



EASTER

A COLLECTION OF SHORT STORIES

ROSE FRANCIS

Don't cry for Butterfly

Cathy Caterpillar felt very old and tired. She had wiggled up and down the huge swan-plant, chomping on sweet young leaves until there were none left. Then she chewed on tough old leaves that really tasted bitter. When they were all devoured, Cathy began munching wearily on the stems and stalks. They were chewy and fibrous and not nice to eat.

Cathy and her cousins had hatched from tiny white eggs hidden under leaves on a swan-plant in the Walsh family's garden. They were greedy grubs, wriggling all over the plant in search of good branches with fresh leaves. Cathy found such a good one, sheltered from the wind, and rain. She didn't even get dried up in the burning sunshine. All she had to do was eat and grow strong; just like all babies do.

So Cathy grew plump and pretty. Her black and yellow stripes were glossy and firm. Her smart feelers flickered constantly, and her sucker-feet clung to the leaves as she chomped through them.

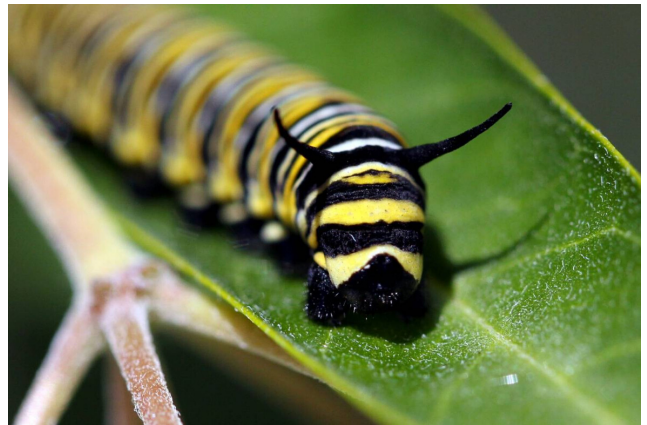
Yes, Cathy was a colossal caterpillar, and she was Ashley's favourite.

There came a day when Cathy felt tired and lazy. She couldn't be bothered to go and find another swan-plant to eat. All she wanted to do was curl up and have a long sleep. Slowly, Cathy wriggled along to where a strong branch joined the main stem. She held on with one end, and slowly spun a sleeping bag cocoon all around herself. It was a bright green tent, with golden edges.

George and Ashley observed Cathy caterpillar.

"Cathy has died", said Ashley glumly.

"Cathy's hiding in a shiny house, and she's not eating any more", Georgia told Grandma that night.



Cathy hasn't died, darling," explained Grandma. "She's finished growing and doing her work on earth, and now it's time for her to rest in her new chrysalis house. If you water the plant, and watch her house, some day soon you will see something amazing."

So every day after school, the children watered the swan-plant that Cathy and her caterpillar cousins were on. Every day they checked the chrysalis. About two weeks later, it became dark and swollen.

"Soon you will see a miracle", said Grandma. Ashley and George checked many times that day.

"Come here girls!" called Grandma "Our chrysalis is moving"

"It's splitting open", observed Ashley.

"It's bursting", added George.

Soon a crumpled butterfly shook free from its coffin. It quivered as it dried itself in the warm sunshine, shaking and stretching two beautiful orange wings with black patterns.

"There is your miracle", said Grandma

"It's a butterfly!" cried the girls with delight.

"Yes", said Grandma "And soon it will fly up, up and away"

"That's just like Grandpa", said Ashley. He was in a chrysalis coffin too."

"And God changed his tired, painful old body into something beautiful and new; with no pain or sadness", said Grandma quietly. Was Grandpa afraid of dying?" asked Ashley. No darling, he trusted God- as I do. We know that our bodies are useful while, we live on Earth; then, when our spirit goes home to be with God, our body is just like an empty sleeping bag; - like Cathy Caterpillar's chrysalis"

"Where is Grandpa now?" asked George
"He's in heaven, with God; and he's very happy, said Grandma smiling."

"One day, after our work is finished down here on Earth, we will also change our earthly bodies for a heavenly one, if we love God and obey Him."

"Jesus was wrapped up like our caterpillar" said Ashley. "Cos He was in a grave too."

"Yes, Ashley, he did die and He was put in a dark tomb. Then a miracle happened." "I know, Grandma. Jesus came alive again; and Jesus left His crumpled chrysalis clothes in the grave" , said George happily. "And then he let all His friends see that He was alive again."

Grandma smiled. "Yes, like the butterfly, Jesus came out from the grave in a new heavenly body. Then forty days later, He went back to His home in heaven because His work on earth was finished."



At the Cross

Characters:

- Policeman
- Jogger
- Man
- Woman
- Girl 9-12 years old
- Boy 7-9 years old

Scene:

Roadside. Tree trunk, shrubbery.

Policeman - Measuring, marking chalk-lines on 'road', writing in notebook.

Enter - a jogger . Bending, flexing muscles against tree trunk, Puffing.

Jogger: "What happened here, officer?"

Officer: "An accident, A child fell off a wobbly bike. An approaching motorist swerved to avoid the boy and crashed into this tree".

Jogger: "Is the child in hospital?"

Officer: "No, thanks to the courage of this motorist, the child was shaken but unharmed.

Jogger: "What about the driver?"

Officer: "Sadly, he was killed instantly. Car's a write-off. Just been towed away to police headquarters. What a mess!" (Shaking his head)

(A man appears, carrying a simple white cross, about 3 ft high. He nods to the policeman who moves towards the back of the stage. The jogger jogs off.)

The man ties his white cross to the tree trunk, and kneels beside it, head bowed, shoulders shaking.)

Enter , a woman with a girl and a boy. They are bearing flowers, and lay them at the foot of the cross.

Policeman finishes writing, snaps his book shut, nods to the group at the cross, and moves off.)

Man: "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend."
(Man turns and looks up at woman)

Man: "Are you a friend of my son?"

Woman: "No Sir, but it was my child who was on the bike he swerved to avoid"

Man: "So my son, died for a stranger?"

Woman: "Yes, sir, a stranger who is very grateful, Your son's death has saved my son's life, and our family's only son."

Man: "John was my only son too"

Girl: "Why did you put a cross here?"

Man: (Getting up from his knees) "Because someone called Jesus died on a cross. He was God's Son, His only Son. Now I understand how God felt when He saw His Son suffer and die on a cross. Jesus did nothing wrong, but politicians were jealous of Him. Imagine it - God's creation hating His Son."

Woman: "Did your brave son John know God's Son Jesus?".

Man: "Yes. I thank God that he did. My wife and I, our son and daughter all know and love God. Our lives were changed when we realised the great depth of God's love for us. We wanted to ask His forgiveness for all our selfishness and greed. We wanted to live in a way which would please Him. After all, Jesus suffered pain in our place, and by His death restored our lives for eternity with God"

Boy: "So Jesus saved your son's life?"

Man: "Yes. by dying in our place, Jesus saved my life too.

Girl: "And now your son has saved my brother's life by dying in His place"

Man: "Yes, ' that's right,"

Girl: "So this little white cross marks the place where a brave man died to save another person."

Boy: "I'll never forget this cross and what it means to me. I did something stupid, and a man died because of it. He could have chosen to save himself, then I wouldn't be alive now. "

Man: "There are lots of crosses around. They remind us of Jesus dying to save us."

Girl: "We made hot cross buns in cooking class, and our teacher told us about Good Friday, and why there's a cross on the buns"

Boy: "We learned about flags at Scouts. We know the cross of St Andrew, and the cross of St George on our NZ flag."

Girl: "I belong to Red Cross First Aiders, and their symbol is the cross of compassion."

Man: "Yes, all these crosses should remind us of Jesus and how He died a cruel death in our place. Do you all know Jesus as your friend?"

Woman: "I learned about him when I was a child in Sunday School"

Man: "Would you like to know more about this Jesus?"

Woman: "Yes, I'd like that, but He couldn't forgive me for all the things I've done wrong"

Man: "God's forgiveness is as great as His love. Jesus even forgave the very soldiers who nailed His hands and feet to that cruel Roman cross. And He forgave the liars who testified against Him, and the judge who sentenced him to death. God will surely forgive you - and anyone else who is truly sorry and who intends living the way Jesus taught - Living by God's rules."

Woman: "I would like to serve such a Saviour. How can I meet with Jesus?"

Man: "Right here, and right now. (All hold hands, and bow heads) "Let's talk to God.
 "O Father, my heart is broken at the death of my son, and we know Your heart is broken as people reject the sacrifice and death of your Son Jesus. We ask You now to forgive us for the wrong things we have done. We are so sorry we hurt You and disobey You. Help us to learn more about You, and read Your wonderful book of loving letters, and live in a way that shows we love and respect you. Thank you for giving us a second chance, a new life. Thank You for the cross and what it represents. Amen"

All: "Amen"

Man: "God has promised us that He will bring good out of every situation if we commit it to Him. I confess I didn't see that anything good could come out of this terrible car crash that killed my son."

Woman: "Yet, God has used this tragedy to bring my children and me to know and love Him."

Man: (fishing in pocket.) "I think my son John would like you to have this Bible he always carried. It meant a lot to him, and his death has given you a new life" (man hands small Bible to boy)

Boy: "Thank you, sir. Will your son who crashed and died be in heaven with God?"

Man: "Yes, my son is with his heavenly Father now, and some day we will all meet again."

Boy: "Then I can thank Him for dying in my place . "

Girl: "Thank Who?"

Boy: "Jesus, of course - and John the driver who crashed to save me"

Woman: "God must have a very special purpose for you, my son. Your life has been saved twice in one day"

Man: (with arm around boy) "Please come to Church with me this Sunday. It is Easter Day, and we celebrate God's victory over death. We have much to thank God for."

All move off stage End.

Butterfly Farewell



"What are you giving Mum for Christmas, June?" asked her Father as they raked leaves off the lawn.

"I've been collecting shells and pebbles to put in the old fish tank", confided June. "Then Uncle Dave is helping me to catch some little guppies in his pond"

"What a thoughtful present, dear", smiled Father. "I'm sure Mummy will be really pleased".

"I'm not telling you what YOUR present is that's a secret, Dad," announced June.

"I've got a present for Grandma too. Please may I use some of the paint left over from your fence-painting?"

"What ever are you painting?" asked Dad.

"Wait there!" called June, dropping her rake and running to the woodshed. In a minute she returned carrying on old flower pot.

"I scrubbed this clean," she said "Now I want to paint it - and paint some bright pretty flowers on it too"

"Hmm," murmured Father, not convinced that it would please his sickly mother.

"You know that the hospital says 'No Pets Allowed,' and how Gran misses her Puss so much? Well, 'Tm growing a swan-plant to put in

the pot, and in its leaves I'll hide a caterpillar," June explained. "The furry caterpillar is so soft to stroke, and it's black like Puss".

"It's a nice idea," chuckled Dad. "But it had better be our little secret. The nurses might get sniffy if they think the rules are being broken."

June painted the pot a cheerful yellow and drew pink flowers on it. Then, for fun, she painted two black caterpillars on the flowers. Next, she filled it with soil and carefully planted a healthy swan-plant. June went hunting for caterpillars, and she found a fat, greedy one. It immediately began sawing its jaws through the swan-plant leaf she placed it on. I can plant another swan in the pot when Cathy Caterpillar munches all these leaves, thought June.

Christmas Day came, and the whole family went to see Gran. There were flowers and cards around her room. Gran looked smaller and older and paler and sicker than before, but she smiled and was cheerful. Even though her voice was only a whisper, she enjoyed their visit. And Gran was delighted with June's present! "Put it there on the windowsill," she suggested, "Caterpillars like the light, and I can watch it dining"

When the new term started, June was in the intermediate school. She passed the hospital every day on her way home, and often dropped in to visit Gran. The poor old lady didn't get out of bed any more. Most days, when June visited, Gran would be sitting up, propped by plump pillows, and reading her large-print Bible. She hardly ate anything these days. "Please Gran, eat this," begged June, pulling a sandwich from her backpack.

"Thanks, dear, but no. I feed on the Word of God now. I only hunger for spiritual food," she said patting her well-worn Bible.

"But Gran, you'll die if you don't eat enough", quavered June.

**"I AM dying, dear," said Gran softly.
It's nothing to fear. I'm going to be
with Jesus."**

Big tears rolled down June's cheeks. "No, Gran! I won't let you die," she sobbed.

"Look at Cathy Caterpillar", said Gran, stroking June's hand. "See how she chomps her way through leaf after leaf? That's how I feed on God's Word, Nothing else is important now. I read page after page, My soul is growing as big and strong as Cathy Caterpillar.

Two hands one young and strong, the other wrinkled and crippled with arthritis - clasped as they watched the caterpillar chewing a leaf.

"What happens when our caterpillar runs out of food?" asked June eventually.

"It won't run out too soon," assured Gran. "Our caterpillar will become so tired of eating, and so fat that it will weave itself a soft sleeping bag and attach it to a little branch. Then it won't need to eat any more leaves."

June pondered this, and knew that Gran was talking about herself as well as the caterpillar.

The next day when June went to see her, Gran pointed excitedly to the swan-plant.

"Look, June, Cathy's eating days are over. She's started to spin her cocoon." They watched together, fascinated. Two bright young eyes, and two watery, hazy old eyes, observed Cathy wrapping herself in a silken blanket. "She's satisfied her body's appetite, June. Now it's time to rest; until a miracle will change her into a new creation. She won't look like a funny caterpillar any longer. She'll be herself inside, but a different, more beautiful creature to look at."

Gran's voice dropped away as her eyes closed. June thought she was asleep. Then Gran whispered her name.

"June, darling. My old body's tired like Cathy Caterpillar's. Soon my time will come to sleep in peace in a silky cocoon."

"No, Gran Please don't die! I want you to live," begged June, with tears in her eyes.

Gran took her hand and said quietly "I'm not afraid to die, darling, and I don't want you to be sad. I've feasted on God's Word, and my soul is fat and satisfied. Now it's my time for The Miracle. I'm ready to leave my tired old body in the cocoon, June. For only then will my spirit rise to be with God."

As June listened, Grandma continued

**"Death, darling, is not the end. It's
the beginning of something new
and beautiful."**

Promise me June, that you too will feed hungrily on God's Word, and trust Him. Then, someday we'll be together again - like two butterflies in God's Garden, fluttering in the sunshine of His Glory."

Those were Gran's last words. As she closed her eyes', June kissed her gently and went home. Gran's sleep became deeper as she slipped into a coma. She was unconscious for days. June would still visit her after school, and sit by the tiny, still body tucked in white sheets. Gran had tubes and bags attached, and a mask over her mouth to help her breathe. June would water the well-chewed swan-plant, and check the pale chrysalis. There was no sign of life, but Gran had told her that great changes were going on inside it. Most days, June would pick up Gran's well used Bible and read aloud from it, hoping Gran could hear her favourite stories.

One afternoon when June stopped by the hospital, she saw her parents drive up.

"What's wrong?" she asked in alarm.

"It's Gran", said Dad sadly. "She's slipping away". Choking back her sobs, June ran ahead of her parents and leaned over Gran's waxy face. Her eyes were closed, her face peaceful. She was hardly breathing. June's parents came up beside her, and wrapped their arms around her.

Look over here, June", said Mother, pointing to the swan-plant. "A miracle is happening in this room." June watched, fascinated, as the silky chrysalis split open, and a damp, crumpled form emerged. It climbed onto a stem and hung itself out to dry, shaking its lovely gossamer wings.

"Oh, it's beautiful," breathed June. "How I wish Gran could see it."

"Gran knows better than we do about miracles of change and life and eternity", said Dad.

As June and her parents laid their hands on Gran's still white chrysalis in the bed, a tiny smile quivered across her face, as a gentle sigh expelled her last breath.

"Goodbye, Gran, darling. Be at peace now," whispered June as tears rolled from her face onto their joined hands.

And a beautiful velvety monarch butterfly left the swan-plant and fluttered over Gran's still form. Gran's spirit was free at last.

**'FOR WHETHER WE LIVE, WE LIVE UNTO THE LORD, AND
WHETHER WE DIE, WE DIE UNTO THE LORD; WHETHER WE
LIVE THEREFORE, OR DIE, WE ARE THE LORD'S'**

Romans 14:8



ARE WE GUILTY?

Were YOU there when they crucified my Lord?

Oh, not as one with power to save Him, but perhaps as one of the crowd who shouted Crucify Him!" The religious authorities would have ended Jesus' career long before this except that "They feared the people" (Matthew 21:46)

History shows that most rulers are concerned to consider the wishes of the people. (If this was not so, why make such efforts to persuade and mislead them?) The purpose of organised propaganda is to encourage people to think what the rulers think, thus making their task easier. Tyrants who ignore the wishes of the people have short-lived power.

Pilate had already decided that the prisoner Jesus was innocent, but he 'passed the buck' by letting the people decide His fate. These ordinary people, easily fooled, and stirred' up into crowd' hysteria which saw them do things together that they would never consider as individuals. (We see this mentality at Soccer games when even mild-mannered fans become aggressive and violent). Being just one of a crowd does not remove their individual responsibility. They are accountable for their actions and words. So that fateful night at the Roman Praetorium, those in the crowd were guilty of shouting, against Jesus. Although not premeditated, they were implicated in a terrible murder. This makes them as guilty as those who nailed Him to the cross.

"HE who is not for Me is against Me"

The people of Israel were known for their love of the law. They had a respect for justice which had bound different factions of the land together. Yet Jesus was denied justice. His trial was anything but just. In six tortuous hours (under cover of darkness), Jesus was interrogated five times, by four different authorities, and within twelve hours of His arrest, He was nailed to the cross. False witnesses were produced, who contradicted themselves and deliberately twisted and misinterpreted His words. An hysterical crowd was drummed up to shout their preference for a criminal, and demand death by crucifixion for Jesus. The final death knell was his conviction by a judge who was convinced of his innocence.

Pilate's moral weakness has marked him for 2,000 years. Every time we say The Creed, we condemn Pilate afresh: "I believe that believe that "For us men, and for our salvation... Jesus... was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried."

So - were YOU there when they crucified my Lord?

I wonder what we would have done if we were in that crowd? Would we have the courage and power to stand against the tide and make our allegiance known? I pray that this Easter our individual commitment to God will be strengthened, so that no crowd will sway us away from standing up for truth and justice and righteousness in His name.

"Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart." (Hebrews 12:3)

HE IS WORTHY

EASTER MEDITATIONS



WORTHY IS THE LAMB

As a man, He felt pangs of hunger Jesus, the
Bread of Life.

His human body was parched with thirst
Jesus, the Living Water.

He drank the bitter vinegar
Yet could change water to wine.

His frail humanity knew weariness Jesus,
our rest and our peace.

He paid due tribute to Caesar
Jesus, the King of Kings.

He was accused of being a devil
Jesus, who cast out demons.

He prayed - the one who hears prayers He
wept, the One who dries tears

He was led as a sheep to slaughter Our
gentle, loving Shepherd .

He who was mute before His accusers Has
spoken, our Living Word.

He who was sold for pieces of silver Has
redeemed the world by His love.

Jesus, the Man of Sorrows
Feels our suffering, and pain.

He who was killed by our wickedness By
His death restores us to life.

We cannot fully comprehend
The mysteries of His painful cross

He laid down His life for us
Then rose to eternal victory.

By His death He gives us life anew Jesus
destroyed the power of death.

What He suffered here for us
Was so much more than, anything

That we must bear for Him, who is
Our Master and our gracious King.

So come, and rest, safe in His love. He
knows, He cares, He understands.