

## The Girl Who Turned Into a Butterfly

ONCE UPON A TIME there was a young girl named Antiopa, who could not talk to people, but she could talk to plants. Because of this she didn't have any friends in the village where she lived. Instead, her most steadfast companion was Willow Tree in the forest. Willow must have been ancient because its trunk was wide and its branches higher than any tree nearby. It grew by a pool of swampy water where peepers sang on spring evenings. Everyday, Antiopa would run to the forest to hang out with her best friend, Willow Tree. In the spring Antiopa would gather willow branches to make baskets and in the summer she would harvest willow leaves to steep in fresh spring water for a cooling tea. In the fall she would prune its branches and bank the base of its trunk with extra peat moss and leaves for the cold months ahead. And in the winter, Antiopa would climb the willow tree and sit amidst its branches watching the snowflakes fall from the sky into the quiet forest.

The willow tree gave Antiopa so much. She tried to reciprocate and often left small notes and trinkets for the tree, along with pruning and mulching at important times of year.

No one in the village had ever questioned where Antiopa went. But one day, a trickster toad from the nearby pond decided to follow her. She had no idea he was there and ran over the warm pine needles on the forest floor until she reached the pool and the willow tree.

She knocked on the trunk three times and a tiny door, that had been invisible before, opened into Willow's trunk. Antiopa reached in and left a cardinal feather as an offering to the tree. She did this often to show her gratitude for her friend. The trickster toad saw her do this and suspected that this was her secret hiding place for treasure!

Antiopa hugged her tree friend and went skipping home for dinner.

The toad approached the tree after she was gone and knocked three times. The unsuspecting willow tree opened its tiny door.

The toad was surprised that all he found was a pile of old scribbled notes and tiny trinkets. Since he was a trickster toad he thought he would play a trick on Antiopa. He took her offerings out of the tree and sunk them in the pool. As he was jumping away, his back leg caught on the door and ripped it off the tree. He felt terrible but didn't know what to do so he hid in the leaves on the forest floor and waited for Antiopa to return.

When Antiopa came back the following day she was heartbroken at what she found: the door gone, a hole in the tree, and all of her treasures disappeared. She tried to help the tree heal its wound by rubbing some sap on it. Who would betray her in this horrible way? The next day she came back again and this time she wore her mother's mourning cloak to sit with the tree and

think about what had happened. It was a beautiful cloak made out of the finest wool. It was brown with a yellow trim and blue spots and the inside was a subtle glittering of grays and blues and browns. Antiopa wore it whenever she was sad.

That day Antiopa sat with her friend Willow Tree in the sun and slowly fell into a dreamy spring sleep on the warm leaves around the tree. She slept there that night and when the morning came again and the sun shone down from a clear sky, low and behold, Antiopa had transformed into a beautiful brown butterfly with yellow trim and blue spots! Antiopa was happier than she had been in her whole life and flew up into the sky floating on the breeze, circling the willow tree who waved her branches joyfully. Antiopa went to drink sap from the oak nearby and soon found a mate, and returned to the willow tree to lay her eggs. Antiopa lived a very happy life as a butterfly from then on.

And so it is today. Mourning Cloak Butterflies, otherwise known as *Nymphalis antiopa*, are the first to appear in the spring time and since there are no flowers out, they drink tree sap instead of nectar and one of their host plants just happens to be the willow tree. And as for Toad, he saw that Antiopa, the girl was now a butterfly, and he made a vow to never eat Mourning Cloak butterflies (for he did love a butterfly snack) and to let them go free in the spring to pay penance for his mischievous acts.

**THE END**

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