Long After the Death of a Brother

Andrea Carlisle*
"Herbie, each of my creations has a purpose, and if that is yours, you must accept it. How can you not want to be such a lovely thing?"

As much as I pleaded to remain a caterpillar, it was useless. Mom refused. She repeated it was a law, and I would become a butterfly just as all my kind had done before me. She said each creature's existence had its good times and its bad times. Her ending statement was “life is what you make it.”

So that's how I got into this predicament. I have been fighting metamorphosis but somehow feel I'm not succeeding. It's so dark in here that I really can't tell what I look like. Hey look, the side is splitting. I'm going to be free in a minute. The suspense is just killing me. It's broken open. My wings are flapping; I'm no longer a caterpillar. But I remember what Mom told me.

“I'm a caterpillar. I'm a caterpillar.”

---

Long After the Death of a Brother

by Andrea Carlisle

English, Jr.

If you hadn't gone away, I never would have needed you, perhaps. Perhaps you would have seemed a brother, not a mind. But you did go—too far—and the sky fell long ago, long ago when I touched the shiny stone and read the nothing words and it was final.
Fall, 1967

Dakota sun stretching your mammoth shadow
far ahead of mine, you held my hand
and we walked the wild prairie together. You told
me the secrets of grass, and sun and sea, of how
at sunset the sphere sinks into the ocean
to light the fish world and you told me I
was not the ugly child they saw, that I had
the special light of sunrise in my eyes
and I laughed but loved to hear your words
though now I know my eyes were yours, and you
needed the sun, needed it more than I.
You called me Tinka and would, you said, till I
was eighty-three and we wondered what it meant
and liked its mystery and sound; you were
my brother, your hand was strong and I held on
because you were my hope. Why, in the cold despair
of your nineteenth winter did you choose to die?
You should have waited one more day or year,
waited until I learned that we were not
the ugly children. We were the special ones,
not brave nor beautiful, but wise to the secrets
of the prairie grass. I learned too late how dear
you were, too late to save you from your sadness.
But could I have said you were the needed one
with your wisdom and gentle strength? Would you have
believed your worth? I didn’t know then. A child
doesn’t know. But even then
when we danced, during blizzards, or sang to the sun,
even then I saw pain, not sunrise, in your eyes.