Icarus

from Dictionary of Classical Mythology

Son of the supreme inventor and craftsman DAEDALUS, borne to him by a slave-girl while he was living at the court of MINOS, king of Crete. When Theseus came to Crete to kill the Minotaur, Daedalus provided the thread that helped him to escape from the Labyrinth once the deed was done. This enraged Minos so much that he imprisoned Daedalus himself in the Labyrinth, and Icarus with him. But Minos’ wife Pasiphae released them, and Daedalus, brilliant inventor that he was, fashioned wings of wax and feathers in which he and his son could fly to freedom. While fitting these ingenious wings to Icarus, he gave him careful instructions on how to fly safely: he must keep midway between earth and heaven, neither too low, where the sea-spray might weigh down his wings, nor too high, where the flaming sun might scorch them. When they took off, Daedalus watched his son as anxiously as any parent bird its fledgeling.

At first all went well as they flew far out over the sea, but then Icarus was fatally overtaken by the joy of flying freely through the air. Forgetting his father's warnings, he let his wings lift him higher and higher and soared towards the sun. At last he came so close that the wax of his wings melted in the heat, the feathers parted and he plummeted headlong into the sea below, still calling for his father as the waters engulfed him. The stricken Daedalus retrieved his body and buried it on a nearby island, ever afterwards called Icaria, just as the sea was renamed the Icarian Sea in honour of the dead boy, and still bears his name.