and looked down, the sight below her verifying her theory. The people were surging up the walls towards her, almost clambering over each other. She knelt and lowered her hand into the small crowd, and was immediately boarded by half a dozen minute figures of human beings. She lifted her hand above her face in wonder, and gazed in a transfixed state at the people who trickled down her arm and tumbled over and into her chest, some falling into her lap.

"Oh my God," she mouthed, staring into space, the people gone from her hand.

After a few minutes sitting silently, the people below scrambling around her unnoticed, Marlise burst into laughter and resolved to finally go to bed. She would investigate this new revelation tomorrow.

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Marlise woke with the gentle feeling of the single light sheet touching the skin of her arm as she lay on her side. Her body was separated from the hot jungle air only by this sheet and the thin mosquito netting; even thin

underwear made for an uncomfortable night's sleep. As she opened her eyes her vision appeared spotty and speckled and she started with surprise.

The spots and speckles were dark blotches on the white mosquito netting, and as her vision focussed she realised that they were in fact people clinging onto the outside and peering down at her on the bed below. She smiled at the idea of all these little people struggling to get a glimpse of her sleeping; she felt important, even though they were only an inch high and probably not even intelligent. Marlise rolled over and bathed in their gazes, not resisting when the light sheet slipped and exposed one of her breasts. *Why should I be shy?* she told herself. There was no need to be shy around insects or other such animals, so there was no reason to be shy around these tiny little bug-like people.

After a few minutes of lying on her back she felt a tickle on her skin and looked down to her chest, where she saw with surprise a small group of thinly-clad people standing solemnly in the valley between her breasts. Her scientific curiosity returned and wondered firstly what they were doing there and secondly why they had chosen her breasts to congregate. She had heard of tribes worshipping Mother Nature and the bosom as the source of life, but she had no idea on these topics, she was more interested in butterflies.

Without lifting her head, Marlise looked down her nose at the people, then brought her hands to her chest and playfully pushed her breasts together. The tiny figures disappeared in her cleavage underneath her breasts and Marlise laughed at the tickling their trapped bodies made on her skin. One man managed to struggle out and she saw him wiggling through her pressed cleavage, so she pushed him back in with the tip of her finger and squeezed harder.

When Marlise felt generous enough to release the tiny prisoners in her chest, they did a strange thing and scurried out from the valley between her breasts and onto the peaks on either side, huddling around her nipples. *Perhaps they think I'm trying to teach them something ...or punish them,* Marlise thought. She was unaware of the huge meaning and consequence her inadvertent actions could have on the small populace. Bringing her hands up once more, she massaged her breasts and watched the tiny figures stumbling over and falling under her fingers.

After a few minutes Marlise was satisfied with playing and her energy for researching these beings returned, and she sat up, the people tumbling down her stomach and into her lap as she did so. When she swivelled on the spot and swung her legs over the side of the bed, she grimaced as she noticed that she had smeared a person who had fallen into her lap, and there was a small red smear leading from her inner thigh to her bare backside.

“Oh well,” she said flippantly.

After licking her thumb and wiping the man from her skin, she plucked another who was swinging from her hair before checking her body for more tiny figures and sliding into her underwear. She had no idea how the people had escaped from the bathtub, but she took no more risks today and used a butterfly jar to collect the others that lay scattered around her bed and clinging to the mosquito net. This sample of people she left on her desk while she arranged her equipment and studied her GPS to return to the site for more.

Just before she left the hut, Marlise remembered about the butterfly that had been the original purpose of her journey, and stopped. It was no longer there, and she scanned the room for it. Instantly she saw it perched high on a cupboard, and took her net to collect it. When she neared the creature she saw something that she had forgotten; the sight that had made her fall from the tree the day before. There was a figure on the back of the beautiful winged creature, and Marlise had a second revelation. The people rode the butterflies, and were thus blessed with the privilege of flight.

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There was a broad smile upon Marlise’s face as she hiked, marvelling at the discovery she had made. She would be famous. Not only had she found a completely new and amazing species, but had discovered one that was at least on some level intelligent enough to master other creatures. Perhaps it was some kind of symbiotic relationship that benefited the butterflies just as much as the ‘humans’. This and a thousand other questions were waiting to be answered, and the task ahead of her made Marlise even more excited.

With her head down, staring at the accurate GPS unit she held, she trampled shrubs and grasses and the insects hidden in them as she made her way towards the site. A day earlier it had been people that had been unlucky

enough to be under her feet while she walked without paying attention to the terrain below her. The technology was reliable and after forty-five minutes Marlise came into the glade that she had discovered.

The instant she came over the embankment, the scene before her broke into chaotic motion. Like ants, a sea of tiny bodies swarmed and flooded towards her. In moments her sandals were filled and her feet covered with figures of minute humans. Sighing and unable to move without devastating consequences to the figures below her, Marlise concluded to try and at least take some photos before attempting to do some productive study of their behaviour. She was now certain that they thought she was their queen.

With her feet firmly planted, she took out her camera and took photos in all directions, but when she pointed the camera straight down she exclaimed with annoyance.

“Hey!”

The people living in the glade were obviously quite athletic, because she saw through the camera viewfinder, that there were spots and movement on her legs, which she verified to be bodies climbing her smooth skin when she put the camera down.

“Hey,” she repeated, and bent over, looking back at herself. Several figures were quite fast and had made it all the way up her calves, over her knees and were high on her thigh, and she noticed them just in time to see them disappear up into her shorts. Marlise swatted at her shorts and felt a damp splat on her skin underneath the fabric. A tickle on the inside of her thigh divulged the location of another intruder, and a hard squeeze from her hand on her leg produced a tiny crunch and another wet smear in her shorts.

By the time she had taken care of only these two, there were half a dozen more on her thighs and scores coming up her calves, and although she bathed in their worship, Marlise cringed as she brushed and swept them off her, shaking her legs to dislodge the people. Looking up, she quickly reached for an overhanging bough and sprang for it over the crowd around her feet, landing on the root of the tree it belonged to and finding a firm grasp on it. In doing so there was an explosion of bodies flung into the air by the launch of her feet from the ground, and the people that had been

squirming between her toes fell further into her sandals, only to be crunched as she landed. Marlise barely noticed the squelching.

Sighing, the scientist shifted her position and moved closer to the tree, and as she did so a wondrous sight opened up from behind a branch that concealed a hollow in the trunk.

“Oh my God...” stuttered Marlise as she gazed upon a squadron of beautiful fiery butterflies, perched in a line along the wooden surface before her. Upon her entry, a man for each flying creature emerged from the shadows behind them in practised hurry and leapt onto the tiny backs of the butterflies, which launched instantly into the air. The sky became a dance of colourful light as two dozen fluttering creatures burst into the space around Marlise.

She was entranced by the unbelievable sight, and remained so for an eternity while the butterflies and their riders circled her head, until the trance was broken by the squadron of winged creatures departed for an unknown destination, and Marlise shook herself from the daze. Looking towards the receding colours, she wondered where they were going, and then she realised there was a lack of tickling on her feet, and wondered where her worshippers were.

The answer to both questions was the same, and she discovered it when she looked at the opposite side of the glade. There was a new type of movement, and her eyes took a moment to absorb it. On the other side was the small creek, whose banks dampened the plains of the glade, and from it sprung objects into the air, landing in the brown boxes in the fields, which were of course the houses of the community before her.

Curiosity taking her, Marlise stepped quickly into the flat area to identify this new happening. Skirting the edges so as not to destroy any more structures, she made her way closer to the action until her breath stopped when she realised what was happening.

The leaping objects were animals; frogs. They, however, were not acting on their own accord. Clearly on the back of a nearby one, was a human figure. This body was visibly darker and more tanned than those that occupied the glade, and each springing frog carried one similar. Not only were there tanned bodies on the backs of these amphibious creatures, but the swarming

tumultuous movement on the ground before her was made up of a multicoloured mixture of cream and tan. There was a different species of humans intermingling violently with those she had already discovered, and when her eyes swept towards the gently-flowing creek and identified scores of floating objects –crafts of some kind– bearing more tanned bodies across the water, she realised what was happening. It was an invasion.

“Oh my God,” was all she could muster. She dropped her bags and whipped out her camera. This was amazing. It was an unbelievably fortunate chance to be able to observe such an interaction as a war between these two species of tiny humans (especially when one was borne on the backs of butterflies and the other on frogs in this strange and unlikely triangular relationship), unless of course she was the cause of the war, which she had not considered, in which case it was not a coincidence at all.

Marlise squatted and steadied herself while she zoomed in to observe and document the event. It was fascinating. Men of the darker tribe were pouring through the villages of the first tribe and the battle was a writhing mass of action, with tiny people clashing violently. They had mastered the spear, observed Marlise. The frogs were landing in the midst of and behind the ranks of the lighter tribe and causing havoc. Although she was honoured to be observing it, Marlise felt uncomfortable that she was sitting idle while a war was waged at her feet.

In the name of science, she continued watching and taking frequent photos, though each time she saw one of ‘her own’ tribe get speared or fall to one of the invaders, she felt a pang of guilt, since they had been worshipping her only moments earlier. Perhaps it was her fault that the invasion had been invited. *Maybe their guard was down.*

“Hey!” she shouted in disgust when she saw one of the tanned warriors attack one of the females of the other tribe, then checked herself as it was not her place to interfere. However she saw this happen again, and then once more again, since most of the populace were surrounded by the attackers arriving in boats on one side and leaping over on frogs on the other, and she felt more guilty at not helping the clearly struggling people against these invaders.

Forcing her eye back to the viewfinder, Marlise saw through the camera tiny figures looking straight in her direction and waving desperately. This was it.

Marlise snapped and shot to her feet. Not two metres away from her was a tanned figure holding a weapon high over a female of Marlise's tribe, but his swing was stopped by a giant flat surface flattening him into a smear on the ground as the enormous woman above stomped down on him.

Another figure inches away became one with the soil as Marlise compounded him under the sole of her sandal. Further into the village, the bodies were too close together to stomp, and Marlise fell to her knees and leaned forward, plucking a man between her fingers and sending him airborne, his body disappearing forever. She flung another and another, picking them individually from the battle, but it was a slow method and she was only taking care of single enemies at a time. When a group of tanned-tribe soldiers emerged, running at some fleeing people, Marlise took the opportunity and swept at them with her hand, collecting them all instantly in her palm. In the same movement, her other hand swept towards the first and they clapped, palms open, and more than half a dozen limp and broken bodies fell to the ground below the woman.

The friendly tribe realised with relief that the giant female was blessing them with her support, and fled the battle, leaving the attacking tribe in the open. These attacking soldiers now found themselves at the whim of an overwhelmingly large woman who was showing them no mercy. Her palm fell on several near her knee, and her other hand collected three who were chasing the fleeing people. In the heat of the moment Marlise's blood was up and her urge to destroy the cruel attackers made her hand fling these men to her mouth, where two were crunched immediately between her teeth and the third was swept by her huge tongue into her throat.

Tiny pricks in her thighs told Marlise that the invaders were now attacking her, but these aggressors were turned to a splat on her skin when her hand came down upon them. Another was plucked from the ground and smeared by a rub of her thumb and forefinger. Marlise revelled in the power, but as more and more men poured around her she wondered when it would end, and her gaze lifted to the boats that brought hordes more.

Getting to her feet, attackers falling from her legs, Marlise brought her feet down on groups of soldiers on her way to the creek. In two steps her foot found its soft banks, but she hadn't anticipated the surface and she sank into it, the wet soil giving way instantly. Marlise stumbled forward and fell face-first into the creek, and onto a dozen boats each carrying a dozen men.

Spinning around, Marlise spluttered and stumbled as her feet found the creek bed. She was up to her neck in water, and after several seconds there emerged tens of tiny bodies around her face in the water; warriors surfacing after their boats were sunk by the enormous female body toppling down on top of them. Marlise had a mouthful of the clear water and spat it out, a tiny man pouring out with it. Around her surfaced tens more men until the water was covered with a layer of tiny bodies.

Marlise surged forward and gained a step up, rising out of the water with cascades pouring from her shoulders. Half a dozen of the tanned warriors were collected in her cleavage as she rose, and ten more clung desperately to her hair and the wet fabric over her shoulders and chest. These helpless men she ignored, instead turning her attention to the nearest of the surviving boats. From under it rose her hand, and the men inside panicked as giant glistening fingers emerged from the cool water on either side. The canoe-like craft was barely longer than Marlise's palm, and when she closed her fingers around it, its hull splintered and shattered like a paper cup.

A tower-like body rose from the water as Marlise took another step forward, bodies clinging to the wet folds of her T-shirt, decorating her like a white, sopping Christmas tree. When the seam of her shorts broke the surface, it was caught by twenty struggling pairs of hands, and these men rose with it, some climbing up to safety on the ledge it created against Marlise's smooth, wet skin, though when she next took a step, the fabric opened and the men tumbled into her shorts, creating an annoyance that Marlise noticed.

"Ugh," she grunted as her hand came down to her crotch. She grabbed at the material but served only to loosen it and allow the trapped men to fall further. A hard rub of her hand up and down the front of her shorts resulted in a crunching and smearing inside them.

Another intact boat found itself within Marlise's reach, and soon became a splintered mess when her hand came down upon it. With another two steps she waded into the midst of a fleet that had managed to avoid her devastating fall into the water, and she stood amongst the tiny boats, the creek coming halfway up her thighs, and drops raining down on the petrified men in the boats below. A swipe at one boat to her side caused her thigh to shake and create a tidal wave that overturned three boats around it, sending another crashing into her other leg. Another drifted under Marlise's crotch,

and when she bent to retrieve a nearby craft, her legs bent and her crotch sank down onto this boat, pushing it violently underwater, its occupants pouring out its sides and up through the water between Marlise's legs.

When she held a boat full of men in each hand, Marlise's face widened into laughter and she held them towards her, tipping them over her chest and giggling with her head raised at the men tumbling over her skin and into her shirt. Another boat fell victim to her grasp, and its occupants found themselves soon falling in horror towards a giant dark cavern behind an enormous pair of smiling lips.

Marlise closed her mouth, but did not yet swallow the men from the attacking tribe, and in moments felt tiny tickles against the insides of her lips as they struggled to escape. Footsteps around her teeth was the strangest sensation she had ever experienced, and she savoured it for a few moments, that seemed like an eternity for the savouries of men in her mouth.

Finally Marlise pulled a man back with her tongue and sent him down her throat, feeling him grasping in desperation all the way down her neck. Her tongue swept her mouth and collected those who were prying at her clamped teeth. Those between her front teeth and lips almost escaped when she parted her lips slightly, but she tilted her head back and they tumbled backwards, the last of the men finding himself on her back teeth when she again closed her jaw, sensing the crunch.

When Marlise lowered her head and opened her eyes, the scene before her was far less chaotic than before. Instead of tumultuous random movement between mixed warring figures, there was a steady panicked stream of fleeing warriors, and her adrenaline lessened, calming her from her destructive rampage. Behind the fleeing figures were dancing, celebrating bodies, and the feeling of anger that had driven her to intercede lessened, giving way to relief and satisfaction at having helped the attacked people.

Wading up onto the shore, Marlise let the last boat fall from her grasp before shaking herself from her daze and stepped quickly to her bag, from which she grabbed two large specimen containers.

Kneeling before the stream of fleeing men, which diverted away at her presence, she leaned over and, completely unopposed, plucked two and three men at a time from the rush, depositing them into the container in her hand.

After several handfuls she clamped the container between her legs and began grabbing two handfuls at a time.

When her tub was full she had another idea and grasped her net, standing in the shallow water with men swarming around her ankles, and lowered it into the water. In one pass she collected two dozen warriors from the surface, which she proceeded to tip into a container, some falling back down with a plop as they missed the opening. As she looked down she noticed the tens of men squirming in her cleavage and laughed, squeezing her breasts together in victory, adding insult to their injury.

Soon Marlise had two full tubs of tanned men before her feet, and the village around her was almost devoid of similar figures. She flopped down onto the embankment, mentally exhausted, and in moments was again surrounded by swarming, joyous and thankful figures, climbing onto her hips and scaling her legs to her knees, from which they waved and bowed in gratefulness.

Marlise couldn't be bothered removing them. *Where am I going to start?* she wondered to herself, thinking of how to introduce her discovery to the world, and the fame she would receive.

As she lay, she watched in complacent wonder as a stream of the crowd made its way up her damp T-shirt and discovered the huddled group of men hiding between Marlise's breasts, and she could do nothing but watch with interest as the crowd horded over her chest and poured under her T-shirt and into her cleavage. Tanned figures floated out on the hands of the sea of bodies washing over her skin, and Marlise plucked them from the people below, having seen enough violence for the day. She collected the ten or so men, thus relieving the crowd of their trophies, and pushed them lazily into her pocket.

She smiled as she thought of the acclaim she would receive from the scientific world for her discovery, and looked down at the people waving up at her, who would provide her with this glory.

Slowly her smile disappeared.

She thought of the other scientists who would want to come and research. She thought of the butterflies and their untouched habitat. Marlise looked at

the tiny people bowing and worshipping her, the woman who had just saved their entire village.

Maybe she didn't want to tell the world. She looked at the two tubs, full of writhing men. She had some toys to play with. Casting her gaze back to the happy crowd, she made up her mind. These people needed only one queen.

THE END