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Gothic Literature Period 1

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Metamorphosis

A monarch butterfly, sun reflecting off its glossy wings, alighted on a blade of grass by the lake. Emily smiled. It was by all accounts a perfect day; the sun was shining amongst the few wisps of cirrus clouds in the cerulean blue sky, mallard ducks were lazily drifting across the water, and Emily had just received her acceptance letter from Trinity High School not but an hour ago. She stretched out her hand, and the butterfly fluttered away, tickling her fingers as it went.

Emily had dreamed of going to the most prestigious school in the area for the past few months, egged on by her sometimes overbearing parents. Dr. James Archer, a nationally acclaimed neurosurgeon at the local La Vida Medical Center, worked long hours and often arrived home just as Emily was about to go to bed, or occasionally not at all. When he did, his method of tucking her into bed was always the same: Switch off the ceiling light, adjust the covers, and leave with the parting words, “I'm counting on you, caterpie. Good night.” Emily would fall asleep every night wondering what he meant. While Emily wished she could spend more time with her father, her mother, Mrs. Elizabeth Archer, never seemed to leave her side. Mrs. Archer was a nurse in a previous life, but ever since Emily was born she sacrificed her career to raise her only child. During her elementary school years her mother was a constant presence, whether it be cooking her meals, picking her up from school, or sending her to her daily violin lessons. Emily was as happy as one can be.

Face pressed against her car window, Emily stared out at the looming brick walls of Trinity High School. A baby cougar's face stared back from a newly draped banner, billowing in the light gale. Emily wiped off the mist that had gathered on the window to get a better look. “Welcome Cubs!” the banner proudly displayed. Despite her apprehension, Emily rolled her eyes. How classic. She read the introductory email for the thousandth time: “Meet by the flagpole in front of the building between Mariposa and Polilla Streets.” As her mother pulled up by the curb and the corners of the buildings receded, the true majesty of the horde of newly minted Cougars was revealed. Groups of students were milling about, absorbed in conversation. There was a sweatshirt stand plopped down next to the flagpole, barely visible behind eager hands and nervous faces. A lanky Hispanic boy arrived on a hot pink skateboard, immediately attracting many of those around him. He obliged his admirers with a flip, drawing cheers and applause. “Sweetheart, I don't have all day.” Emily jerked back to reality, banging her head on the car roof as she did so. Her mom reached across and kissed her on the cheek. “Go show them what you're made of.” Emily reluctantly clambered out of the car, went to the trunk to pick up her backpack, and managed a stroll down the cobblestone tiled walkway leading to the flagpole. “Hey elephant!” Emily glanced up from the ground in surprise, and started to look around for the animal. Instead she found the the Hispanic boy and his crew tramping toward her and laughing. The boy stuck out his hand and jeered, “You wanna give some of that blubber to me?” Emily, by this time quite afraid and even more self conscious than she had been, was speechless. Luckily, at that very moment the speakers blared to welcome the students into the school, and the students rapidly dissipated from the courtyard. “Talk later, elephant. By the way, the name is Jorge.”

From that day onward, Emily was never given room to breathe. It seemed that wherever she went Jorge and his friends hounded her, calling her names and disrespecting her as a person. While Emily was mostly outgoing during her elementary school years, she became a shell of herself, trying to hide and blend in as much as she could. She stopped eating for days at a time and started wearing excessive amounts of makeup to school. Her grades dropped. Her mother, knowing something was very wrong, finally got out of her that Jorge was the root of the problem. When Mrs. Archer called a meeting with the school counselor, however, she was told Jorge's parents both recently had died in a car accident, so he was going through hard times. Emily herself assured her mom she had gotten the situation under control. Her eating habits improved, but her grades remained at an all time low. Tutoring didn't seem to help; Emily's tutor complained she never paid any attention during sessions. Nothing appeared to work.

Emily couldn't wait for senior year and the promise of escaping the misery she was in. Her parents started nagging her about starting college applications, but Emily was just satisfied to get out of high school. She haphazardly applied to numerous schools, not knowing anything about them. The school year went by in a flash. Then March hit. One by one colleges notified her: “We are very sorry...” Emily couldn't believe it at first, became angry as several went by, and sunk into depression at the end.

They found her by the lake, lying as if asleep. Upon approaching the body, they found a tiger moth perched on one of the buttons of her jacket. The moth cocked its head, seemingly in acknowledgement, and flitted away into the dusk.

Artist's Statement

When I first started writing this story I had some idea about critiquing college applications and how ridiculous they sometimes are. Yet simply writing about the application process seemed a little too shallow to me, so I wrote about Emily and her growth (or deterioration) over time. I included some elements of my own experiences in the story, such as some parts of the family structure (father being a doctor). If you didn't catch it already, there is a transformation, hence the title, from caterpillar to moth. I thought metamorphosis was a really interesting topic to approach because a caterpillar can either end up as a butterfly or a moth. This draws a parallel with high school as a time of growth and transformation for a lot of people. There is also a critique of bullying in the story, but I didn't really develop it that much. If given more time I would have developed the other characters of the story a bit more, such as Jorge, Emily's parents, or some of her friends. I hope you enjoyed!