

## THE ART OF GROWING WINGS

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I always dreamed of the sea. Even of something beyond the sea.

This is the story of a butterfly who lived on an island where the king did not allow us to dream of the sea. It is a common story which many know but few people like to tell.

No one wants to hear about sad stories. But I do, because what you are about to hear is my own story. If I hadn't had such tiny wings, I would have flown high above the clouds, because rain comes from clouds and the rain can break my wings. My wings are made of many colours, and even though they may be fragile they are dusted with a mysterious powder so that no one will touch them. I think that everyone who has wings should take good care of them, because with broken wings it is not possible to fly far enough to reach [the place of] dreams.

I always said: "It is such a pity my wings are so small when the sea is so huge!"  
When the voyage is difficult and long it is important to have very good wings. When a storm comes and you only have one pair of wings, you must grow many more. My voyage was a peculiar one, and I had to use all the wings that cannot be seen, even the ones that sprout from the heart. I am one of those creatures who thinks that having wings is something like being free, or at least it is one way to get there.

Because I knew my journey would be a long one, I prepared myself well. In order to reach [the place of] dreams one must study and work every day and overcome all the things that hold us back, that tie us down, that weigh heavily on us, and are stones which get in our way on the path to freedom.

In the beginning my story was the saddest of stories, because on my island I was held prisoner. I was imprisoned behind bars for dreaming of the sea. I am sure that all of us like to travel and get to know other places, other customs, other cultures and the most famous cities in the [western] world: London, Paris, New York, Tokyo, Istanbul. We have wings for a reason. What good is it to grow or create wings if we are not even able to use them?

I really suffered when I was behind bars because of my wings: they yearned to fly. And do you know how I managed with this? Can you guess why I did not perish? Or exactly how I was able to escape?

Well, here is the secret: the more I was punished when they were trying to break my will, the more I dreamt of the sea. I would imagine that I was on a beach watching the waves of the sea wash back and forth. I would imagine the wind pushing a little sailboat far away, and I swear I even managed to smell the perfume of salt in the air, which is the perfume carried by waves when they break on the sand. And so I was able to resist so much suffering. That is why even when I was behind bars, I felt free; because thoughts have wings, and no king is able to keep thoughts behind bars. This is where the king actually made a big mistake, because he wanted all thoughts to be the same colour: red. And this is really like cutting off someone's wings. Flowers love their colours and live through them, and I live through flowers. Remember this: where an idea is born a flower blooms with it, and where there are wings there is always love.

That is why the king did not want anyone to leave the island, Cuba--that is the name of my island-- because he wanted no one to discover the truth; but I always dreamed of the sea, even further than the sea, because to me this word means discovery, knowledge, togetherness and friendship. After wings, the most perfect creation is the sea. I knew this, and behind bars I wrote down my dreams every day without the king's soldiers seeing me. I painted the sea, a sea that was sometimes blue like my wings, and sometimes grey like a dull mirror, which is the colour of imprisonment. That is how it feels to be locked up just for dreaming of the sea.

I really don't know how it happened. I think that without realising it I escaped through that same sea of many different waters that I had dreamed about and painted. Dreaming is like flying. It looks like I entered one of my seas and I came out of this painted sea here in front of you on the door The Salon at the Art Gellery of Ontario, where excellent painters are gathered. I did not know this because the king of my island, who is called Tyrant, says the sea is simply not allowed. This Salon is filled with ancient stories, and with artists who loved to create wings with their brushes, wings that exist in every painting even though some people cannot see them.

Artists also have wings. Look at John Hammond's "Bay of Fundy" with its silent boats on still waters; or look at Paul Peel's "Mother and Child", "The tired Model" and "Adoration." It seems like they are alive, as if they spoke to us in forms and colours. As you can see, artists can speak with these greatest of wings. I say that not because I myself am an artist but because I was a prisoner on my island, and because I learned that freedom is the most accomplished and beloved of arts. I love harmony and truth as much as I love flowers and this prosperous country. Everyone on my island, Cuba, sometimes dreamed of this place, a country so full of rivers, snow, lakes and sea, which are in the paintings in front of you. Take good care of all these things, and remember my story: It is the story of how to grow wings.

Come, follow me onto this path, because I want to talk to you about my island, Cuba, which is a country I love, a land where there are always flowers and sun, a place you can get to know and paint, a country where everyone knows the art of creation, of growing wings, even though a tyrant still won't allow us to dream of the sea.