

## Little Bird

When Icarus was a boy, he used to watch his father in his workshop for hours. He would sit on the end of a bench and look in wonder as his father's broad hands moved swiftly with a skill he knew no other craftsman possessed. Time would pass rapidly as Icarus sat there, his father continually designing and creating, each new idea more intricate than the last.

Whilst he sat and watched, he would beg his father to teach him his trade, to let him use the tools he wielded with such ease. "One day, little bird", Daedalus would say, "when you are older and stronger like me". Icarus didn't think his father particularly old, though he didn't really have any point of comparison. He knew his father was strong though. His broad shoulders and large arms gave him the silhouette of a grand oak tree; his body its trunk, each arm a winding branch producing life at its tips.

Whenever a King or Queen wished for a new gift, they never came to him directly. The messenger boys they sent were only ever a few years older than Icarus himself. They were lean, and tall, and far more handsome than Icarus was. He often wondered if they had fathers like his. If they were able to sit in a silence with them that had no weight to it, only peace. He somehow doubted it.

One day, Daedalus received a request from a Queen for his presence. Icarus was ecstatic. He begged desperately for his father to let him accompany him on the long journey. "No, child", his father had said. The words burned a hole in the pit of Icarus' stomach. "I must make this journey alone. You are too young to accompany me.". Icarus chanted the phrase in his head. *Too young, Too young, Too young.* He loathed the way the words sounded, the way the shapes felt as he formed them with his lips. "Father, I don't understand you!", Icarus cried, "Every day I watch you in your workshop and every day I beg you to teach me to work as you do. But no matter what I say, you never accept my request. Instead, you repeat that awful phrase. That I am "too young". Why? What is it that you are afraid will happen to me?" A dark look had passed over Daedalus' face as his son spoke. "My boy, there is nothing I wish for more in this world than your safety. I would sacrifice all my skill if it meant I could protect you forever". Icarus looked into his father's dark eyes and saw his small image reflected in them. "You are a ray of sunshine that seeps through a sky full of clouds, Icarus. Please don't argue with me about this further." At this, Daedalus placed a calloused hand on his son's small shoulder. Icarus turned to face him, "Of course, father". Daedalus bent down and held his son close. Icarus felt warmth radiating off him and didn't push the matter further.

The next day, Daedalus set off for Crete, leaving Icarus alone. As much as he hated arguing with his father, being apart from him more pained him more. "Stay safe, father!", called Icarus. "I always am, little bird. Your light will guide me home."

Time passed slowly during Daedalus' absence. Icarus would sit impassively in his father's workshop and stare vacantly out the window for hours, fantasising about the birds that passed him by. He saw himself and his father in them, their swooping actions so steep he thought they were destined to fall out of the sky. Yet somehow, they never did.

After what felt like a lifetime, he returned. Icarus flew to meet his father, a thousand questions fluttering like a murmuration in his mind. He came to a halt after seeing a haunted look residing on his father's face. But as quickly as it had appeared, it was gone. His father told him how much he had missed him and gave him a small model of a wooden bird he had carved on the journey to Crete. Icarus marvelled at the creature; its wings so fragile he could easily break them with one touch. He caressed the smooth indents on its back with the tips of his fingers. He loved it more than any gift he had ever received. His father explained to him he had to immediately start work on his new project. Instinctively, Icarus followed him to his workshop but Daedalus stopped him. "I am sorry, child, but this work requires all of my concentration. I must be alone." Icarus felt his heart wrench. His father always let him sit in his workshop and watch him. What had changed? Icarus stood, resigned, as he watched Daedalus walk into the room he knew so well and shut the door behind him. There was a small snap and he realised one of the bird's wings had broken off in his hand.

After a few days of torment, Icarus became restless. Cautiously, he sneaked up to the doorway to look through the small crack where a key should have resided. But when he lowered his head to the gap, he saw what looked like a hollow replica of a cow. How odd, he thought, that a Queen should wish for such a thing. Perhaps she is passionate about cattle, he had heard stranger things.

Icarus had learned to not question his father's actions. He never brought up what he saw that day. And when a King then demanded his father construct a mysterious maze, he never thought anything of it. That was, until the soldiers came to their home.

Icarus had finally been allowed to take his usual place in his father's workshop again, when suddenly, there was a loud crash, and a group of soldiers burst into the room. They wove around the tables, tackling Icarus and his father to the floor. Icarus screamed for Daedalus, attempting to wrestle out of the soldier's grasp. He heard his father beg the men to let his son go, but they ignored him. Icarus began to cry. He saw the small broken bird as he was pulled from their home, and it seemed more fragile than ever. It made him cry harder.

Eventually his cries stopped, as did the soldiers grip on his arms. Icarus and his father had been taken to a tall tower and left alone. He couldn't rationalise why. The soldiers had mentioned a monster, how its location must never be revealed. He had no idea what they were talking about. He looked over at his father in the small room, and he had that haunted look on his face. But Icarus didn't question it.

As days passed, Icarus found himself frequently staring out the window of the tower. He missed feeling the heat of the sun on the skin. He was jealous of the birds, of their freedom. He missed watching them from his own window in his own house while he waited for his father's return. As one dived past the window, a feather fell from it. Icarus quickly reached out the window and grabbed it, almost falling in the process. He stroked the feather gently. It reminded him of the bird his father had made him. He turned to show it to him, and as he did so, saw a spark come into his father's eyes he recognised well. "Son, I think you are finally old enough to help me with a project. What do you think?"

It took weeks to catch enough feathers to fashion the wings Daedalus had designed and even longer to bind them together using the wax from a candle in the tower. Eventually, they formed two full sets of wings for each other to wear. It was a warm summer day when they made their escape, the sun shone brightly through the window and Icarus longed to feel its heat on his skin.

The pair slowly made their way to the ledge. Icarus fit his small hand into his father's, trying desperately not to become paralysed from fear. The horror would soon be over, he told himself. He looked up at his father and smiled. "Ready, Little Bird?"

They launched themselves from the window. And they were free.

Icarus soared through the sky, laughter bubbling up his throat as his father swooped around him. But the sun still felt so far away. If he got a bit closer, he would warm up. Icarus heard his father's voice become frantic below him. Don't worry, he tried to shout, only he couldn't get the words out. Why couldn't he get his words out? And why did the sun suddenly seem so distant?

As he fell, Icarus looked for his father. He felt the wind claw through his golden hair, a cacophony filled his ears.

"Little Bird!"

Then he was once again in a silence with no weight to it, only peace.

©KittyVolino