

Daedalus and Icarus

By: Poet Publius Ovidius Naso

In mythological ancient Greece,
soaring above Crete on wings made from wax and feathers,
Icarus, the son of Daedalus, defied the laws of both man and nature.

Ignoring the warnings of his father, he rose higher and higher.

To witnesses on the ground, he looked like a god,
and as he peered down from above, he felt like one, too.

But, in mythological ancient Greece,
the line that separated god from man was absolute
and the punishment for mortals who attempted to cross it was severe.

Such was the case for Icarus and Daedalus.

Years before Icarus was born,
his father Daedalus was highly regarded as a genius inventor,
craftsman,

and sculptor in his homeland of Athens.

He invented carpentry and all the tools used for it.

He designed the first bathhouse
and the first dance floor.

He made sculptures so lifelike that Hercules mistook them for actual men.

Though skilled and celebrated, Daedalus was egotistical and jealous.

Worried that his nephew was a more skillful craftsman,

Daedalus murdered him.

As punishment, Daedalus was banished from Athens and made his way to Crete.

Preceded by his storied reputation,
Daedalus was welcomed with open arms by Crete's King Minos.

There, acting as the palace technical advisor,

Daedalus continued to push the boundaries.

For the king's children,

he made mechanically animated toys that seemed alive.

He invented the ship's sail and mast, which gave humans control over the wind.

With every creation, Daedalus challenged human limitations
that had so far kept mortals separate from gods,
until finally, he broke right through.

King Minos's wife, Pasiphaë, had been cursed by the god Poseidon
to fall in love with the king's prized bull.

Under this spell, she asked Daedalus to help her seduce it.

With characteristic audacity, he agreed.

Daedalus constructed a hollow wooden cow
so realistic that it fooled the bull.

With Pasiphaë hiding inside Daedalus's creation,
she conceived and gave birth to the half-human half-bull minotaur.



This, of course, enraged the king
who blamed Daedalus for enabling such a horrible perversion of natural law.

As punishment, Daedalus was forced to construct an inescapable labyrinth
beneath the palace for the minotaur.

When it was finished, Minos then imprisoned Daedalus
and his only son Icarus
within the top of the tallest tower on the island
where they were to remain for the rest of their lives.

But Daedalus was still a genius inventor.
While observing the birds that circled his prison,
the means for escape became clear.

He and Icarus would fly away from their prison
as only birds or gods could do.

Using feathers from the flocks that perched on the tower,
and the wax from candles,

Daedalus constructed two pairs of giant wings.

As he strapped the wings to his son Icarus,
he gave a warning:

flying too near the ocean would dampen the wings
and make them too heavy to use.

Flying too near the sun,
the heat would melt the wax and the wings would disintegrate.

In either case, they surely would die.

Therefore, the key to their escape would be in keeping to the middle.

With the instructions clear, both men leapt from the tower.

They were the first mortals ever to fly.

While Daedalus stayed carefully to the midway course,

Icarus was overwhelmed with the ecstasy of flight
and overcome with the feeling of divine power that came with it.

Daedalus could only watch in horror as Icarus ascended higher and higher,
powerless to change his son's dire fate.

When the heat from the sun melted the wax on his wings,
Icarus fell from the sky.

Just as Daedalus had many times ignored
the consequences of defying the natural laws of mortal men
in the service of his ego,
Icarus was also carried away by his own hubris.

In the end,
both men paid for their departure from the path of moderation dearly,
Icarus with his life
and Daedalus with his regret.

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