







THE FLYING PRISONER AND THE CRUEL SUN

A father and son's prison escape went horribly wrong yesterday when one of them fell to his death.

Daedalus, a construction industry contractor, had been locked up in the high-security Tower Prison together with his son, Icarus.

The Greek king had hired Daedalus to build the Maze Shopping Centre on Minos. The idea was to construct a mall that was so difficult to find one's way out of, shoppers would stay for hours and spend lots of money.

The scheme was a flop because shoppers managed to leave too easily, so the king threw Daedalus in jail. But he was not going to just sit behind bars and accept this punishment.

The Tower Prison is located on the island of Crete, surrounded by treacherous waters and patrolled by guards. In a diary he kept while imprisoned — a copy of which has been obtained — Daedalus wrote: "We can't escape by land or sea, but the king does not control the skies. We will escape that way."

His plan was to change the natural order of things and build wings for him and his young son, using the only materials he could find — feathers and wax, which he layered to imitate a bird's wing.

"I will improve on what nature has done," he wrote.

After testing the wings himself, he strapped them onto Icarus with this warning: "If you fly too low, your wings may get too wet from the sea and become weighed down. If you fly too high, the heat from the sun will melt them. So keep near me and be safe."

The next day, after they had put on their wings, he gave his son a tearful hug and a kiss, knowing the danger of what they were about to do.

Then he flew up and ahead, leading the way.

As they soared, local fishermen and farmers witnessed their doomed flight. "We thought they were gods," one shepherd said.

Icarus, however, got carried away with his new freedom.

In his excitement, he flew too close to the sun.

The heat softened the wax that held the feathers together and, one by one, they fell off.

The boy flapped his arms frantically but it was no use; he fell like a rock into the churning sea, never to be seen again.

Witnesses on the ground say they could hear Daedalus shouting: "Icarus, where are you?"

When he saw feathers in the water, he stopped shouting. Heartbroken, he flew on to the island of Sicily, where local officials say he has asked for permission to build a temple, so he can hang up his wings as an offering to the gods.

BACKGROUND

This is a story from the *Metamorphoses*, written in AD 8 by the Roman poet Ovid.

The *Metamorphoses* had a big impact on Western literature and art.

Hundreds of famous stories have been based on it, with great writers such as William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe and Dante looking to it for inspiration. It also fired the imaginations of painters and other artists.

In this particular story, Daedalus builds a labyrinth (a maze) for King Minos to hide an ugly half-bull, half-man creature the king's wife had given birth to. But the maze does not work - a man called Theseus finds the creature, kills it and runs away with the king's daughter. So the angry king imprisons Daedalus in a tower (in real life, Ovid also fell out of favour with a king and was sent to live in a remote place).

Icarus falling from the sky can be viewed as a warning against trying to be like the gods, or trying to change nature.

Ovid, whose full name was Publius Ovidius Naso, began writing poetry when he was about 20 years old, getting ideas for his work by observing life in the city of Rome.

FAB VOCAB

CONTRACTOR

A person or company providing materials or workmen for a job, usually to build something

A FLOP

An utter failure

BEHIND BARS

Another way of saying someone is in a prison cell

TREACHEROUS WATERS

A sea or river with hidden or unknown dangers

IMITATE

Copy

SOARED

Flew up or high in the sky

DOOMED

Marked for failure or death

CARRIED AWAY

Get too excited

FRANTICALLY

In a hurried, uncontrolled way, because of fear or some other feeling

HEARTBROKEN

Very hurt or disappointed

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