The Butterflies
(A Short Story by Denise Ringo)

Twenty-four year old Clary Daniels stood in front of a mirror: in her hand she held a bouquet of pink roses, her bridal train flowing behind her gracefully. Her makeup was applied flawlessly, the golden eye shadow making her forest green eyes pop. Her golden blonde hair was done in a braided updo. Her dress was as pure and white as a dove, and she was a few inches higher due to the heels she wore on her feet. She looked gorgeous, though the thing that might have topped it all off was the citrine ring that rested on her ring finger. She looked down at it, sighing softly, and thinking of her husband-to-be: Rick Moore, the CEO of a multi-million dollar company, with good looks and a perfect smile. He was a saint, humble and generous with a lot of perseverance. How else could they have beaten Jennifer Aniston out of booking a spot at Bourne Mansion for their wedding? Everything was absolutely perfect.

Except for the weather of course.

Thunder boomed outside, so loud that Clary couldn’t help but flinch. It was almost as if the thunder was trying to warn her. At that instant, Clary would have run from that mansion as fast as her heels would take her if anyone objected. Despite the fact that she was wearing the perfect dress and marrying the perfect man, butterflies fluttered in her stomach and heart. She had been waiting for marriage her entire life, but now that it was here, she was both excited yet terrified and she didn’t know why. She just wanted to be sure she was ready to marry Rick.
It wasn’t that she didn’t love Rick, but her heart was jumping, and she assumed it was because of her friend, Nathan. A fist clenched around her heart as she remembered the last time they had conversed. Fire burned vibrantly in her eyes as she glared at him, disbelief flowing through her as she processed his harsh words. He stared her down with indifference, as if he didn’t just tell her that he refused to attend her wedding.

A fast rapping on the door knocked her out of her thoughts and she quickly looked over to it. She walked over to it, grabbing the knob and taking a deep breath and pulled it open. Before her stood Nathan, and she almost cried out with joy. He sucked in a breath, staring at how she was dressed, and his face twisted in disgust.

“What have they done to you, Clary?” he demanded, and all of the happiness that had flowed through her immediately evaporated. He wore a t-shirt, black jeans, and black combat boots stained with dirt, leaving tracks on the clean hallway.

“You’re not dressed for a wedding,” she said gently.

He shrugged, pushing past her into the room and looking around. “I’m not planning on staying. I just came here for a pick-up actually.” He looked back at her and studied her for a while before saying in an annoyed voice, “You’re not wearing your glasses.”

She looked away, suddenly feeling insecure. “No, my contacts came in a few days ago, and I decided to wear those instead of those humungous bifocals.” She giggled to lighten the tension, but he looked offended.

“At least you looked real wearing them.” He snapped. “Now you look like a Barbie doll. All they have to do is shove you in a box and put you on a shelf.”

She glared at him. “Did you come here to insult me, Nate?” Self-doubt flooded through her, as she had felt like a goddess when she looked in the mirror. “If you’re not here to apologize or even attend my wedding then you can just go.”
He scoffed. “And then will that make you happy, Clary?” She groaned and grabbed a makeup bag, flinging it at him, but he ducked, looking up at her with his eyes darkened. “Why are you even here?” She screamed. “I freaking swear to God, Nathan, you are not gonna ruin today for me!”

He opened his mouth to reply but the door opened, and in stood Rick. He was tall and muscular with warm brown skin, caring dark brown eyes, and full lips that were curved downward into a frown. He wore a black tux and a black bow tie, his hands shoved into his pockets. He looked at Clary and his eyes widened. He looked her up and down, utterly speechless and some of Clary’s confidence returned. He then looked at Nathan, and protectiveness passed into his eyes.

“Is everything okay in here, Clary?” He asked.

Nathan rolled his eyes. “Everything’s good. You can just hit the road.”

“This is my wedding,” Rick said in a steady voice, not losing his temper. Clary hoped he could stay that way, as Nathan was known to push people’s buttons until all they wanted to do was kick the crap out of him.

“That’s my Clary.” Nathan said in the same tone, though his fists were clenched and his foot was tapping impatiently. “I’ve known her longer than you have. I’ve loved her longer than you have.”

Clary was fuming. “How dare you? I’m not your Clary and you have some nerve to barge into my wedding and declare your love to me! What the hell is wrong with you, Nathan?”

“I’m the one you’re supposed to be with, not Chocolate Thunder!” He grabbed Clary by the arm fiercely and she immediately tried to pull away.
“Stop playing around, Nate. That’s starting to hurt.” No matter how hard she pulled, Nathan’s grip seemed to tighten. Who was this man? Who was this man who was treating her like an item, acting like a child and nothing like the man she desired more than light.

Rick yanked her arm out of Nathan’s grip and shoved him back. “I think it’s time that you go, Nathan,” he said with finality.

Nathan paused, and Clary could hear a tightly coiled string snapping. Nathan swung at Rick and hit him square on the jaw. Rick stumbled back and Nathan reached for Clary, but Rick caught his balance and flung himself at Nathan. The thunder boomed louder than ever, and as Clary watched the two throw blows at each other, she could hear the soft patter of rain on the roof.

Both men seemed to hear it too, and they stopped fighting. Rick looked down at Nathan, who now had a split lip and a bruise on his nose. Rick got off of him, seemingly horrified at what he had just done, and he looked at Clary, who was sullenly silent.

“I-I’m sorry,” Rick whispered under his breath. “I-I-I didn’t mean to do that.” She grabbed his hands and kissed him on the cheek.

“It’s fine.” She told him softly. Nathan scoffed and she whipped around to glare at him. “Why are you even still here, you arrogant prick?”

Nathan shrugged, “I told you...I was here for a pick-up.”

“What were you picking up? A life?” Clary snapped viciously.

He looked her up and down. “No...you.” He said simply, and Clary couldn’t help the blush rushing to her cheeks.

“Well you can’t have her.” Rick said sternly. “She doesn’t belong to you.”

“So what? She belongs to you?” Nathan asked mockingly. “Aww, that’s cute, you two belong to each other and all that lame crap.”
Rick shook his head. “Clary is her own person. She belongs to no one, and no one belongs to her.”

Clary's heart lightened at those words and she squeezed Rick’s hands. As she gazed into his eyes, the butterflies in her stomach weren’t there anymore. When she looked back at Nathan however, they returned, and she realized why.

“I love Rick, Nate.” She told him flatly. “I love you too but...I don’t think you and me are right for each other.”

“We’ve known each other for years.” Nathan objected angrily.

She let go of Rick’s hands. “You’re not ready for a relationship, Nathan. Here you are scaring me and treating me like I’m your property. Years of friendship, years of isolating yourself from the world have made you possessive over me. Do you really think I can be with someone like that?”

Suddenly Nathan’s lip began to quiver. “You have to. You have to.” She turned away from him. “I need you, Clary Daniels. I can’t give you a fancy ring or a fancy wedding like Scrooge McDuck but I can give you love, which should be enough.”

“You’re not listening to me,” she said in an exasperated tone. “No, Nathan. The answer is no. You don’t know what a relationship is, but I do.”

Nathan stared at them, brokenheartedly, and it was the last expression Clary saw on his face before she visited his apartment two weeks later, helping him down from the ceiling fan. Honestly, she had never felt so relieved as the butterflies flew away.