

## Wings

By Michael C. Daconta

### CHAPTER 1 - The Confrontation

As a golden sun pierced the dawn and glistened on the fresh dew, a speckled Monarch Butterfly stood upon its hind legs while speaking to his son, "We've just about run out of time Craig! When are you going to buckle down and take on some responsibility? You should be a lot fatter than you are right now! Why you are practically skin and bones!"

Craig caterpillar blinked and remained silent.

Carl Butterfly continued, exasperated, "why you choose to climb treetops and risk getting hurt I will never understand! What do you gain by risking your neck? Why can't you spend your time on things that will secure your future and keep you warm, safe and fed! You know that a caterpillar is just a stage in the life of a butterfly. Your goal right now should be to eat as many green leaves as possible to insure your metamorphosis!"

Craig arched his hairy back so far over that he could see his hind legs.

"Craig what are you -"

Craig stretched further, placed his forelegs, and flipped his lower half up and over his body to complete a spectacular, slow-motion, caterpillar back-flip! Hysterical shouts and praise showered down upon him from an imaginary crowd of insects watching the young caterpillar ...

"Craig! Stop fooling around and pay attention!" Carl

roared.

Craig shrugged, then whined, "you have told me the same things a hundred times! Don't tell me - I know the next part...

metamorphosis class ... loop the silk around me to secure my chrysalis ... pick my site carefully and close by others for protection... over and over again. I know all that already!"

Carl slowly counted to ten in his mind before continuing, "just hearing words is not listening Craig. I am not saying this to bore you but because you do not seem to care about what I am saying. You are the right age for metamorphosis but I worry that you may not be ready inside here!" Carl poked his son in the temple, "that is where the real changes must take place. Your body is just a tool for your mind. If your mind is messed up, your actions are sure to follow. Now tell me where you will attach yourself for metamorphosis. I want to be-"

Craig pounced on his forelegs in frustration, "when are you going to treat me like an adult! I am so sick and tired of you nitpicking every little thing that I do! I wouldn't let you watch me build my chrysalis if you were the last butterfly on the planet!"

Tears trailed down his cheeks, "You try to make me believe that this is so difficult when my friends all graduated to butterflies last week! You don't trust me to do it by myself. You don't want me to be able to do it. The funny thing is that you can't stop me. I learned in school that the first law of nature is that everyone is born

with special gifts. That means that I will get my wings whether you like it or not! I was born to be a butterfly and nobody can stop me! Especially not you! I know you would just love to keep me as your little boy forever!"

Craig about-faced and slinked off of the leaf and down the plant stem. Carl fluttered down in front of his son, raising his hand to halt the boy, "Wait a minute! I don't want to keep you as a little boy. I just wanted to make sure you got off to a good start."

Carl shook his head and chuckled, "you know, I've seen you do some silly things, like jumping from tree branches with a leaf strapped to your back! And what about floating down the stream on a tree branch? Can't you see that I'm just looking out for your safety?"

Craig stood tall on his hind legs to try and match his fathers height, "No Dad, I don't want to be safe! I want to be daring and reckless! I don't want to waste my time eating leaves when there are whole worlds to explore and things to see! I'm going full tilt in everything I do!"

"You can't do that! Life is not some game where you can make up the rules as you go along! You must accomplish things slowly and in the right order." Carl gripped Craig's shoulders to emphasize his point.

Craig tore away, "Get your hands off me! You already -"  
The backhand was swift and jerked Craig's head to the left!

A silence swept over both of them as Craig quivered with rage trying to hold back his tears.

Carl stared at his hands in disbelief as he thought -

*What did I do? How did I let myself lose control like that?  
Sometimes that boy just makes me so angry ...*

*He stopped his reverie to call after his son; but it was too late because Craig had merged into the stems and stalks beneath him. How stupid of me to let him run off! I must find him and watch over him until he emerges safe from his chrysalis! Carl flitted off the leaf into the air in a graceful arch. I must find Craig! Why would he do this now? He never ran away from me before! He never would have stomped off in anger! What crazy dreams are making him act like this?*

## CHAPTER 2 - Runaway

Craig drove himself hard away, determined to put as much ground as possible between him and "it". This was his final break and he vowed never to go back! So many nights he gazed upon a field of stars and dreamed of soaring into the night. Many times he would awake believing he had wings. Wings! Wings would bring him freedom from the drudgery of his slow-moving same-old-place existence! The world was open to him with wings! On those magical nights when he soared through a clear sky, the magic would linger with him throughout the next day like a strong bouquet of roses.

He strode for over an hour before he grew weary and rested, panting, under the bough of a fern. He decided to stop for a while and enjoy some of the morning. He leaned against the stalk of the fern, pulled a leaf over and watched the morning sun paint the waving grasses gold. *What a pretty morning! Soon I will see this from a whole different perspective! How much better it will look from up high!* Craig considered staying right in this spot until the metamorphosis "urge" rumbled through him. The "urge" was an uncontrollable tremor that ran through a caterpillar signaling the onset of metamorphosis. Many times he listened to mothers compare the "urge" to the beginning of childbirth. Some of the elders broached the subject in

terms of a religious experience, while others brushed the subject aside as common place and trivial.

Craig remembered the words he yelled at his father, "Everybody is born with special gifts ... I was born to be a butterfly and nobody can stop me!"

Those words had erupted from him like a geyser from a part of him that he had never seen before. The words shocked him because he had never given any thought to the subject of what gifts he may or may not possess. *What are my gifts? What is special about me? What do I add to the world?* Craig did not know the answer as he listened to the sounds of the woods around him. Somewhere crickets sang, a bird called out to his mate, and the wind rustled the leaves and stirred the grass. As he waited, the sun shifted and sent a slither of sunlight angling across his face and he enjoyed the warmth. As he closed his eyes and felt the sun ray tingle his skin, he suddenly knew what his gift was. He had the ability to be unfettered and absolutely free. Time did not drive him, he marched to his own rhythm. Food would not force him to forage, he would go hungry for a spell. Friends could not pressure him nor could his family ever own him. He delighted in doing things his own way even if that meant falling on his face every once in a while. It was a luxury to him that he savored as his own secret treasure. It was an enduring and subtle thing. Maybe that was why the need for wings burned in him so strong. Wings would put the final touches on his freedom and grant him title to soar! Craig smiled at the endless worlds he would explore with his wings!

### CHAPTER 3 - Clyde and Claude

After a good stretch of time in which the shadows lengthened, Craig moved out in a rather chipper mood. He decided to call on a few friends to share in his "coming out." He traveled through the tall wheat-colored grass until he came upon a narrow, well-trodden trail. He knew this trail well as it was the marching trail for a colony of ants whose hill was over the next rise.

Before he could enter the path, the thrum of song stopped him. It was a deep, hearty song from the mouths of workers,

"HI HOOOO! OUR WORK IS NEVER SLOOOOW!

HI HEY! OUR WORK IS JUST LIKE PLAY!

HUT, TWO, THREE, FOUR!"

(The foreman's voice bellowed)

"LET ME HEAR LOT'S MORE!"

"HI HOOOO! OUR WORK ..."

A company of ants marched past him two by two. Each ant carried a bread crumb or morsel of food on his back. Craig watched the synchronization of the troops' legs in awe. The unison of the sea of crossing legs was mesmerizing. The last two ants in line halted when they spotted Craig.

Clyde ant waggled his antennas and trilled, "Good

afternoon, Craig! Is this the big day!"

Claude ant piped in, "Big day, big deal. Are you even ready for it?"

Craig did not like Claude much, but he and Clyde were brothers and never separated, " I'm as ready as I'll ever be!"

Claude snorted, "Harumph! I doubt that! You don't sound very convincing. How have you prepared? Have you reconned the area? Posted guards? Tested the branches for strength and wind blockage? Any good soldier does these things!"

Clyde, as always, came to Craig's defense, "Stop being a mother hen Claude! Craig knows what he has to do."

"Oh sure! If he follows you he will really be in a fix!" Claude gestured wildly, "I've seen pupas wash away, blow away, dry-up, split in two, and be smashed apart by a man-child with a stick!"

Craig mumbled, "you sound like my father."

Claude scoffed, "Ha! I wouldn't take the job. Running around, chasing someone who does not want to listen! Someone who doesn't have the faintest idea what he is doing! Your father must be quite a nurse maid always wiping your snively little nose!"

"You shut up about my father or I'll -"

Clyde stepped in between them, "come now you two. Hold up here. I'm sorry Craig. You know that Claude never misses an opportunity to step up on his soap-box!"

Craig shook his head, "forget it, it doesn't matter."

Claude countered firmly, "like heck it doesn't matter!"



You think you have plenty of time to learn the important lessons of life? Well you don't! Time marches on whether you learn its lessons or not! Before you know it you are old and tired, wondering how life passed you by! But it didn't! Every day the answers came by and knocked on your door but you said 'go away I'm looking for answers.' So the answers go away shaking their heads." Claude waited for Craig to reply.

Craig simply shrugged.

Claude's voice softened a bit, "Craig, you may think I am being hard on you but I've seen too many young boys follow down your same path. Hurling towards the new and exciting while leaving behind all the wisdom and knowledge of a thousand generations. It takes a lot of discipline to balance the desire for excitement with the patience of learning and preparation."

In the pause of silence, the "worker's song" lilted back to them causing the ants to jump. Clyde blurted, "we must get going Craig. Would you like to join our picnic?"

Craig smile and shook his head, "No, I'm going to recon my pupa site, clean it up and stand guard!"

Claude snorted and marched off. Clyde waggled his antennas good bye and followed.

Craig slinked off in a foul mood. He traveled with his head down for a while and did not even hear the buzzing until Bubble bumble-bee hovered before him.

"Congratulations!" Bubble buzzed.

Craig perked up, "Hi, Bubble! How are things at the hive?"

"Oh, busy, busy, busy. Two new extensions started yesterday. And there is always the constant task of pollinating, you know. Enough about work, tell me, what's the buzz? Are you nervous?"

"Nervous? Me? Heck no. Haven't thought about it much until today. In fact, all this talk about it is becoming stale. I wish it was done with already."

Bubble buzzed loudly in excitement and performed a quick barrel-roll.

"My sentiments exactly! Too much talk and not enough action! Well, let's just do something about that! Would you like to see what flying is like?"

"What? You can do that?"

"Sure, sure. Don't flatter yourself. Your not that heavy. You're as bad as those goofy humans. I overheard this big oaf telling his friend how bumble bees shouldn't really be able to fly because our body weight was too heavy for our tiny wings to lift. HA! He even thought we were just too simple-minded to know any better! It just goes to show you who the simple ones really are! While humans worry about what they can't do, us bees concentrate on doing just what we want to do! Silly humans."

Craig could not contain himself, "that's exactly the way I think! I always figure I can do anything that I set my mind to!"

"Yep, there really is honey in the hive, you just have to search through enough combs to find it! Ready to take off?"

"Ready Captain!"

Bubble clasped Craig about the waist and slowly lumbered off the ground. Craig smiled as a sense of wonder crawled through him as he lifted away from the muddy, trampled ground. As the grasses, bushes and trees shrank to miniature replicas of themselves, Craig achieved a new perspective on the world. He now felt in command of something that formerly commanded him. He looked down on things that had towered over him. Everything was wonderfully swaying to an inner music as they floated on the wind! And all the time, the buzzing of wings was beautiful and deafening to his ears. They tore through the air as if being yanked by an invisible wire. The wind buffeted them with hundreds of soft blows and slaps; but through it all, the beating of wings continually came back to Craig as the source of all this magnificence. They were being propelled through space, hurtling through a forest, with a speed that awed Craig. He had heard some of the elder butterflies talk of human machines that thundered across the sky and he wished he could see one of those winged machines right now. Craig grinned foolishly as he thought that humans can not be that bad if they invent powerful winged machines! *"Soon I too will have wings"* he repeated to himself, over and over,

until it sounded like the beat of a drum: wings, wings, wings, wings, wings, wings ...

The strange duo of bee and caterpillar zipped over the trees, dove under a telephone wire, and zig-zagged between the pine trees. Bumble was straining with the extra weight but happy to hear the joyous exclamations of his friend. All of Ashberry Downs forest was sprawled beneath them, so he dove down to get a better look. Craig marveled at everything, "look at that Cardinal!"

"See, that is a human boy! A boy!"

"There is another butterfly! Look at the beautiful yellow spots on her wings!"

Suddenly and without warning, Bubble jinked sharply downward. They just barely slipped underneath a large spider web stretched between the branches of an old oak tree. This sudden maneuver caused Bubble to almost lose his grip on Craig so he landed immediately.

Bubble was about to explain what happened but Craig interrupted with thanks and praise for taking him on such a wonderful trip. Bubble smiled at his friend who he had never seen so excited before. Craig could not contain himself and babbled on about the puffy clouds, the whistling wind and the bright sun. Then, with a curt goodbye, Craig announced that the urge to metamorphose was upon him so he must be off.

## CHAPTER 5 - Head In the Clouds

Craig could not escape from the powerful visions of the sky that swirled in his mind. He never wanted to forget the feeling of wind buffeting his face and sun teaming in his eyes. Soon they would be his again! He climbed the nearest tree as his thoughts stayed in the clouds. He slinked around to the underside of a branch and hurriedly spun a silk belt to fasten himself to the branch. Soon, very soon, he would be back in his beloved sky!

Carl flew low frantically searching for his son. His head flitted to and fro straining to scan as much terrain as possible. *How do you spot a pupa in a forest? That is a tougher challenge than the needle in the haystack! At least a needle shines!* Carl shook his head to disperse the cobwebs of doubt. His wife whined all day and night since he told her what happened. Every once in a while she would break into hysterical crying and carrying on about the dangers of metamorphosis alone. Carl felt utterly sick with guilt before he told her, and her sharp questions just reinforced it. Though Carl was not a religious bug, he prayed to whatever God there was to give him a sign of hope.

Days past and Craig lay still in a deep sleep within his dark chrysalis. The transformation started with jolts of electrochemical energy surging throughout his body. These eery electrical charges were combined with crackling noises of stretching and splitting skin. Even in the deep state of coma Craig felt his wing stubs form on his back. He would gladly take any pain this transformation dealt him to finally get his wings!

CHAPTER 8 - The Search continues...

The search for Craig had expanded. Carl finally realized that he would not be able to find Craig by himself. He needed help, a lot of it. He first asked Clyde and Claude. After a "hmmrph" from Claude, they readily joined the search. Carl also asked his many butterfly friends and they also signed up for the long and difficult task. After several days of blind searching without any progress, Carl's wife, Christine, announced that she would take control of the search. She gathered all of the helpers and assigned each sectors on a road map that the ants had taken from humans at a picnic. Christine marked on the road map with a charred stick from the remains of a campfire. She set in motion a methodical search of concentric circles around their home. Each day the circles grew larger and covered more territory. Each night the searchers returned exhausted. Not one of them complained. No insect ever turned down a request to find a mother's baby.

## Chapter 9 - Inside the Chrysalis...

Eight days passed and Craig regained full consciousness



within his dark chamber. His eyes quickly grew accustomed to the dark so he watched the changes that transformed his body. Legs sprouted like corn stalks at harvest. His insides changed too, with organs shifting and rearranging themselves. He felt like a jigsaw puzzle where someone decided to rearrange all of the pieces. He smiled as he thought about what the finished puzzle would look like!

#### Chapter 10 - The pace quickens...

The search accelerated into a frenzy as Craig's

gestation period neared its end. More numerous and varied species entered the fray: flies, wasps, mosquitoes, beetles, centipedes, and crickets. Even some of the kinder mammals helped in the search. Owls, bats, and mice scoured sectors assigned by Christine. Christine worked relentlessly and silently worried about Carl's health. He refused to sleep and ate hardly anything.

Carl flew fast and hard, racing against each rising morning. Each new day brought home his failure. He could not escape the weight of guilt for chasing his son away. He had been too hard on the boy and now he was paying for it. No rest could quench the pain, but activity seemed to dull it. So he flew and looked, that was all he could think to do.

The day finally arrived and Craig's chrysalis split open like an egg. Strands of golden sunlight slit into the blackness of the chrysalis. Somewhere a bird cawed and it sounded like a welcome back to the world. Foreign, strange and spindly hands reached out to spread open the split. Once apart, he thrust his body through the opening growing excited to test it out. He stepped out of the chrysalis with a feeling of amazement that he could now stand on legs! He shouted his excitement, "I'm a butterfly! I knew I would be one! I have wings! Wings ! This is so won-"

Craig's voice caught in his throat as he realized he could not move his foot. He desperately tried to lift it but he could not budge. He looked to the sky in angst as he beat his wings. He grunted and growled as he pounded the air violently, kicking up great gusts of wind. His eyes arched towards the sun, his arms outstretched to the sky groping upwards. Slowly, as his strength faded, Craig felt himself slipping as the tears began to well in his eyes. He screamed in a low gut-wrenching warble as he flopped down to the sticky webbing below him.

"You poor, poor little boy", came a slow, sweet voice from above him.

Bubble landed quietly before Christine not wishing to disturb her soft weeping. He bowed deeply and spoke with a soft, feathery gentleness, "May I speak to Carl - I had been away pollinating when I heard of your search."

Christine sighed deeply and nodded towards a crumpled figure behind her, "he has not spoken in days. He no longer eats. He has set his mind and may soon leave us."

Bubble spoke loudly so that Carl was sure to hear, "I may know where Craig is."

Carl stirred and lifted his head. Bubble continued, "on the day of his metamorphosis, I flew him over to Ashberry Downs where I nearly crashed into a spider's web-"

Christine gasped.

Carl struggled to his feet, and stepped forward. "Take me there now!"

Elvira, the black widow, poised herself a foot from her prey as her voice dripped forth like honey, "I watched you attach yourself to that tree limb. In your haste you failed to attach yourself correctly to the branch!"

She giggled to herself and stepped closer. "Spying an opportunity, I quickly spun my gorgeous web directly beneath that limb. So when the wind came, as it often does this time of year, you tumbled squarely into the center of my trap!"

Elvira patted down her hair and licked her lips. She always felt happy at times like these. "Now you are mine Craig. You need not worry about flying any more. Tisk, tisk ... and you never even had a chance to try your wings. Poor, poor baby."

Craig flushed with anger, "you witch! Why not go and take on someone your own size! Let me go and I promise to never return here again!"

Craig did not notice the smooth movements of Elvira as she crept closer. She kept talking to him but her words were so smooth and long that she was practically singing. "Oh, my poor sweet boy, of course you are angry. I heard you going on about special gifts and the first law of nature. Poor, poor boy, let me let you in on another one of nature's secrets."

Elvira walked within inches of her prey and coldly spat out her words, "there is another law of nature that goes like this -

Gifts you do not use, you lose! That which you do not fight for, you give away! That is what you have done! Life

is not a one way street with everyone following the herd! While your gift may be to fly, mine is to exploit your foolishness! They are competing goals that cannot stand together! One must fall! You do see this don't you? My poor sweet little boy..."

Craig shook terribly but could not break free. He pleaded for Elvira to let him go.

Elvira stopped and sadly shook her head. "I just lost my respect for you dear boy. You are obviously a poor loser. You must understand that it is nothing personal but mother nature is not a compassionate soul. After all, survival is something much stronger than compassion. When will you learn that it is not your birthright that is important but what you do with it! Success is not measured by who you are, but by what you have the potential to do! Too bad you will never learn this! Enough chatter - good bye my dear."

As she bent her fangs toward her prey, a great shriek erupted behind her that caused her to pause. She glanced upward to see a screeching butterfly in a steep dive towards her!

Elvira screamed and spun about as a needle jabbed into her soft back. She became confused when she did not see her attacker and swung around again only to see Carl standing stiffly before her. His white-spotted wings were spread wide to shield his son from her. Elvira could not see Bubble bee behind Carl tearing at the strands that held Craig!

Carl's voice sounded tired and old, "you may not take

my son, widow! He is not ready to meet the likes of you just yet! I am bringing him back to those who love him!"

Elvira chuckled and rubbed her forelegs together at the thought of eating two butterflies. She smiled sweetly and readied her hind legs to pounce!

"Stop and look up Widow!"

It was now Elvira's turn to gasp as she saw hundreds of butterflies of all shapes and sizes hovering around her web!

Carl's voice gained power, "If you move one step closer they will tear every support from this web and send you crashing to the ground below!"

"You little beast!"

Carl stood defiantly as Bubble tore away at the last strand around Craig.

Elvira was about to back down when she spotted Craig and Bubble fly up over Carl's outstretched wings!

Elvira leapt.

Seeing this, the horde of butterflies attacked the web!

Carl attempted to dodge the black widow but her fangs and front legs caught his left wing. He would have lost balance but he was grabbed from behind by Craig!

The battle pitched on as a tug of war erupted between Elvira and Craig as the butterflies gnawed and pulled at the corners of the web! Bubble led a daring charge into the side of the huge spider only to be swatted aside by a free leg. Other butterflies joined Craig in pulling Carl away as the web began to sag!

Elvira cursed and screamed as she swatted and grasped at anything she could have a chance at hitting. Meanwhile

she dug her fangs deeper into Carl's wing.

Suddenly the web collapsed and Carl screamed!

Craig, Bubble and Carl spun away as Elvira lost her grip!

The huge black spider tumbled downward clutching Carl's wing between her teeth as she crashed into a tree branch.

Craig held tightly to his father as he watch the spider thrash apart on a tree limb before hitting the ground dead. The swarm of butterflies dispersed as quickly as they assembled leaving Craig with his father.



Craig labored upward carrying his father beneath him. He sweat and strained as his arms burned in pain. Just when he thought he could no longer go on, a fresh wind current lifted him up.

Carl spoke softly, "go with it Craig, spread your wings as far as you can. That's it... you're doing it. Real good."

Craig bristled with pride and turned in the air current to test its strength. A wonderful sense of belonging swept over him and made him want to share it with the world!

"Father, I am sorry that I hurt you. I did not want it to happen!"

"I know Craig."

"I thought I wanted to be by myself but I was wrong. I never want to leave you or mother again!"

One more thought prodded Craig and he just had to say it - "Hey Dad, you really did want me to fly, didn't you!"

Now it was Carl's turn to smile with pride! He said in a choked voice, "You really made it Craig! You're all grown up now!" Carl laughed and Craig laughed and they both allow it to roll forth freely. They both felt very close.

The End.