



*Butterflies
in May*

KAREN HART



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What may seem our darkest hour may only be as the caterpillar to the butterfly that flies free in spring. The road of a lowly, slow-moving creature seems long compared to the brief burst of beauty that is the butterfly, but it is in the transformation that the real beauty of the butterfly lies.

—Imara



For all who are faced
with an unplanned pregnancy





Chapter 1

Everything in your life can change in a single instant. That occurred to me this morning, when I realized my period was MIA—missing in action. Suddenly, my entire world shifted. The most pressing things on my mind yesterday were a paper I was writing for government class, the realization that I’m an anarchist, and deciding whether to wear that new cropped sweater to school or save it for the football game Friday night. Now all I can think about is this.

It’s probably nothing. It *has* to be nothing, but I’m worried. My periods have never been regular. I’m always two or three days late, and once I was even a week late. But this time, I’m ten days late. That’s a record.

Still, Matt and I are careful. We don’t usually take chances—not like some girls in my class. Last New Year’s Eve, my best friend, Monica, had a sleep-over party, and five other girls, including myself, stayed up most of the night talking. One girl, Robin Evans, said she had done it with four different guys and never used protection with any of them. Talk about incredibly stupid.

That was junior year, when I was taking my first journalism class. The thought of being that careless outraged me so much that I wrote a series of articles about teens and sex titled “Get Real.” I wrote how we should take responsibility for our actions, and about the success rates of various methods of birth control. Monica read my articles and said I should lighten up, but she thinks I take everything too seriously.

Mrs. Danker, my journalism teacher, said the articles were





“brilliant” and “insightful” and “struck a chord.” She even asked my permission to run them in the student paper, *The Voice*. But after the first article “Teens and Sex” appeared, along with a sidebar about abstinence-only education and how students really felt about it, a group of outraged parents went to the school board and demanded that the series stop. One parent said the article was “suggestive,” and four others agreed. Then a board member said the article might undercut parental authority and encourage “the children” to have sex. After that, the board voted unanimously to stop the series, as if that would solve anything. Obviously, the authorities here don’t realize that when it comes to sex, no one asks their parents for permission first.

Mrs. Danker, who’s more enlightened than the parents and board members, tried to save the series, but apparently First Amendment rights don’t apply to school newspapers. The rest of the articles were never published, but Mrs. Danker asked if I would be the paper’s editor my senior year and write a column each month. I may groan and complain about it—and believe me, I’m not the type of student who complains about everything—but it’s empowering to have a voice.

School is out for the day, and I’m making my way down a hallway, past the principal’s office and a row of lockers. When I turn the corner, there’s Andy leaning against my locker, waiting for me.

“Hey, Parker.”

“Hey, yourself.” I’ve known Andy since middle school, but we probably never said more than seven words to each other until we wound up in the same journalism class last year. Andy’s got a 4.40 GPA (you get extra points for AP classes) and is bound for some prestigious college, but you’d never guess it from looking at him. Today, he’s wearing a rumpled t-shirt and shorts, no socks, and has a candy bar hanging out of his mouth. He’s a math brain who, by some quirk of fate, can write clear and sometimes clever copy with hardly any effort at all. Sometimes, I find it annoying.

Sometimes, I'm more than a little envious. But he really is a nice guy, and it's been fun working on articles with him for the paper. Whenever I get frustrated with a column I'm writing or the school board's constant involvement with our paper, I appreciate having a goofball genius like him around.

"About my article . . ." he begins.

I know what this is about. His article for the paper is due tomorrow, but Andy thinks deadlines are for other people, not him. I know for a fact that he missed every single deadline last year.

"Look, I need two more days to finish that article."

"Two? No way."

"Okay . . . one."

"Deal," I say. I know he'll get it to me by then.

"Really?"

"Really."

He smiles, walks backwards, and trips over a garbage can.

Five minutes later, Matt pulls up in his car to give me a ride home. It's a beater, but it has a ragtop and a lot of character. Reaching across the seat to open the door for me, he smiles, which is enough to make me stop worrying, at least for now. There's something about the way he looks at me—as if no other girl on the planet exists. It gets me every time. I climb in beside him, and he gives me a quick kiss before taking off. It's the last week of September, and the leaves are just starting to change, but it still feels like summer—Indian summer. I wish it could last forever.

During the summer, Matt and I had been able to see each other nearly every night. He worked construction, and I worked the afternoon shift at Java House making espresso drinks. But now that he's bagging groceries most nights at Vincent's Market, and I'm working weekends, we have a lot less time to spend with each other.

"Do you think you'll come by later?" I ask, hoping he will. "Aunt Laura's birthday is today, and she's coming up from the city





for dinner at my house.” He has to work tonight until 8:00.

He glances at me. “Are you sure it’s okay?”

What he really wants to know is whether it’s okay with my mom. There’s always an undeniable chill in the air whenever Matt and Mom are in the same room together. I have no idea why Mom is so cool toward Matt. She’s always great with my other friends, but she’s different with Matt. I asked her about it once, but she acted like she didn’t know what I was talking about. My father rescued her. “Ali, of course your mother likes Matt. We both do,” he’d said. Mom stood there, nodding like a maniac with a smile frozen on her face, but I saw the truth. My dad likes Matt. My mother tolerates him—barely.

“Sure. My mom said to invite you,” I say, which is not even remotely true.

“Okay,” he says. “I’ll try.”

But I know he won’t. He hardly ever stops by when he knows my mother’ll be there. We’re quiet for a few minutes, and then I remember that Matt had a meeting with his guidance counselor today. “How’d it go with Meyers?”

Almost everyone I know is applying to Illinois universities, except for Matt. His number one choice is Pratt Institute, which is in New York. He likes it for two reasons. One, it has the best fine arts program in the country. And two, he thinks he can get a full scholarship there. I know how important it is for him to get the scholarship at Pratt. Matt’s parents earn a decent living, but they have five kids to put through college, so they’re strongly encouraging him to apply for scholarship money.

“He thinks my chances of getting a big scholarship are good,” Matt says.

“That’s great,” I say, even though I don’t want to think about next year.

Before Matt and I started dating, my number one choice was Northwestern because it’s nearby and has an excellent journalism program. But it’s more than 800 miles away from Pratt. Last

week, I told my mother I also want to apply to Columbia and NYU because they're both in New York. From Columbia, Pratt's only 45 minutes away by subway, and NYU is even closer. Matt and I could see each other a lot, and probably every weekend. My mother had said, "You've always had your heart set on Northwestern, Ali. I don't think you should apply to schools just because they're close to Pratt." But when I pointed out that Columbia and NYU both have strong journalism programs, it was hard for her to argue.

"Okay," she'd finally said. "Go ahead and apply, but I expect you to apply to Northwestern also, the way you've always planned."

Matt pulls over to the side of the street, a couple of houses away from mine, and puts the car in park. He draws me close and kisses me—lightly at first, but then his arms tighten, and the kiss gets hard and deep. Before I leave, I almost tell him my period's late, but I don't want to worry him. I did skip school during lunch to buy a pregnancy kit, which I jammed into my backpack before the clerk had time to put it in a bag for me. It's still there, underneath a copy of *Macbeth* and two spiral notebooks. I'll take the test, find out for sure it's negative, and then stop worrying about it. It has to be negative. I'll be graduating in the spring, and the future is full of endless possibilities. There's college, travel, a job in Chicago, a fabulous apartment, and who knows what else? Only one thing is certain: Matt. All futures include Matt.

I've lived at 207 Camden Street for most of my life. It's your basic, traditional two-story house with shutters and looks like every other house on the street. When people come over the first time, they're usually surprised to see how contemporary it looks inside. Most of the furniture is modern and in neutral colors, but there are a few traditional pieces, and the walls are covered with bright watercolors that my mom picks up at art festivals. And every room is filled with pottery, sculptures, and hand-painted wood boxes—pieces that you'd never think to put together in the same house—but somehow it all works and everyone always com-





ments on how great everything looks.

My mom, Kate Parker, is on the kitchen phone when I walk in the back door. Everyone says I look like my mother. We're both 5' 4" and have fine features and the same blue-green eyes, but our hair is different. Mine is long, dark blonde, and turns lighter in the summer. Mom's hair is the same color, but she keeps it short and highlights it now to cover the gray.

"You're home early," I say when she hangs up.

"I wanted to get a head start on dinner, and the plumber's supposed to stop by to fix the faucet. I didn't know if you'd be home in time to let him in."

"Oh." I lean against the counter and watch her squeeze lime juice into a bowl. A bag of groceries is on the counter, and next to the bowl are limes, a bottle of rosemary-mint shampoo, and raw chicken. Sometimes, I don't want to know what she's concocting, but today, I can't help myself. The shampoo makes me nervous. "What are you making?"

"Lime-pepper marinade . . . for chicken. But I got you tofu."

"Thanks," I say, grabbing a can of pop from the refrigerator. I gave up meat this summer after watching a documentary on how animals are butchered. It grossed me out, and now my mother is abnormally preoccupied with protein. She thinks I'm not getting enough of it.

She hands me the shampoo. "For you," she says. (*Thank God it's not part of the marinade.*)

"Oh, yeah," I say. "I invited Matt to stop by after work." I hold my breath, waiting for her reaction.

My mother doesn't bother to look up. She shakes some salt into the marinade and says, "Oh," as if it's the worst idea she's ever heard.

"What time is he coming by?"

"He gets off at 8:00."

She nods distractedly, as if she's completely absorbed by the

recipe on the counter. I head upstairs to my room before she can say anything else.



It's no use—I can't focus. I'm sitting at my desk, homework piled high, but all I can think about is the pregnancy kit still in my backpack.

It was easy to forget about on the drive home with Matt. But if I allowed myself, I could easily have a mini-breakdown right now. Fortunately, Monica bursts into my room and saves me.

"I hate my life," Monica announces as she flops down on the bed. This is our daily ritual. After school, either I go to Monica's house or Monica comes here to complain and decompress.

Monica is a drama queen. I think she should major in drama next year in college, but she's not interested. Monica is always changing her look, too. Today, she's wearing moccasins, a tie-dyed shirt-skirt combo, and hair beads. I've heard what the girls at school say about her. They think she's a flake. But the truth is, Monica is the most grounded person I know.

"What's up?" I ask, knowing this latest drama probably has something to do with her new stepdad. Monica's mom remarried over the summer. Steve Marsac seems like the typical friendly, balding, overamped stepfather. I actually like him—he was a relief after the string of losers Monica's mom dated the past three years—but Monica despises him. She's suspicious of anyone who tries too hard to win her over. I think she should give her stepdad a chance, but out of loyalty, I keep my thoughts to myself.

"First," she says, "Steve has decided to play guidance counselor and wants to spend this weekend going over college brochures with me. And second, Kyle is coming home for the weekend, which means every night will be family night in my mother's ongoing quest to turn us into one cohesive family." Monica rolls onto her back and groans at the ceiling. "You're so *lucky* your





parents aren't divorced."

"What's wrong with Kyle?" I ask. He's Monica's new stepbrother. He'd been living with his mom in California until a month ago. I met him briefly at the wedding this summer. He has a great body and nice teeth. Monica usually goes for guys like that, but he is her stepbrother, and like me, she's never had to deal with a sibling. This year, Kyle's a freshman at Northwestern, so he'll be spending occasional weekends at Monica's house.

"Oh, *pleeeeee*. For one, he's constantly bragging about how he's making it with all these college women, which I don't believe for a minute. Two, he thinks my outfits are goofy, so he assumes I'm incapable of a complete thought. Three . . . never mind." She takes a deep breath and exhales loudly. "I saw Niles today . . . with Robin Evans."

Niles Sherman is a friend of Matt. They met this summer when Niles got a job working for the same construction company as Matt. They started hanging out together, which is how Niles and Monica hooked up. Niles is wild and different and reckless. He always talks about parties he goes to where the cops show up, and about the road trips he takes. And he drives like a maniac. His driver's license was suspended last month after he got a speeding ticket for going 95 mph. He still drives anyway.

When Monica first met Niles, she was fascinated with him, but Niles isn't the sort of guy who stays with one girl for long. This summer, he would unexpectedly show up at Monica's house, but he never knocked on the front door. Instead, he'd throw a pebble at her window to get her attention. She'd sneak out of the house, and they'd go driving around.

But that all changed when school started. Now, suddenly, Niles and Robin Evans are always together. I know it bothers Monica, though she pretends it doesn't. Monica is usually the first to move on in a relationship, but this time Niles is the one who called it quits. He's stopped showing up at her house.

Monica shrugs. "It's not like I liked him that much anyway,"

she says. “Besides, I want to go out with someone older and more experienced and—”

“Experienced?”

“You know . . .” Monica makes a “V” sign with her fingers. “I think I’m the only one in our class. I definitely don’t want to start college that way.”

“That’s a *great* reason,” I say, sarcastically.

“Well, not everyone can be going out with Mr. Perfect, Ali.”

I roll my eyes.

“See, you can’t even deny it because you know it’s true.”

It *is* true. Actually, Monica introduced me to Matt, which is amazing when you think about it. Monica is really beautiful, with long dark hair and a perfect body. Most guys fall for her immediately, but Matt seems completely oblivious to her. He’s never shown any interest in her at all other than being her friend. Matt started going to our high school last February when his family moved here from Ohio. It might have been tragic for most people, moving in the middle of high school like that, but Matt had two things going for him. A) He was tall and gorgeous. B) He was new, so everyone was intrigued.

The cheerleaders swarmed him immediately. Sarah Vogel (head cheerleader, queen bee) followed him around like a puppy for weeks, introducing him to all the cheerleaders and the rest of her entourage. The jocks liked him because he was a natural athlete, but he was no threat to them because he wasn’t interested in joining a team. But it didn’t look like he fit it in with that crowd of cheerleaders and jocks, and he was just as likely to eat with the science geeks or the math nerds or even someone like me, which is how I met him.

He and Monica had been in the same P.E. class. One day at lunch, he set his tray on our table and asked Monica if he could join us. He was wearing a black t-shirt—it had a peace sign on the front—and a baseball cap, which he wore backwards. He had straight dark hair and deep blue eyes that reminded me of the





ocean after a storm. At first, I thought he was interested in Monica, because most guys usually are, but he kept watching me all through lunch and asking me questions—even Monica noticed. A week later, he gave me a ride home from school and asked if he could sketch me for his advanced art class. They were doing portraits, and he said I had an interesting face. I didn't know if that was good or bad, but I liked the way I felt whenever he looked at me.

He sketched me the next day after school, and then he started looking for me every day at lunch. My life began to revolve around lunch period. I noticed, for instance, that he never drank pop ("toxic," he said), and he favored t-shirts that bore some message like "Save the Rainforests," "Recycle," or "Think Peace." Suddenly, the world seemed brighter, and I knew I was starting to fall for him. I loved how I felt when I was with him. I had never felt this way before. Then, one day between classes, he was waiting for me by my locker.

"You like me," he said.

"What makes you think that?"

"Because of this." And just as the warning bell rang, he leaned in and kissed me, fast, before I could react.

A week later, we were driving around in his car, talking and laughing and listening to the radio under a bright blue sky. I showed him the way to Willow Lake. We took off our shoes and walked along the water's edge, just playing around, when he put his arms around me and pulled me close. He kissed me and smoothed my hair. I closed my eyes and felt it for the first time—that rush you feel when you're with someone you really care about. I kissed him back, and I felt different somehow, as if I'd crossed some threshold, as if he was about to lead me somewhere new.

Before, with other guys, I was always happy with kissing and holding hands, but for the first time ever, I found myself wanting more. The thing is, I never had a definite timeline. I wanted to take my time, not have it happen in some mad rush or in the

backseat of a car with some random guy. The other reason I waited was because, frankly, there was no one I even wanted to go there with. When I lost my virginity, I wanted it to be meaningful. I've heard how some of the guys talk about the girls they've been with, rating each of them on a scale of one to ten. Then they laugh among themselves about some of the girls. I don't even want to imagine what the guys say about those girls.

I knew Matt had experience, and he knew I was a virgin because he had asked. We took it slowly because I wasn't ready. The truth is, I was scared. Then, on June twenty-first, the first day of summer, we went to Willow Lake with Monica and Niles. We played volleyball for a while, and Monica took some pictures. After lunch, Monica and Niles took off, leaving me and Matt alone—swimming and laughing. The sky was wide and blue, and the sun was shining. We were in the center of the lake's shallow end, splashing and playing around, when he got serious.

"There's something I've been meaning to tell you," he said.

I thought he was goofing around, so I splashed him. "What?" I asked.

He took my hand and pulled me close. "I'm being serious here." He smelled like suntan lotion and lake water.

"Okay," I said. "Me, too."

"I love you," he said—just like that. And the way he looked at me, I knew he wasn't kidding around.

I didn't say it back right away, even though I wanted to, even though I'd been thinking the same thing for weeks. My throat closed and I got tears in my eyes, and I hoped he knew I felt the same way. Later, when the sky was turning orange and red, he said he wanted to be alone with me, and I knew why. We went for a walk, bringing a blanket with us. We found a place by a tree, far away from the rest of the world. We were lying there on the ground, fooling around like we had been lately, but this time I didn't want him to stop. We kept going, and it felt so good. I couldn't get close enough to him. I couldn't say why exactly.





Maybe it was the color of the sky or the way he asked if I was really sure. But I was seventeen years old, I loved him, and I knew I was ready. We had known each other exactly three months and 21 days.

Afterwards, I said, "I love you, too."

"I know," he said and pulled me close.

I can't imagine doing something that intimate with someone I didn't love. I'm glad I waited, and I'm glad it was with Matt. But I know some girls will casually hook up with any guy, and I hope Monica doesn't become one of them just to get the experience.

I look at Monica, who's still sprawled on my bed. "Do you have a *timeline* now?" I ask. "Don't be in such a hurry," I add, thinking about the pregnancy kit in my backpack. "Mon . . ." I almost tell her I'm late. After all, she's my best friend. "What?"

I shake my head. "Nothing."

Monica glances at the alarm clock on my nightstand. "I gotta go. I promised my mom I'd be home half an hour ago. Did you remember to bring home your notes?"

"Yeah. They're in my backpack." The phone on my desk rings, so I pick it up. Last year, I begged my parents for my own private line. They vetoed the idea, but at least they ran an extension into my room. "Hello?"

Monica mumbles something to me, but the connection is so bad I turn my back to her and use a finger to plug my other ear. "Hello?" I say again. Whoever it is must be calling from a cell phone. Through all the static, all I can make out is that it's the plumber. He promises to call right back. I hang up and am about to get my notes on *Macbeth*, but Monica is already rummaging through my backpack.

"Monica . . . wait," I say, trying to sound more casual than I feel. But it's too late. Monica is holding the pregnancy kit.

"Oh, my God . . . Ali? Are you . . . ?"