

Lyn Stevens  
Butterfly House

Amanda was in the living room feeding the caterpillars leaves soaked in sugar water when her phone rang. Late afternoon sunlight spilled through the open window throwing thin shadows from the 5 netted cages and lacy patterns of the monarch's wings on the wall. After the call she had to focus on simple tasks, zipping the butterfly cages, closing the blinds, putting her car keys in her bag, walking down the block, one foot in front of the other.

Her nail tore on the car door handle but didn't snap. Buckle your seatbelt, she said to herself. Put on some lipstick. Pale, not red. Your 16 year-old son and his friend have just been arrested for armed robbery. Find a peppermint in the glove compartment. Don't sit there like a zombie. Drive to Manhattan.

By the time she stepped through the glass doors of the 6th police precinct the news had spread inside her like venom. She charged up to the mammoth front desk. "I'm here about my son, Logan Hayes."

"Have a seat. Someone will be with you shortly," said the female officer, without making eye contact.

BB guns. An actual holdup. No more plastic deep-sea divers floating in *my* bathtub. Bedtime stories and homework help were also relics of the past.

"Please have a seat," the policewoman said, more sharply.

She turned to the row of dull blue plastic chairs. A petite woman in a floral-patterned headscarf sat stiffly in one of them – Adil's mother. Amanda couldn't remember her name. She walked over and sat down.

"What is this? What happened to my boy?" said Adil's mother.

"They didn't tell me. We should know pretty soon," Amanda said, nervously.

Policemen milled around, their belts heavy with guns and clubs. A beefy man in a turtleneck and badge approached her.

"You here for Hayes?"

Amanda jumped up. “I’m his mother. Is he OK? Can I see him?”

“I don’t know yet, Mrs. Hayes. That’s not up to me. Here are his things,” said the officer handing her keys, a phone, a broken headset, MetroCard and student ID.

“Please, can I see him?” she asked.

“Detective Perez will be down shortly. He’ll explain everything. Please sit down, ma’am.”

Then he walked over to Adil’s mother and she too leapt up. “Someone called me to come here. What is going on?” she said in a quivering voice.

Amanda looked down into her hands at Logan’s treasures and immediately tucked the keys into her bag. One of the headset batteries was missing. She tried reattaching the back of the earpiece into place but it wouldn’t snap shut. She reached back into her bag and slid the pocketknife and mini gold-plated can opener off his key ring, sickened by finding this arsenal of weapons in her own possessions.

When the detective had told Amanda about the fake guns on the phone, she’d acted shocked and outraged but the truth was she’d seen them several months before. Apparently, her ex-husband, Bobby had ordered the fake guns for Logan from a catalog along with a dartboard. Amanda told Logan she never wanted to see those guns again and stormed out of his room, too naive to realize her son had begun his descent into manhood.

She’d been worrying the torn nail for an hour when another policeman, Detective Perez, lumbered over. Amada bolted to a stand. “Please, have a seat,” he said pulling up a chair and straddling it backwards. He was a short pear-shaped man. His scalp shined through his oily black hair. His bright white shirt pulled across his belly, the armpits stained yellow.

“Your son and his friend held a couple of kids up at gunpoint. The victims were smart enough to call 911.”

“But the gun was a fake.”

“If he had pulled that gun on me, I would have shot your boy.”

She looked down at her hands and yanked off the nail.

Perez told Amanda that Logan had waived his rights and confessed to everything.

“Waived his rights?” she breathed. “He’s a kid. He was scared. He probably didn’t understand what waiving rights meant. He would have said anything. Without a lawyer being there I don’t think you even have a case.”

Perez leaned forward, looked her squarely in the eye and lowered his voice. “I understand this is hard. It happens with teenagers. They turn. I see it all the time. Look, I have kids of my own.”

“I need to see him! Please.”

“I’ll give you a few minutes with your boy. You seem like a nice enough lady.”

Pompous ass, thought Amanda. I am a *very* nice lady.

Amanda was led up a musty back staircase to a small office with black file cabinets, a gray steel desk, papers strewn everywhere. Since the phone call, she’d been saving everything for this moment.

Logan straggled in through another door escorted by a uniformed cop. The shame, the rage, the fear, it all slid away. Amanda lunged and hugged him, stunned as always at the hardness of his sinewy muscles, his arms locked behind his back, hands in cuffs. It wasn’t until they both carefully sat down opposite each other that she actually looked at Logan. He wore baggy sweatpants and a white T-shirt with pink and black lettering that said “Jessica’s Bat Mitzvah, Mar. 5, 2017.” The shirt hung to his knees. He had on his neon green Adidas.

“How are you? Are you OK?”

“I’m fine,” he muttered with his chin on his chest.

“Look at me, Logan,” said Amanda. How could you have held someone up? She thought. “I don’t understand what happened.” He raised his glassy brown eyes and stared right through her.

“Say something. Did they give you anything to eat or drink?”

“I’m OK,” he mumbled.

Perez must have taken a seat behind the desk. Amanda couldn’t see him and wouldn’t look but she could feel him watching her.

“Do you have a bed? Did you eat?”

“They gave us bologna sandwiches and water. No bed. I’m fine, Mom.”

“Did you do what they’re saying?”

“I don’t know,” he mumbled again. It had been his default answer for the last several years.

“How could you not know? What were you doing with a gun? Were you on drugs?”

“No.”

“Were you drinking? Is that it? Was this Adil’s idea or did you two plan it together?”

“No. Noo.” He was starting to whine.

It was all jumbled together, trying to understand what had happened, trying to interpret Logan’s reaction to her questions and to the mess he’d made. “I don’t understand it.”

Logan shrugged. “How are the butterflies?”

“Is this what you’re asking me? Now? Why on earth would you leave the house with a BB gun? Tell me Logan. Whatever it is, you can tell me.”

“The guns were fakes.” He cocked his head. “Anyway, I didn’t even know I had it,” he said coolly.

“What did you mean you didn’t know you had it?”

“I didn’t realize it was in my pocket.” She didn’t know if he was being stubborn, resigned, remorseful. She couldn’t tell if he was being brave, or a wise ass. She couldn’t understand what her own child’s face was telling her.

Suddenly panic stricken, Amanda froze with the realization that she shouldn’t be talking about it in front of the detective, not without a lawyer.

Logan shook his head from side to side.

“It’s okay. Don’t say anything.”

His eyes started to fill. “They took my basketball jacket.”

In the precinct lobby, Perez gave her a slip of paper with a phone number to call in the morning. He told her to go home. There was nothing more to do until the arraignment.

Amanda switched on the side table lamp and sank onto the couch. Her whole body clenched in a ball, heart pumping so loudly against her chest she felt it pulsate on her thighs. Could he really be a bad person? Or was he just a clueless teenager? What if he got sucked into the system? What if they sentenced him? Held him by the roots of his hair, turned him around, and threw him against the bars?

In the semi darkness a few butterflies fluttered between milkweed leaves. If she released them there'd be a chance some might make it to Mexico though others would die or be eaten. The flap on the smallest cage was still open. She forced herself to straighten up and zipped it up.

Stop thinking about it. Focus on something else. Something good. Focus on the butterflies. She thought of the summer Bobby's brother, Matt came down from Vermont and took care of them, even though Bobby had moved out of their house two months before. Matt was Logan's godfather, a soft-spoken science teacher whose hobby was painting the natural world. The best parts of Bobby. Logan liked him. They both did. They were both so needy.

One perfect summer day, ten years before, the three of them went for a walk along the shoulder of the highway. Amanda and Matt holding Logan's hands and swinging him in the air as they walked. They were near an off-ramp when Matt bent down to inspect some milkweed. "Hey, look," he'd said turning up the underside of the leaf to show them the eggs. "How would you like a house of butterflies?" he asked Logan. Logan smiled, blinking in the sunlight, unusually quiet and skeptical as only a young child could be. Amanda thought it would help him forget the screaming and fighting and pain of his family falling apart. And it did.

All that summer they collected Starbucks cups, cut big holes in the tops and attached netting. They watched caterpillars molt and

eat and rest and molt again, took turns putting leaves in, taking frass out. In the evening Amanda and Matt sat together on the back patio in the glow of a citronella, drinking white wine and philosophizing about the meaning of life while Logan sprawled on the sofa in the living room watching Nickelodeon. One night Matt confided in her that he was gay, something she'd already suspected. The family had no idea and he asked her to keep it secret in order not to destroy the tenuous relationship he had with his conservative family. If Logan stays as sensitive and instinctual as he is now, he'll figure it out on his own one day, he had said.

Her eyes drifted onto the clock on the TV. 2:12 am.

Bobby had been harsh with Logan, jealous of how she'd fawned over him, saw red anytime Logan disobeyed him. Backhanded him, more than a few times. But Bobby loved Logan too and Logan worshipped him, had a crying tantrum whenever Bobby went away overnight. Now Logan was convicted of armed robbery. *Bobby*. Shit. It was too late to call him.

Logan wasn't some poor boy, desperate for some cash and he wasn't a rich kid, seeking thrills. A B student, guard for his high school basketball team. The only white kid on the team. He was never bored going to museums with Matt and Amanda. He'd loved the dark passageway of the Cloisters, twirled in circles like a little dancer on a music box, spiraling down the Guggenheim. Came home with his gym clothes soaked in sweat, stood at the sink washing aphids off milkweed. How could that same boy have pointed a gun at someone? When did he make the transition? Was he a deviant or just incredibly immature? Was he covering up for his buddy, Adil?

4:28 AM. Amanda's thoughts still firing back and forth.

She thought of a different Adil and a different Logan. It had been Adil's 11<sup>th</sup> birthday party, a bumper season for butterflies and they'd brought over the cages to release the butterflies in Adil's backyard to make the party special for the kids. Had Matt been there? God, she was so tired. On the drive over little Philippine girls dressed in white princess clothes were out in droves. Adil's mother greeted them at the door in a silky blue headscarf. His father smoked

a fat cigar. Adil's family Sudanese, not Filipino, as she'd thought. The dry brown grass, a Carvel cake shaped like a basketball. Logan unzipped the cages and 30 or 40 butterflies soared into the sky. The kids went wild, jumping up and down, running around the yard, chasing the butterflies, tripping and falling and rolling around each other.

5:57am. The day began a dark dark grey. Out of the corner of her eye something twitched. Stiff necked, she hauled herself off the couch, looked up and saw two butterflies clinging to the living room ceiling. She shuffled to the window and using all her strength shoved it wide open. Rubbing her sore neck, she went to the kitchen to make a pot of coffee.

At 7 a.m., Amanda retrieved the slip of paper Perez had given her and called the NY County Court arraignment office. Around 11 am, when she finally reached a live person, they said it usually took 24 hours from the time of the arrest to the time of arraignment. Logan had been brought in at 6:00 pm the previous night. Amanda, Executive Assistant to the CEO of a software engineering firm, called in sick to work.

In the wet misty afternoon streetlights glared on the highway. Traffic snarled on the Queensboro Bridge. In the 10 minutes it took to punch and re-punch Bobby's number to make the connection, she thought of how he'd wanted to move them all to Orlando, a better place to sell real estate but she'd already guessed there was another woman. A fucking model. Still, her heart leapt with longing that there would be some camaraderie, some kind of deep understanding from Bobby. When he picked up, she choked back a sob, finally managing to get the words out and he told her to get a lawyer. "He's good kid. I'm sure it's just a mistake but I'll fly up in a day or two if you need me. Keep me posted."

"A day or two? Don't trouble yourself," she said and hung up.

As she drove, she counted money in her head. Her savings, two CDs, loans against her credit cards. Bobby's second cousin had married a federal judge. "He's a minor with no record. It could simply go away. I'll be available if you need me." From the lawyer

at her firm. “Bail could be set anywhere from \$10–50K. For such a serious crime they could deny it altogether.”

Amanda found a parking spot on a desolate side street in lower Manhattan. Her \$3.00 umbrella was a joke. She tilted it backward to see the street signs and was pummeled by rain.

The concrete pavement outside the courthouse was flooded. She ran on her tiptoes up the handicapped ramp on the side of the building. The puddle at the end of it was so huge she missed clearing it by a foot.

Inside Amanda pulled her phone from pocket and laid her shoulder bag on the security table. One of the guards took great pleasure in feeling her up with his metal detector, while the other poked through her bag.

She squeezed into line in the stuffy arraignment office. When she reached the scratched bubble filled plexi-glass window she told the man she wanted to see her son.

“Arrest number?” he said without lifting his eyes.

She shuffled through the papers in the outer pocket of her bag. “7123785,” she muttered, quickly shoving the scrap of paper back into her bag.

The man turned to look at his computer screen. He had droopy eyes, a face pitted with acne. Amanda imagined him sitting in someone’s basement smoking pot, listening to Pink Floyd.

“What’s that number again?” he said.

She sifted through the bag, found the scrap, stammered, read and re-read the number.

“Nope, not in the computer yet. Time of arrest?”

“6:00 p.m. last night,” said Amanda timidly.

He looked up at her. Whether it was her pretty face or her nipples jutting through her blouse and open raincoat hardly mattered. His face glimmered and visibly softened. He cleared his throat. “It usually takes 24 hours ma’am.”

“Is it ever less?” her voice pleading.

“Could be, but it’s been a busy night. By the time we’re done I bet we’ll have processed 300 arrests. Why don’t you go home, get



some rest. Come back later.” He handed her a slip of paper with a list of xeroxed numbers. “Here, you can call us.”

If he were to get assigned a docket number while she was back in Queens there was a chance she might miss his arraignment. Amanda wasn't going to let this goon see her cry. She looked down at the slip of paper. The telephone number had already been branded into her head.

Amanda's stomach growled. 3:42 p.m.. She couldn't remember the last time she'd eaten. A block away from the courthouse wedged between bail bond shops was a Pho restaurant. The place had a cloying hot oil odor, shrill music, a sticky tile floor. She sat down at an empty table. At her feet, a dead fly lay on its back. The first and only swallow of soup stuck in her throat. Amanda felt hot and sick, despite being drenched from the rain. She couldn't blot out how crazed and alone she felt so she texted Matt, keeping it vague. Teenage trouble she wrote, asking if Matt could come down for a visit. Matt texted back to say he was busy preparing for show in a gallery in Burlington. Wow! How exciting! Amanda wrote back pretending that was okay.

At 4:30 p.m. she ran back to the courthouse in the downpour. Before entering the building, she huddled beneath the shallow overhang and called Bobby's cousin, the federal judge. His wife answered and said he was in court.

“Why are you calling a judge? Sweetheart, a judge isn't a lawyer.”

“I'm sorry. I need to find a good lawyer to represent my son. Please, can you help me?”

“I'll try to get a message to him.”

Amanda wiped her face on her wet coat sleeve, combed her wet hair and traipsed into the courthouse to face the security guards and metal detectors again.

In the hallway, she scanned four sheets of paper taped to the wall with lists of names and docket numbers. By that time, she was an ice cube. She wandered the cavernous beige and brown marble hallways for an hour, sank with wobbly knees on a hard, brown bench. A woman strutted past her, hands and feet in cuffs, flanked

by police officers on both sides. An inmate dressed in a leather skirt barely covering her ass, black fishnets, see-through, low-cut blouse, brassy blonde hair. The woman jerked her arm away from one of the cops, swiveled on her lace-up high-heeled boots, and Amanda saw her face, the thin red lips, fake eyelashes as thick as fur, tears falling down her sallow cheeks. She knew that every minute of that women's life was a crisis. She called Bobby's cousin, the federal judge and left a message. She called the lawyer at her job but got his voice mail too. She needed a lawyer. Now.

It was 9:30 p.m. At 10:00 p.m. the court broke for dinner. At 1am they would stop processing arrests only to resume again at 6am. If Logan wasn't arraigned by midnight, he would spend his second night in jail and she'd have to wait until morning when it started all over again. Amanda laid her head on the bench and cried.

At midnight Logan's name appeared on the list. People were filing into one of two New York County Criminal Court arraignment rooms. And she had to go.

Amanda took a seat off to the side in the second row of benches. The stenographer was hugely pregnant, her skin, ashy. The court officer in the bright blue uniform slumped in his seat. Everywhere she looked someone had been beaten down by drudge work - legal aid lawyers sorting through stacks of information for clients they hadn't met, trying to bone up on the facts of a double homicide in minutes; uniformed guards escorting prisoners in and out of the holding cell, warning them not to turn around and face the room, while the judge, whose name plate said Edelstein, and looked as if she had presided over this courtroom for one hundred years, doled out bail decisions. When the third defendant took the stand Amanda approached the wooden gate that separated the courtroom from the spectators to talk to one of the legal aid lawyers, a pudgy young lady with kinky hair in a dowdy pants suit. Amanda bent down low.

"He's on the list. Logan. Logan Harris Hayes. He'll get seen tonight, won't he?" she whispered. The woman told Amanda there was no guarantee, but she would talk to the clerk to see if he would move Logan's papers to the top of the pile. "Asking for favors is

tricky. It can backfire. If he feels like he's being taken advantage of he can just as easily move the papers to the bottom of the pile."

"Please do everything you can," said Amanda, tears swimming in her eyes. Her clothes were damp, her feet soaked, skin prickly with cold and sweat, the smell of the courtroom moldy, men's cologne, and disinfectant. Armed felons, rapists, and drug dealers rolled through the courtroom.

Logan didn't see her immediately. He looked into the room in glazed astonishment, an insect caught in a spider's web. They pointed him to a bench on a side wall, in the way back of the courtroom. He sat far away from Adil. He turned, eyes darting madly around the room. A guard snapped at him and his head whipped back around.

The lawyer took him into a glass booth on the side of the room. The two of them began talking. Logan nodded, drew the lawyer pictures in the air with his fingers. When he finally saw her, he kept glancing up, his eyes asking if she still loved him. Part of Amanda wanted to reassure him, another part wanted to see Logan cry.

Both of the boys stood with their shirts tucked into their sweatpants, their hands laced together behind their backs, their heads dipped forward. The Legal Aid lawyers took turns quietly speaking to the judge. The judge shuffled through papers. "What is this, some kind of aberration? Why are these boys in criminal court? Are the parents here?"

"They are your honor," said one of the lawyers.

"Released on their own recognizance. Parents, don't let your sons out of the house. Lock up your boys!" she declared and banged her gavel.

Sunlight poured glorious and unheralded into their little house. The two butterflies were figurines on the ceiling. Come on, Amanda thought. Come out. Fly away. Escape. Now that the worry of jail time had vanished, a controlled anger filled the space. And guilt wrapped itself around Amanda's heart. Logan had shrugged off

his old identity. Both of them had. Amanda was tougher, less hungry for his love. They passed each other like adept blind people, careful not to bump into each other for when they did, they smashed head-on.

On Logan's second day back Amanda came home from work and saw him slink out of the bathroom with a towel around his waist. His wet hair had grown past his ears. There was a dark blonde stubble on his cheeks and chin, like a spreading stain. His ribs stuck out. She promised herself she'd make him chicken parmigiana, his favorite, to love him wholly again, but the promise felt false.

She picked up the phone and called Matt. She needed an intermediary, for Matt to be a balm again.

"Bobby told me. Why did you keep it from me?" Matt said.

"I know I can't punish him forever, but I can't forgive him either. I don't know how," said Amanda.

"Patience," said Matt.

After the arraignment they had converged in the hallway. Logan eyes were dark and sunken. Bruised skin beneath the bloodshot whites. He looked worse than the day before. Much worse. He hugged Amanda so fiercely it hurt. She sobbed loudly in front everyone, the Legal Aid lawyers, security guard, Adil and his parents. The lawyer told her that for a few weeks, he couldn't so much as spit on the street. "If Logan were 19 he could be locked up for years but the fact that he's 16 and has never been in trouble just might save him. I'm going for what's called a youthful offender. It'll help if we can get the DA on our side. Naturally, we have to get Logan's story straight. They'll be time for that after he's gotten a good night's sleep." She rambled on: grand jury indictment, discovery, hearings to suppress evidence. Amanda lost her at plea bargaining, sick of the damp and the soupy yellow light in the sinister hallway.

Amanda fought against the memory of it as she talked to Matt. "A butterfly is about to eclose," she told him. The chrysalis had spun a silk button and backflipped onto it. Its shell had turned from green to transparent, showing orange and black right through

it. They spoke for a while about butterflies and Amanda sank back into the warm comfort of friendship with Matt.

Matt told Amanda his show was opening in two weeks. Bobby was flying up for it. "Come or just send Logan on his own, if you don't want to be here with Bobby and his new Victoria Secret."

"He can't go anywhere. Not now!" cried Amanda.

"It'll be over someday. Everything will be back to normal. You'll see," said Matt.

Normal for Matt meant living a secret life. She and Logan lived in a tricky, intricately coded new world. Amanda told herself she wasn't going to settle for that. She would reach out to Adil's mother. She would fight to get her boy back, to understand who he was.

Two weeks later Logan stayed home sick from school. Spent the day in and out of the bathroom. He missed fall basketball tryouts, so she knew he was really under the weather. He still hadn't written the essay for the DA. She took the day off to feed him rice and bananas.

As dusk fell, they sat together on the couch. He opened a butterfly cage and gently took out a caterpillar the size of his pinkie finger. It trailed up the rigid blue-green vein of his forearm. He took a finger and petted its fuzzy length.

Amanda laughed out loud, a strange caustic laugh.

"What's so funny?" said Logan.

"Remember you used to call it, the poopie stage? Poopie instead of pupa." It's that innocence she wanted back but if that's where the love resided, then what?

"It was just supposed to be game," said Logan. "I didn't mean for anyone to get hurt."

"But the game became real," said Amanda.

"I didn't know that," said Logan. "But now I do. I know."

Amanda fought back tears. She bent her head and covered her eyes with hands.

“Hey look!” Logan cried, straightening up. “In the cage.” He nudged the caterpillar onto her lap and ran to get his phone to video the butterfly emerging.

Together they watched the chrysalis split out of its cuticle. The butterfly hung upside down on the netting, twisting back and forth, pumping blood from its abdomen into its wings to straighten them so they would dry out.

“It’ll be ready to fly in a few hours. We need to release it,” Logan said excitedly. “I’ll go put on clothes. He pranced towards his room.

“Wait for me!” he shouted naturally, as if it meant nothing at all.

THE END