



CHAPTER NINE

The Wings

“There is nothing in a caterpillar that tells you it's going to be a butterfly.” - R. Buckminster Fuller

Max sat on his bed in his apartment with his computer on his lap and a pillow behind his back. He was alone because his roommate had left for the summer.

He smiled to himself. “I love silence. Maybe I should leave all of this and be a Buddhist Monk somewhere far away.”

He also loved YouTube because it had such great content. After a click to the screen you could have Tony Robbins or Wayne Dyer on your screen giving some of the best talks in the world.

You also could research anything and everything. Music, Sports or even “how to fix a leaky faucet.”

A new thought hit him. He could probably assemble the best “playbook” in the world just using the internet.

He suddenly got an idea. He typed “leaving the cocoon” in the search box. In a flash, a video showed a butterfly battling through his cocoon.

The process was amazing to watch. It was like a video of a high-speed blooming of a flower. It seemed so natural and painless. He couldn't help but think, “Why can't I be that?” It's so...easy and elegant?

It was a delicate dance with nature, instead of a vicious and violent dog fight.”

He had read somewhere that humans were the only life form that was out of touch with its potential. A tree effortlessly draws life from its roots and pushes skyward to all it is supposed to be.

Even a dog knows what to do in its place on earth. It doesn't overthink things. A puppy doesn't have a program of goals and a list of things to do. It grows by reacting to things in the moment. And everything is a glorious game of fun.

Max loved dogs and he missed not being around them. Football and college had no room for such preoccupations.

Growing up Max had a dog named Blacky. He was his best friend. As a kid, Max would crawl into his doghouse and pet and talk to her for hours. She was his first coach and therapist.

Every spring, it seemed that Blacky would have an encounter with some male dog and produce a gorgeous litter of pups.

For Max, this was heaven on earth. He suddenly had a tribe of little bandits that he could name and talk to as he pressed them against his cheek.

Now returning from his daydream, Max looked down at the foot of his bed. Bee's battered briefcase sat near his feet, locked and secure but still within reach. He rubbed his hip area to confirm the key was still in his pocket.

Max picked up his cracked helmet and took off the lampshade from the lighted lamp, on the table next to his bed.

He replaced it with his helmet and to his surprise the light did indeed shine through.

Then, Max turned off the overhead light.

In the darkened room, only lit by the small crack in the helmet, he took out the flashlight Coach D gave him and started to point it at the dark ceiling.

It was as if he were scouring the ceiling, looking for the truth.

He took a deep breath. "Where are all the answers?"

Suddenly, Max got an idea. Maybe he should call home to talk to his mother. Sometimes moms have good answers.

He grabbed his phone and pounded out her phone number. He took another deep breath as he heard it ringing.

Finally, he heard her voice. "I have been thinking about you. Are you in trouble?"

Max smiled and thought to himself. "How do mothers always know?"

He quickly responded. "I'm good. I just have some big decisions to make."

His mom responded. "I know?"

For a long beat, silence filled the air. Finally, Beatrice spoke. "You want to quit, don't you?" Max nodded like she was in front of her.

"To tell you the truth, I never understood football and never will. As a mother you just want your kids to be safe. And I worry about you, Max." Her voice started to crack. "I know that's wrong and I should respect your dreams. But I still worry."

Max's eyes glistened with tears as his mom kept talking.

"I used to go through the same thing with your dad. He worked so hard every day breathing that carbon monoxide in the car dealership and smoking cigarettes. He would wake up in the morning at 5 a.m. to get to work at 7 and then stay till the doors closed at 9. Even on Saturday he would work at least 8 hours. I regularly told him he needed to slow down... he was a ticking time bomb, ready to explode. He already had a heart murmur for God's sake."

"After 30 years of this nagging, he finally looked at me, in a moment I will never forget. He said: 'I guess it was just a dream I have... of my kids having something bigger and better.'"

Max lifted his t-shirt collar and soaked up a flow of tears.

His mother continued. "I guess I finally understood. And every day, when I look at him in a wheelchair, I think. As a mother, I have lots of mistakes, but as a wife....at least I didn't stand in the way of his dream. And you know what Max? He achieved his dream. And deep down inside, I know he knows that too. All six of his kids have had great lives and created great careers, families and grandchildren...each live "bigger and better" in their own way."

Max couldn't help but ask, "Was its worth it

Ma?' There was a long silence.

Finally, Bea answered. "Of course."

'And after he passes and I am on my own, at least I know that the stroke didn't win. You and all my kids are living proof. It took away his health, but it didn't take away his dream." Max clicked off his flashlight and closed his eyes.

He felt the buzz again. It was the same feeling he had in the middle of the stadium a few days back. Only this time it moved from his head to his heart. Four words were his only thought. And so, he spoke them into his phone...

"I love you ma." Maxy... when me and your dad pass and are laid to rest in that little cemetery in Brown City...and you are this big NFL football star...you are still going to visit us, aren't you?

"Promise?" Mom's love promises.

"Promise!" Max smiled big. He could see it.