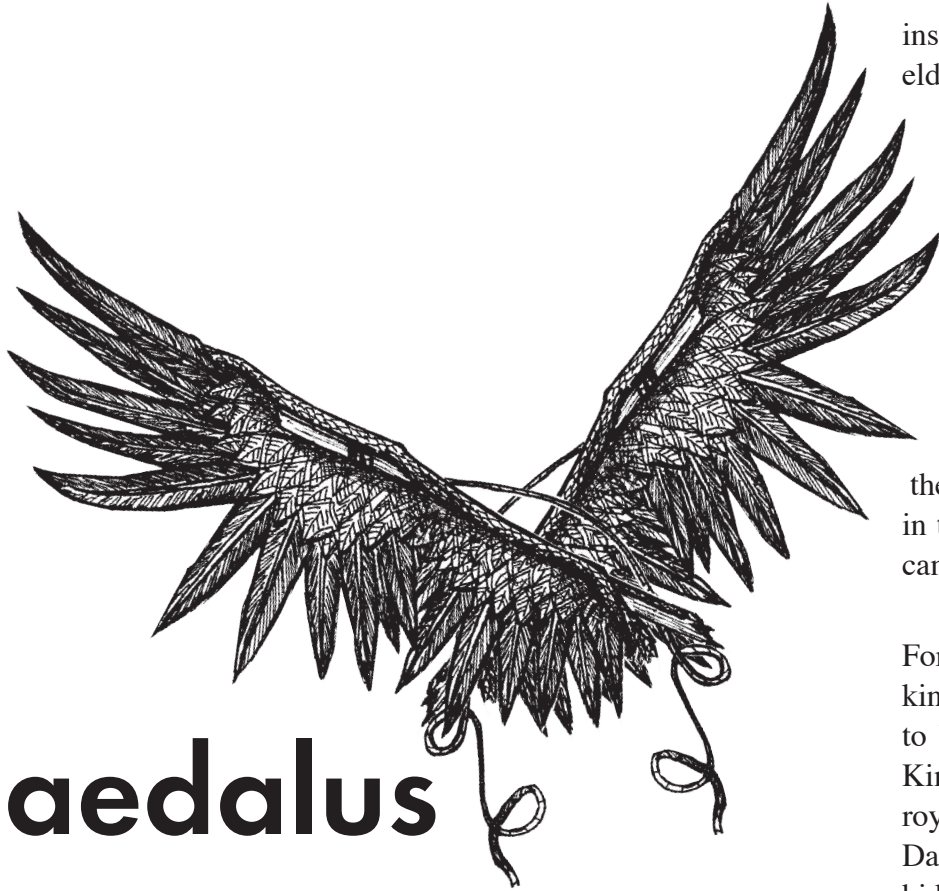


# Daedalus



Daedalus was the greatest inventor of his day. Not only as an architect was he great, but as a sculptor he had the creative power to not only carve people and animals that looked alive, but to cause them to move and to be, to all appearances, endowed with life. The artificers who followed owed to him the invention of the axe, the wedge, and the carpenter's level, and his restless mind was ever busy with new inventions. To his nephew, Perdix, he taught all that he himself knew of the mechanical arts.

Soon it seemed that the nephew might actually equal Daedalus in his inventive power. As he walked by the seashore, the lad picked up the spine of a fish, and, having pondered its possibilities, he took it home, imitated it in iron, and so invented the saw. The excited Perdix brought his fine invention to his uncle's workshop; instead of feeling joy and celebrating the invention, Daedalus realized that his young nephew was gifted with

inspiration that might grow to excel his own. This was too much for the elder man's jealous spirit.

A few days later, uncle and nephew stood together on the top of the Acropolis, and Daedalus, murderous thoughts bubbling up from the jealousy in his heart, pushed his nephew from behind, causing the boy to tumble from the precipice. Down, down he fell, knowing well that he was going to meet a cruel death, but Pallas Athena, protectress of all clever craftsmen, came to his rescue. By her will, Perdix was turned into the bird that still bears his name, and Daedalus beheld Perdix, the partridge, rapidly winging his way to the far-off fields. Since then, no partridge has ever built or roosted in a high place, but has nestled in the hedge-roots and amongst the standing corn, and as we mark it we can see that its flight is always low.

For his crime, Daedalus was banished from Athens. In the court of Minos, king of Crete, he found refuge. Offering the saw as a wondrous new tool to benefit the people of Crete, Daedalus immediately won the favor of King Minos and his royal family. Daedalus soon became a favorite of the royal daughters, Ariadne and Phaedra, who were mesmerized by the dolls Daedalus created for them because the wooden figures were built with hidden springs that allowed them to dance and wave and blink. Queen Pasiphae was also charmed by Daedalus' inventions, including a perfume container that played music when it was uncapped and a bejeweled mirror that allowed her to see the back of her head. She had never seen such clever trinkets and often lingered in Daedalus' workshop, hoping to learn more about the interesting inventor.

Over time, Daedalus and Queen Pasiphae became friends, gossiping and chatting away the afternoons. Pasiphae grew more and more curious about the events that led Daedalus to leave Athens, but he would always sidestep her questions, saying only that he had lost Athena's favor.

"Oh, all I ever hear from Minos is gods and goddesses, be reverent of the gods and goddesses," Pasiphae complained one afternoon. "I tell you, I am

sick of hearing such talk. Intelligent people like us know that *we* are the ones who create our successes, right? I'm so tired of giving the credit – and blame – to the gods.”

“Now, now,” Daedalus said, “please don't say such things, Pasiphae. The gods will hear you and be angered.”

“I'm baffled to hear such an intelligent man say such things,” she said. “A skilled craftsman like you is as talented as Hephaestus, are you not? And I am as beautiful as the mythical Aphrodite, don't you agree?”

Daedalus stood awkwardly, not wanted to offend the gods or his queen. Pasiphae continued, taking Daedalus' silence as agreement. “And love is the biggest lie of all. Aphrodite's power falls on us all, they say. Yet, here I am, a beautiful woman tied to a pompous king who loves only the sound of his own voice. This 'love' that people speak of is a falsehood. I've never felt it. And I never will.”

Daedalus consoled the queen and deftly changed the subject, distracting her from her misery with this newest invention, a gossamer-threaded parasol that opened on its own whenever it was touched by sunlight and closed on its own when placed in shadows. The conversation ended, but the damage had already been done. High upon Olympus, Aphrodite had heard everything and now Queen Pasiphae would be punished. She placed a spell over Pasiphae, making her fall madly in love with a prized white bull that King Minos kept on the royal grounds. Pasiphae was drawn to the bull by an inexplicable attraction and, in time, gave birth to a son who was half bull, half man. Upon learning of the monstrous child, citizens of Crete began calling the child by the name of “Minotaur,” meaning Minos' taurus, or bull.

The king was humiliated by his wife's infidelity and sought Daedalus' help in crafting a cruel punishment. Knowing that people will quickly forget about things they cannot see, he instructed Daedalus to build an intricate labyrinth which had only one opening and no end, but ever returned on

itself in hopeless intricacy. Minos then locked his wife and her child away in the complex maze. When the king learned that Daedalus had known of Pasiphae's affection for the bull and did nothing to stop it, he punished the inventor as well, locking him away in a prison tower; to double the punishment, Minos also imprisoned Daedalus' son, Icarus. But prison bars and locks did not exist that were strong enough to baffle this master craftsman, and from the tower in which they were shut, Daedalus and his son were not long in plotting their escape. Leaving the tower would be a mild challenge, but leaving the island itself was far more problematic. There were many places in that wild island where it would be easy for father and son to hide, but the subjects of Minos were mostly mariners, and Daedalus knew well that all along the shore they kept watch lest he should make a boat, hoist on it one of the sails of which he was part inventor, and speed away to safety like a sea-bird driven before the gale. Then did there come to Daedalus, the pioneer of inventions, the great idea that by his skill he might make a way for himself and his son through an element other than water. And he laughed aloud in his hiding place amongst the cypresses on the hillside at the thought of how he would baffle the simple sailors who watched each creek and beach down on the shore. Mockingly, too, did he think of King Minos, who had dared to pit his power against the wits and skill of Daedalus, the mightiest of craftsman.

Many a Cretan bird was sacrificed before Daedalus' task was accomplished. After bribing two guards, Daedalus was allowed to work in a shady forest near the tower, where he fashioned light wooden frames and decked them with feathers, until at length they looked like the pinions of a great eagle or of a swan that flaps its majestic way from lake to river. Each feather was adhered with wax, and the mechanism of the wings was so perfect a reproduction of an actual bird's wings, that on the first day he fastened them to his back and spread them out, Daedalus found that he could fly just as the birds flew. He made two pairs; the second pair was made for Icarus, and, circling round him like a mother bird that teaches her nestlings how to fly, Daedalus, his heart big with the pride of invention, showed Icarus how he might best soar upwards to the sun or dive down to the blue sea far below, and how he might conquer the winds and the air currents of the sky and make them his servants.

That was a joyous day for father and son, for the father had never before drunk deeper of the intoxicating wine of the gods – Success – and for the lad it was all pure joy. Never before had he known freedom and power so utterly glorious. As a little child, he had watched the birds fly far away over the blue hills to where the sun was setting and had longed for wings that he might follow them in their flight. At times, in his dreams, he had known the power, and in his dreaming he had risen from the cumbering earth and soared high above the trees and fields on strong wings that bore him away to the fair land of heart's desire – to the Islands of the Blessed. But upon awaking, the dreams silently slipped out before the coming of the light of day, and the boy sprang from his bed and eagerly spread his arms only to realize he could no longer fly. Disappointment and unsatisfied longing often came with those waking hours. Now all that had come to an end, and Daedalus was glad and proud as well to watch his son's joy and his fearless daring. One word of counsel only did he give.

“Beware, dear son of my heart,” he said, “lest in thy newfound power thou seekest to soar even to the gates of Olympus. For as surely as the scorching rays from the burnished wheels of the chariot of Apollo smite thy wings, the wax that binds thy feathers will melt, and then will come upon thee and on me woe unutterable.”

In his dreams that night, Icarus flew, and when he awoke, fearing to find only the haunting remembrance of a dream, he found his father ready to bind their willing shoulders with the great pinions that he had made.

Gentle Dawn with fingertips of rose was slowly making her way up from the East when Daedalus and Icarus began their flight. Slowly they went at first, and the goatherds who tended their flocks on the slopes of Mount Ida looked up in fear when they saw the dark shadows of monster-sized birds making their way out to sea. From the river beds, the waterfowl arose from the reeds and with great outcry flew with all their swiftness to escape them. And down by the seashore, the mariners' hearts sank within them as they

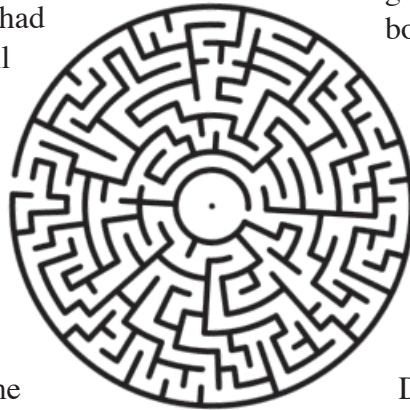
watched, believing that a sight so strange must be a portent of disaster. Homewards the mariners went in haste to offer sacrifices on the altars of Poseidon, ruler of the deep.

As the mighty wings of Icarus cleft the cold air, the boy's slim body grew chilled, and he longed for the sun's warming rays to turn the waters of the Aegean Sea from green-gray into sapphire and emerald and burning gold. Toward Sicily he and his father bent their course, and they saw the beautiful island lying far off like a gem in the sea, which Apollo had bathed in a gleaming light. With a cry of joy, Icarus marked the sun's rays as they painted the chill water, and Apollo looked down at the great white-winged bird, a snowy swan with the face and form of a beautiful

boy, who sped exulting onwards, while a clumsier thing with wings of darker hue followed a ways behind in the same line of flight. As the god looked, the warmth that radiated from his chariot touched the icy limbs of Icarus as with the caressing touch of gentle, life-giving hands. Not long before, his flight had lagged a little, but now it seemed as if new life was his. Like a bird that wheels and soars and dives as if for lightness of heart, so did Icarus, until each feather of his plumage had a sheen of silver and of gold.

Down, down, he darted, so near the water that the white-tipped waves almost caught at his wings as he skimmed over them. Then up, up, up he soared, ever higher, higher still, and when he saw the radiant sun-god smiling down on him, the warning of Daedalus was forgotten. As he had excelled other lads in foot races, now did Icarus wish to excel the birds themselves. Daedalus was left far behind, and still upwards he mounted. So strong he felt, so fearless was he, that to him it seemed that he could storm Olympus itself.

In terror, his father called to Icarus in anguished warning, but his voice was drowned by the whistling rush of the air currents. Powerless, he could do nothing but watch horror befall his son. The strong wings begun to lose their power. Like a wounded bird, Icarus fluttered, lunging sidewise from the straight, clean line of his flight, recovering himself, and then fluttering



again. And then, like the bird into whose soft breast the sure hand of a mighty archer has driven an arrow, downwards he fell, turning over and yet turning again, downwards, ever downwards, until he fell with a plunge into the sea that still was radiant in shining emerald and translucent blue.

Apollo's golden chariot drove on. His rays had slain one who was too greatly daring, and now they illuminated the little white feathers that had fallen from the broken wings and floated on the water like the petals of a torn flower.

The light shone on the dead, still face of Icarus, and the sunrays spangled the wet plumage that still buoyed his corpse upon the waves.

Stricken at heart, Daedalus had no time to lament his son's untimely end, for even now the black-prowed ships of Minos might be in pursuit. Onward he flew to safety, and in Sicily built a temple to Apollo, and there hung up his wings as a propitiatory offering to the god who had slain his son.

And when gray night came down on that part of the sea where Icarus met his demise, still there floated the body of the boy whose dreams had come true. For only a little while, he had known the exquisite realization of his dreams; for only a few moments, he'd tasted the sweetness of perfect pleasure and then, by an overdaring flight, had lost it all forever.

The sorrowing Nereids sang a dirge over him as he was swayed gently hither and thither by the tide, and when the silver stars came out from the dark firmament of heaven and were reflected in the blackness of the sea at night, it was as though a velvet pall, silver-decked in his honor, was spread around the slim white body with its outstretched snowy wings.

So much had he and his father dared, yet so little was accomplished.

