

MODERN-DAY ICARUS

Grace Bawden

She is the sun.

Well, that much is obvious.

It shows in the way her smile seems to brighten my day. Lasting a sweet second, its dazzling light lingers with me. It shows in her laugh, although rare, that seems to light up the room and leaves me deliciously dizzy for more. It shows in her eyes. The shine as she gets excited about something, furiously gesturing. How they crinkle when she's suppressing a grin at something she should truly not be laughing at. At the very least, she's the centre of my universe.

But if she is my sun then I am her ill-fated Icarus.

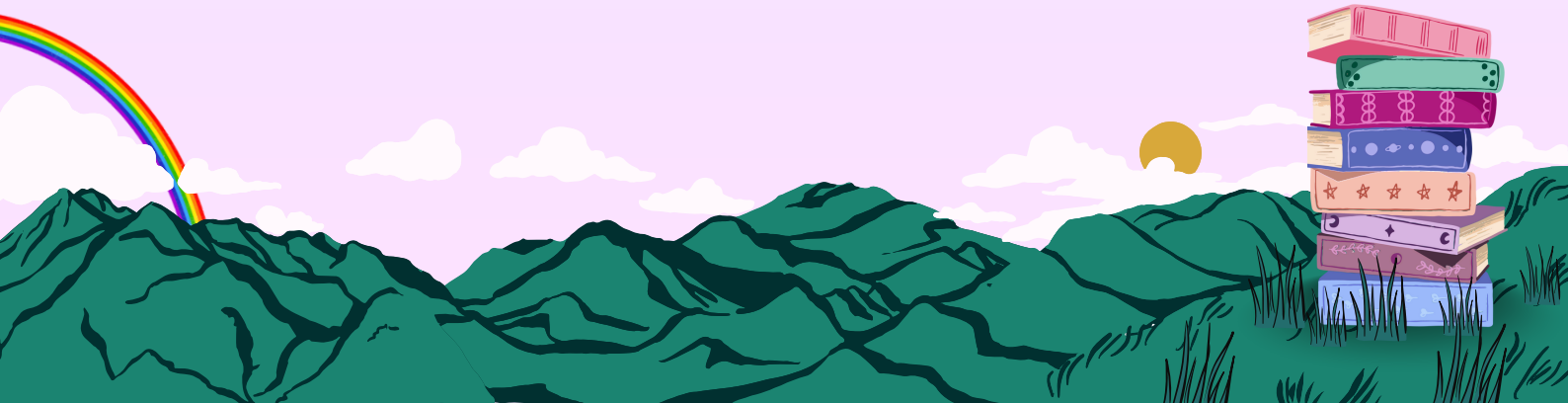
I have remained in the tower I have been banished to for years. My defences are something to be marvelled at. Walls of indifference and isolation. Sharp swords that gleam and bite, unintentionally driving away those who dare to get close, drawing blood from their souls. I sit above it all at the top of my tower, protected by a labyrinth of callousness.

She makes me want to abandon it all. For her, I'd strap on wings of wax and fly with no regard for anyone or anything, chasing her warmth and compassion. That is why I need to be more careful, build more walls and complicate my labyrinth.

I have not yet accepted there is no defence to the sight of her.

I respect her far too much.

That is why I do not say anything. It has nothing to do with my own alienation. My Daedalus, a few friends rather than an uncle, do not know either. They would be sympathetic. I expect nothing less. They would have solutions and ideas, their minds working together like a complex machine. I don't want to be judged even if I know they would not. She is special and I fear if I tell them, it will reach her. She doesn't need to be marred by my association.



This is why I do not say anything while they talk about their love life. I laugh and brush off any comments, my palms sweating as I just wait for them to figure me out. Wait for them to pick me apart, unscrew me and look at my robotic innards like a toy with a confusing ailment. Perhaps they already know. Perhaps I've already been opened up on the workbench, with small comments and observations instead of screwdrivers. Perhaps they've sewn me back up already, and I am none the wiser.

One of my friends gives me a look as we enter class. She sees what I feel, I know it. My Daedalus are locked inside of the tower with me, and my defences fail to stop them. They come and go as they wish, on wings that are surely not made of wax. It is my greatest envy. But in doing so, they scrutinise me in the most loving of ways. It is now I am on the workbench.

I try not to look at her. But she is the sun, and the sun demands attention. She smiles at me and my heart leaps into my throat, a bird trying to escape. Its wings pitter-patter madly against the confines of my oesophagus as I smile back. One of the Daedalus quirks an eyebrow.

I am not focused on my work at all. My pencil twirls in my hand absent-mindedly as I sneak glances at her through the curtain of my hair, and, as I do every time, I resist the irrational urge to gather feathers from the bird in my throat and begin to craft a pair of wings.

An escape I am not ready to enact.

Like the Icarus of old, I have a King Minos. My Minos has never been kind, has not housed me in its castle. It always has been against me, ready to push me back into the tower they have forced me to create. A fear lodged in my chest, my Minos takes the form of anxiety. It causes my head to spin and my breathing to quicken and my lungs to ache and my eyes to hurt and my skin to itch and my-

Breathe.

It is stoic as it elbows me back into my tower. It makes me as wobbly as a newborn giraffe, allowing my monarch to take charge. I worry about its repercussions if I leave my tower.



Mythos-Minos won in the end. I fear my Minos will do the same.

Minos is loud. Regrettably, the loud seems to be the ones so often heard. It yells and screams. It cusses and hisses, an expression of everything that could go wrong with the world. It feels as if it is trying to burst from my chest in an explosion of gore, my ribs shattering and my muscles contorting to make room for the growing evil. A king cannot be ignored.

My sun quiets Minos. It's unusual, really. I think it's to do with how she seems to fry my brain, my neurons no longer firing and the chemicals no longer communicating.

It's peaceful.

And so I sit quietly as she tells me of her passions. She could do whatever she wants to in the future. She has the drive and the ambition to do it, that's for sure. As I'm listening I'm battling with myself again. To make myself wings, to not. Do I want to know what lies beyond what I've known for years?

The butterflies in my stomach she causes are surely poisonous. Or psychedelics. How else would she leave me feeling so distracted and dazed, blinking like a little mole coming out of its molehill? She makes me feel so stupid.

She makes me feel so wonderful. I come to class again, the day on repeat like a broken record.

But it stops and starts anew. She sits beside me, greets me by name.

"How are you?"

"Oh! Uh, I'm good, thank you. How are you?"

"I'm fine. Look, I was wondering. . ."

And all of a sudden I have given in. I don my waxen wings, and I leap into the sky.

My fate is yet to be decided.

She is the sun, and I am Icarus. I may drown before I get close to her, but she is worth every drop of damned seawater that will fill my lungs as the currents drag me down, down, down.

