



The Butterfly by Patricia Polacco (Part 3)

From that time on, Sevrine came to Monique's room as often as she could without waking her own parents or Monique's mother. Marcelle could never know! When the girls were together, they played dress up and had midnight tea parties. They laughed and giggled, and told each other their dreams.

Monique collected things from the outside world for Sevrine to see and feel and touch.

"What did you bring me tonight?" Sevrine asked softly one night.

Monique reached into a small cloth bag and sprinkled rich black earth into Sevrine's hands. "This smells like the air outside," Monique told her.

Then she handed Sevrine a bright flower from her garden. "This will be your sunshine. And now, close your eyes!" Monique slowly opened her cupped hands. "Look." It was a glorious butterfly.

"A *papillon*," Sevrine whispered in wonder. Monique put the butterfly near Sevrine's cheek. "Let its wings flutter," Monique whispered.

Sevrine caught her breath and smiled.

"Like the kiss of an angel," Monique said softly.

Tears began to fill Sevrine's eyes and roll down her cheeks. "I miss my home, Monique. My own bed. My own kitty. My garden."

"The Nazis won't be here forever. Maman says that they will lose this war," Monique reassured her.

'At our home," Sevrine went on, "we celebrated Shabbat, the holidays...Passover, Hanukkah. My mother cooked for days. Family came from everywhere. Then it all changed. We had to leave. My parents were afraid that the Nazis would kill us."

"You'll be home someday, you'll see!"

"Papa is so sick from breathing damp air. He hasn't seen sunlight for months. Maman has to cover his mouth with a pillow so that his coughing can't be heard upstairs."

"I promise, Sevrine, someday you'll be as free as...as that *papillon*."

"Let it fly now, Monique," Sevrine said. "When it flies, it will be as if Papa, *Maman*, and I are flying away!"

The girls took the butterfly to the open bedroom window and threw it into the night air, then stood and watched it until they couldn't see it anymore.

All of a sudden they looked up—for what reason, who knew. They saw Monsieur Lendormy, the man next door, looking right at them from his window across the courtyard.

Monique's heart leapt in her chest. Sevrine slid down under the windowsill so that Monsieur Lendormy couldn't see her. The girls looked at each other in sheer terror. They knew they had to tell Marcelle.

They ran to her room and awoke her. She was startled to see the two of them together! When they told her about their secret meeting and Monsieur Lendormy, Marcelle sank to her knees in front of them. "*Mon dieu, mon dieu*," she said mournfully as she rocked with fear.

"Are you angry, Madame Solliliage?" Sevrine asked as she began to cry.

"Oh, no, *ma petite*. No, of course I am not angry. You are a little girl. You didn't ask for this war, or to be kept in my cellar. You needed to play. Children need other children." Marcelle smoothed her hair. "But you are no longer safe here, my dear."

"We must leave home tonight." Marcelle began to pull on her clothes. "We need to get you and your family out of the country. Let me see. Pere Voulliard will take your parents to the next refuge. You will travel with Monique and me! Yes! Hurry, petites, put on as many clothes as you can. Dress in layers. We can't carry valises, or we will attract attention."

The girls watched as Marcelle, Pere Voulliard, and Sevrine's parents dug holes in the cellar floor and buried everything that would look like someone had lived there. Then it was time for them all to leave. Sevrine's parents came out dressed as a nun and priest. They both cried as they held Sevrine and said their goodbyes. They would next meet in a village in southern France near the Swiss border.

"God be with us tonight!" Pere Voulliard prayed.

It seemed that Monique, Sevrine, and Marcelle had walked for miles in darkness. Through back alleys, avoiding street lamps. Taking great care to be as quiet as it was possible to be.

With the first light of dawn they had reached the countryside. They stopped to rest under a grove of trees, close to their rendezvous with the people who would take Sevrine to her parents.

Marcelle had just given the girls some bread and cheese, when she pulled them both into a ditch. She motioned for them to be still and quiet. A patrol car full of Nazi soldiers slowly drove by on the country road.

After the car passed, the three sat without speaking.

Finally, another car came driving slowly down the road. It stopped by the bridge a few hundred feet away, and turned its headlights on and off three times.

"It's time, my precious child," Marcelle whispered as she pushed Sevrine out of the ditch, and they ran toward the car. "These people will help you and your *maman* and *papa*."

At the car, Monique took something from the pouch she'd been carrying. It was Pinouff! "Take her, Sevrine," Monique whispered.

Tears welled up in Sevrine's eyes. She folded Pinouff into her sweater, then reached into her pocket and pulled out a fine gold chain on which hung a gold Star of David. "Remember me, Monique!"

We are practically home, my little one," Marcelle said as she and Monique arrived at the train station in Melun. This was where they would board the train to go back to *Choisy-le Roi*.

But there was an unusual amount of travelers for that early time of day. The station was crowded. Nazi soldiers were everywhere, stopping people, searching them, and barking orders. Marcelle took her daughter's hand. In her other hand, Monique clutched the chain Sevrine had given her.

As Monique and Marcelle drew closer and closer to the gate where their papers would be checked, Marcelle pulled a bundle of tickets and documents from her handbag. The entire station of people had to squeeze through the tin gate to board the train.

Suddenly, the crowd behind Monique and her mother surged and pushed so hard, Monique lost Marcelle's hand. Monique couldn't see her mother anymore. People pushed and shoved, and Monique lost her footing and fell. When she did, Sevrine's necklace slide out of her hand onto the platform floor.

Quickly, she put it into her pocket, pulled herself to her feet, slipped into the line that was pushing through the checkpoint, and was swept with them into a shabby coach car.

The tall boots were shouting at everyone. What if they searched her and found the necklace? And where was her *maman*?

She could see through the window of her train car people standing on the platform waiting to catch a train going in the opposite direction. Had her mother been pushed into that line instead of onto this train? She tried to see through her own tears to find her mother's face, when she saw a girl alone. She looked thin and sad, very sad. Like Sevrine!

On the girl's coat was a yellow Star of David. Was it Sevrine? No, she could see now, it wasn't Sevrine.

But it could have been.

Monique held Sevrine's necklace tight in her pocket.

"Oh, *Maman, Maman*, where are you?" she cried as the train lurched away.

The train rolled to a noisy stop. *St. Georges*, the sign read. Only two kilometers from *Choisy-le Roi*! From home. Monique walked through alleys and back streets that only hours before she, Sevrine, and Maman had passed. "Oh, Maman !" she cried as she walked.

When Monique finally saw the familiar threshold of her front door, she pushed it open and climbed the stairs. She could still smell her mother's scent in the air. She was tired, so tired. She threw herself across her bed and fell into a deep sleep.

Then she dreamed of her mother's voice. "*Ma Cherie...ma petite*," the voice said. She dreamt a cool hand crossed her brow. It seemed so real.

When she opened her eyes, she saw that the hand was real! The voice was real! It was her *maman*!

"Oh, my sweet, brave, little girl!" her mother cried as they rocked in each other's arms. "I just knew that I would find you here."

One week passed, two. Monique tried to imagine that Sevrine and her *maman* and papa, and of course, Pinouff, were safe. Then the tall boots would march by her front gate, reminding her how hopeless it seemed. If only she had a message from Sevrine. A sign. Something.

And then one day, Monique and Marcelle were planting next year's bulbs in the garden, when Marcelle suddenly gasped.

"*Regarde*, Monique, look!" Her mother pointed at the bleak sky above them. A butterfly fluttered down into the garden. And another. And another.

They both watched as butterflies started to land on the dry stalks of faded flowers. First there were three, then ten, then twenty and thirty.

Neighbors came out of their cottages and peered over the wall in wonder.

"It's a sign, *Maman*, a miracle! Sevrine sent them, I know it! She and her parents are safe!"

Monique held up her hand, and a butterfly fluttered and landed on her finger. She took it to her cheek. Its wings fluttered. "A kiss," Monique said softly.

-THE END-

Author's Note:

Marcelle and Monique did not hear from Sevrine until the end of the war. Then, two years after of the liberation of France, they received a letter. In it was a card with a drawing of a papillon on the cover. Inside it said: "Je vis! (I live!) Sevrine." Next to her signature was a paw print.