

## STORY of THE ELEPHANT and THE BUTTERFLY by Thinh DoDuy

A long time ago, in an African savanna, there lived an elephant. It was a very large elephant with legs as thick as baobabs, a giant tree that grows in Africa. He also had a long and wrinkled trunk that he used to make music that was in his head. His head was always so full of music. He danced at times but since his legs were quite heavy, he only danced to slow rhythm of sad tunes. It was easier.

The elephant was a loner, despite being polite and sociable to the other animals in the jungle. Always helpful, he never minded giving smaller animals a lift on his back as he ran his errands. But even though he was appreciated, they never really understood him. They found him rather amusing when he sang with his trunk and danced goofily but he was at times reserved and absent. So the elephant was lonely.

To forget about his solitude, he would spend his time putting his feelings into songs. Since he was so deeply lonely, his songs were always sad, tinted with bitterness and the desire of being loved. He was aware that he was ugly and grotesque with his long wrinkled trunk, his bald head. He just wished so much to meet his soulmate. Someone with whom he would not be afraid of being clumsy, with whom he would feel less repulsive or at least it would cease to be a problem.

Every day, the elephant would go drink at the nearby watering hole. He would take the winding path through the wild flowers and the tall grass. The elephant loved to look at the wild flowers. They look like a silk carpet unfolding over the dry african soil. He would be careful not to step on them with his clumsy feet. So he would stay some way away from them, admiring them from the distance. Everyday, he would stop on his way to the watering hole and linger awhile to admire the wild flowers. They were so colorful like concentrated rainbows shimmering in the Sun, swaying at the rhythm of the African wind. At times, he could hear them sing in unison like a schoolgirl choir and could hear drum beats resonating in his heart.

At the watering hole, he would close his eyes as he would drink the water with his trunk. He didn't want to see his own reflexion in the water. He was ashamed of his wrinkly skin and his bald head. He was also ashamed of his slowness. The elephant thought that time passes by too fast, faster than he could

catch up to and was sure that he was left stranded in the past. In truth, he thought he was old fashioned, expired, out of date. In short: un-necessary.

One day, on his way to the watering hole, he stopped and looked over the field of wild flowers. he noticed that something was strange. Wild flowers, although beautiful, tended to look alike each other. They also tend to be obedient and would follow the wind's current. But today, something was not ordinary. There was a particular flower that was not subjected to the wind. she had all the colors of the rainbow irradiating from her petals like a seventies protest song, irreverent and candid. Then, all of a sudden, the flower lifted up in the sky and came toward the elephant. Obviously, that was not a wild flower, that much the elephant knew. It was a butterfly, but that, the elephant did not know yet. The butterfly flew past his head and landed on the border of his ear, unconcerned and innocent. She was beautiful! She was captivating and mesmerizing. For a couple of the elephant's heartbeats, the world stopped. Everything went silent. She was so alive that the elephant could not believe what his eyes were showing. At one moment, the butterfly was on his ear and at the next, she would be on his wrinkled forehead. She had the colors of spring painted in circles on her wings like targets to attract the world's attention. The wings were so light that music would be produced at each beat, a light and joyful music, very different than the one the elephant was used to. The butterfly was singing and dancing to her own music, paying no mind to the elephant even though she had noticed him for sometime now. He was too large to go unnoticed. On the other hand, the elephant fell right away for the butterfly. His trunk, usually so loud was mute from emotion.

The elephant had never seen anything that beautiful. In the savanna, there were only big animals the color of burnt earth, more or less grotesque and without interests. But now, as by some miracle, the most beautiful creature on earth with colors of rainbow was right in front of his eyes! She was so light! Her music was so refreshing and innocent, like the beginning of spring.

He asked the butterfly: "who are you? Where do you come from? How did you get here?". He had to repeat his questions three times before the butterfly even took the time to answer.

"I'm a butterfly" she said. "Where I come from and how I got here are my business" she added somewhat miffed.

"I'm sorry" stumbled the elephant, "I didn't mean to bother you, but you look like a flower".

The butterfly smiled with satisfaction: "but I am a flower" she sang, "a flower that needs more freedom than the regular ones".

At that precise instant, a sandstorm started to blow. The butterfly, with no shelter nearby, started to panic. Eagerly, the elephant offered her to get shelter in his ear. And that's how the butterfly and the elephant became inseparables.

The butterfly appreciated the company of the elephant. She appreciated the worship from him and the shelter she found in the hollow of his ears at times of great winds. The Elephant was elated. He didn't feel useless anymore and he loved the songs the butterfly would whisper in his ear the stormy days. The butterfly would tell him of far away places she visited on her travels. The emerald shores and white snow capped mountains that the wind guided her wings to. In truth, it was an unequal love. The elephant was irrevocably in love while the butterfly, well, she did like the elephant.

The butterfly was capricious. Her mood was always changing, she commanded the weather in the elephant's world. At times adorable, at times hardhearted, she was always lovable in his eyes. He could never love her less even when she was mean to him with words that would cut through his soft heart like a hot knife through butter. He was lost in love with her. It was an unconditional love. He loved her permanently, no letting off, the only way big clumsy ugly elephants know how to love. He swam in happiness when she was happy, fell in bottomless despair when she was sad or bored. He told her again and again that she was the center of his world, that she had the power of absolute happiness or purgatory sufferance in the palm of her hand, and that she made use of it twenty times a day. But for her, he would do anything, go through every hell, abandon everything. He had no more self respect and pride. Nothing mattered anymore, only she. For her, he invented songs of thousand colors and would sing them softly, late in the night, so she would fall asleep to the sound of crickets in the savanna. With his ears, he would fan her, his beloved, so that her dreams were peaceful.

Days went by, as months followed. At each passing day, the elephant fell deeper in love with the butterfly. It seemed to him that each of his breath were charged with the desire to be near her, that each of the wrinkle lining his old skin was a complex tattoo that spelled her name. The elephant never left her side. When the butterfly went drinking the nectar of the wild flowers, he watched her at a distance. He was afraid of losing her. The butterfly was carefree. She was sure of the love the elephant had for her. She was his queen.

Overcome of pain and anguish, one day, during a long conversation that stretched well into the night, he asked her: "do you think it's love, you and I?"

"What is love?" Asked the butterfly back at him, "what do you know about love?".

"Well, I don't know for sure" said the elephant, "but I can tell you how I feel and may be you can tell?"

The butterfly waited for him to continue.

"I feel joy, excitement and doubt, fear and pain intensely together in every cell of my heart, at every nano second I'm near or far from you."

"I feel like drowning, you know death by drowning? But without panic, without the natural instinct of wanting for air. I'm peacefully drowning."

"My heart is so swollen that it could contain the whole Atlantic Ocean just for one thing only, and that is the thought of you, tiny you."

"I'm heavy, my feet are clumsy but each step I take ceased to be an effort. It's like I'm not walking this earth but it's the earth that's rolling under me when I walk."

"The very last image in my mind before I fall asleep and the very first one when I wake up is you."

"And when I sleep, you intrude in my dreams as if you need no permission, as if you were the maker of them."

"I'm jealous of the flowers you linger on a little too long. I'm jealous of the air that carries your songs to others ears than mine."

"I'm angry of the Sun for kissing your wings so harshly because it will cause the colors to fade"

"I'm fearful of the wind because it might take you away from me."

"But as long as you are near me, I feel proud, handsome and strong enough to face anything life would throw at us."

"So tell me, is it love between you and I?" Finally, the elephant asked again.

Half asleep, the butterfly casually answered: "how can it be love? It would be weird wouldn't it? A big clumsy elephant like you and a tiny princess of a butterfly like me?"

Hurt, the elephant asked: "but if I go on a diet and lose weight and become as tiny as you, would you love me?"

"May be, may be, probably..." Said the butterfly suppressing a yawn.

Finally, an idea came to the elephant: "do you think one can live on fresh water and love alone?" He again asked the butterfly.

To the question, she answered distractedly, sinking in her slumber: "of course not, you big romantic! Be real! One would quickly die of starvation"

The elephant was upset since he thought it was possible. So he thought out loud: "but if one is big, sturdy with a heart large as mine, it should surely be possible!"

So the butterfly said finally: " I'm sure it will take longer with you, but eventually, you will die all the same."

How long was the time they had together, no one knows since time in the African Savanna doesn't flow at the same tempo for men and for animals, but one of the things they loved playing was for the elephant to tell the butterfly why he loved her. They called it: 101 reasons why I love you. She would encourage him to find all the 101 by saying that it was impossible that he would have more than 10, 20, then 40, then 50..... For him it was easy, he found them with each passing day, watching her every move, from the smallest insignificant details that his heart was showing him. And, in truth, she loved to hear him come up with all of them, they made her realize how much he loved her. Not because of the number of reasons, but more because of the fact that many of them were simply idiotic but adorable. One of the reasons was that he loved her because she was "strangely little"!

Each day, he would write down a dozen of reasons on little green or yellow leaves, and would disseminate them cleverly on her whereabouts so that she would find them. The butterfly was happy to get them. It was always with anticipation that she would wake up in the morning to find out what would be the next 10 reasons that he would have come up with during the previous night. She expected them and cherished them more than she would let herself believe. She kept the little love notes in a hidden place and sometimes, would go back and read them again.

It also seemed that she took pleasure in torturing him. Maybe she couldn't help it, maybe she was testing his love? She was capricious after all! She would get upset over some obscure matters and would, on a dime, stop talking to him, giving him the silent treatment or would tell him to get lost because she didn't want to see him any longer. These were the times that he dreaded the most. Granted that she did it often enough for him to know that they would have to make up before all this could happen again. But the elephant was definitely stupid. Each time, he would believe that it would be the end, the last time. So each time, the elephant would descend into the deepest state of despair that any being could imagine. The darkest place for anyone to be stranded and forgotten, that was where he was cast away, each time she stopped loving him. Eventually, they would make up and he would be lifted up from despair and be saved again by her hands.

More time went by, one day, when Spring just returned, the butterfly woke up early. She was excited and eager to take advantage of the beautiful day ahead. Unwilling to wait for the elephant to wake up, she decided to go down to the wild flowers for breakfast. The flowers were so many and beautiful, the butterfly didn't know what to do. She drank the nectar from one flower to the next unaware of an approaching storm. And so it was that the butterfly was carried

away by one of the most terrifying sandstorm that the African savanna had known.

The elephant woke up as the storm started raging, immediately knew his beloved was no longer by his side. With all his strength, he struggled against wind, sand and twisters to run after the butterfly. With his strong trunk, he called out again and again his love, but to no avail. The butterfly was gone. With a bleeding heart, he continued calling her, quietly even in his restless sleep.

For a longtime, he called out for her.

For a longtime, he cried to the memory of his lover.

For a longtime, the elephant took the path to the watering hole.

For a longtime, he muted his trunk to listen to the music of spring.

For a longtime, he checked out the flowering bushes in hope of finding her among the little flowers.

But the butterfly was lost and didn't have any memory of him.

So the elephant stopped singing all together. He also stopped going to the watering hole. He stopped eating.

For a longtime, a longtime, a very very longtime....

At the last day, when the elephant were but a shadow, weak and old, as small as a grey mouse. When the music of spring ceased to ring in his head, his heart shriveled like a dry leaf of Fall. The elephant who were now just a mouse, crumbled among the tall grass and wild flowers and stopped breathing.

And the butterfly? What about The butterfly, you may ask me? Well, the truth is, since that fateful sand storm that took her so far away from the elephant, she realized how much she missed him. She realized how deeply she had fell in love with him. True, he was large and clumsy, but his heart was swollen with the love he only had for her. His music was mesmerizing of melancholia. So, the desire of finding shelter in the hollow of his ear made her search for a way back to him. With all her strength, she flew, she called out for him: " big stupid! big stupid! Oh my big stupid elephant, where are you?! ". She flew down the path of every roads to every water holes she found. She checked out all the baobab trees she saw on the way. She asked all the wild flowers she met on her search for him if perhaps, one of them might know of a big clumsy elephant?

Alas, the last sandstorm took her too far and she could not find her way back to her big stupid elephant. But the butterfly never faltered in her quest. She was headstrong. In this department, no one is more determined and headstrong than that butterfly, believe me! If there were anything impossible to do, she would be doing it!

So the butterfly would fly and fly, all day long, even forgetting to drink the nectar of wild flowers. At night, exhausted and heartbroken, she would fall asleep, her tears slowly drying. Very often, she would see her beloved elephant in her restless slumber. Very often, in her dreams, she would tell him to wait for her, because she is returning. " wait, wait for me, big stupid. I'll find my way back to you! I'll sing you songs of springs where Japanese cherry blossoms bloom like a million promises. I will tell you of springs where the snow just melted and the birds were already eager to build their nests. I will tell you that you were right. You were always right to say that of course, we can live on with just love and fresh water. Like how I live now! I will tell you that you were right with your feelings, they were all unmistakable signs of love. Now, I feel them too. And finally, I will tell you, without shame or fear that I love you. I love you my stupid of an elephant! "

Longtime she searched. Even longer, she called him. And then, one day, almost by chance, she found among the wild flowers and the tall grass the body of a tiny grey mouse, all wrinkled with a muzzle in the shape of an elephant's trunk. She recognized then her beloved one. She now noticed that he had lost so much weight and became so small that they are now of the same size. She leaned over his chest to listen for his heartbeat, a heart so large once but now small enough to nest within her hands. A now, silenced heart. So the butterfly covered the elephant- mouse with her delicate wings. She sang all the songs of Spring and their promises of a radiant future that she had known. And finally, at the dawn of the third day, the butterfly, also, went to sleep of a peaceful rest next to her unlikely lover....

There are two lessons to take away from this story. It all depends on what type of person you are. I will leave with you the choice of which lesson you would rather learn from.

If you are of a realistic and even cynical, or pessimistic, or all of the above, the lesson would be: it does not matter how large the size of a heart, one cannot live on love and fresh water. It will take a very long time, yes, but one would die in the end. Not of hunger, no, but of sorrow.

But if you are a dreamer and you are not scared or ashamed of being romantic, the lesson would be something like this: yes, you can live on love and fresh water alone. Love is the only feeling worth dying for. Love accomplishes impossible feats. Like binding two people that everything would oppose: the butterfly and the elephant. Love makes you do impossible things. Like transforming oneself into something we weren't meant to be: turning an elephant into a mouse. Love forces nature to make miracles. Like giving a butterfly the strength to fly thousands of miles in search for her lover. Love is immortal, simply

because I'm telling you this story now. In a way, the elephant and the butterfly lived on.

Now, finally, I owe you all a confession. I am the elephant. I'm still waiting for my love to come back to me. This story is just words. Words are all I have to convince her to return to me. Please, if you see her, tell her that I'm still waiting.

The End.