



*Greatest inventor of all time; Invents the wheel, the loom, and the plow, among other things*

## Daedalus - Day 1

1. THE GODS, BEING ALL-POWERFUL, needed a more subtle praise than obedience. They preferred their intention to become man's aspiration, their caprice, his law. Athene, in particular, liked to be served this way. The gray-eyed goddess of wisdom, whose sign was the owl, taught men the arts they needed to know, not through gross decree, but through firing the brightest spirits to a white heat wherein they perceived the secret laws of nature and made discoveries and inventions.
2. Now, in those times, her favorite among all mortals was an Athenian named Daedalus. In the white city of the goddess Daedalus was honored among all men, and treasure after treasure flowed from his workshop—the wheel, the plough, the loom. Finally, as happens to many men, his pride raced away with his wits; and he fell into a black envy of his own nephew, Talos, a most gifted lad, whom he had taken into his workshop, and who, everyone said, was bound to follow in his footsteps.
3. “Aye, but he’s following too fast,” grumbled Daedalus to himself. “He’s treading on my heels.”
4. Daedalus, at that time, was working on a special project, a blade to cut wood more quickly than knife or ax. He had puzzled, tested, and tried many things, but nothing seemed to work. Then, one day, coming early to his workshop, he heard a curious sound. It was his nephew, Talos, who had come even earlier. He was leaning over, holding a board pinned to a low table under his knee, and swiftly cutting into it with what looked like the backbone of a fish.
5. The boy turned to him, smiling. “Look, uncle,” he cried. “See, how splendid! Yesterday I saw a large fish stranded on the beach, half-eaten by gulls, and a notion came to me that his spine with its many sharp teeth might be just the thing we’re looking for. So I took it from the fish who had no more need of it

and tried it right there. I cut through a great piece of driftwood. Isn't it wonderful? Don't you think the goddess, Athene, herself, washed the fish on shore for me to see? Why are you looking at me that way, uncle? Are you not pleased?"

6. "Very pleased, my boy. I have long been considering your case and have been weighing how to reward you according to your merit. Well, now I think I know. But first we must go to Athene's temple to give thanks for this timely inspiration."
7. He took the boy by the hand and led him up the sunny road to the top of the hill, to the Acropolis where the temple of Athene stood—and still stands. Daedalus led him to the roof of the marble building; and there, as the lad stretched his arms toward heaven, Daedalus stepped softly behind him, placed his hands on his shoulders, and pushed. The boy went tumbling off the temple, off the hill, to the rocks below. But Athene who had heard the first words of the boy's prayer, caught him in mid-air, and turned him into a partridge, which flew away, drumming. She then withdrew her favor from Daedalus.
8. Word of the boy's death flashed through the city. Nothing could be proved against Daedalus, but he was the target of the darkest suspicions, which, curiously enough, he took as an affront, for nothing could be proved, and, so he felt unjustly accused.
9. "Ungrateful wretches!" he cried. "I will leave this city. I will go elsewhere and find more appreciative neighbors."

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27. Even in his most cruel fury, Minos was a careful planner. He decided to hide his shame, knowing that the world forgets what it does not see. He had Daedalus construct a tangled maze on the palace grounds, a place of thorny hedges and sudden rooms called the Labyrinth. There were paths running this way and that, becoming corridors, plunging underground, crossing each other, crossing themselves, each one leading back to the middle, so there was no way out.
28. Here King Minos imprisoned Pasiphae and the Minotaur—and Daedalus too. Minos wanted to make very sure that the old craftsman would never divulge the secret of the Labyrinth so here Daedalus dwelt. His workshop was in the

Labyrinth, but he did not work well. At his bench he could hear Pasiphae howling, and the hideous broken bellowing of the bull-man, who grew more loathsome and ferocious each day.

29. His only comfort was his son, Icarus, who, of his own free will, chose to live with him because he so loved and admired his father. It was Icarus who said to him one day, "Father, I grow weary of this maze. Let us leave this place and go to places I have not seen."
30. "Alas, dear boy," said Daedalus, "we cannot. It is forbidden to leave the Labyrinth."
31. "You know the way out, do you not? You built the thing, after all."
32. "Yes, certainly, I know the way out. But I dare not take it. Minos would have us put to death immediately. All I can do is petition the king to allow you to go, but I must remain."
33. "No. We go together."
34. "But I have explained to you that we cannot."
35. "Minos is a great king," said Icarus. "But he does not rule the whole earth. Let us leave the island. Let us leave Crete and cross the sea."
36. "You are mad, dear boy. How can we do this? The sea is locked against us: Every boatman on every craft, large and small, is under strict interdict against allowing me voyage. We cannot leave the island."
37. "Oh, yes, we can," said Icarus. "I'll tell you how. Just make us wings."
38. "Wings?"
39. "To fly with. Like the birds—you know—wings."
40. "Is it possible? Can I do this?"
41. "Birds have them; therefore, they have been made. And anything, dear father, that has been made you can duplicate. You have made things never seen before, never known before, never dreamed before."
42. "I will start immediately," cried Daedalus.
43. He had Icarus set out baits of fish and capture a gull. Then, very carefully, he copied its wings—not only the shape of them, but the hollow bone struts, and the feathers with their wind-catching overlaps and hollow stems, and he

improved a bit on the model. Finally, one day, he completed two magnificent sets of wings with real feathers plucked from the feather cloaks the Cretan dancers used. They were huge, larger than eagles' wings.

44. He fitted a pair to Icarus, sealing the pinions to the boy's powerful shoulders with wax. Then he donned his own.
45. "Goodbye to Crete!" cried Icarus joyfully.
46. "Hear me, boy," said Daedalus. "Follow me closely and do not go off the way. Do not fly too low or the spray will wet your wings, not too high or the sun will melt them. Not too high and not too low, but close by me, through the middle air."
47. "Oh come, come," cried Icarus, and he leaped into the air, spreading his wings and soaring off above the hedges of the Labyrinth as if he had been born with wings. Daedalus flew after him.
48. They flew together over the palace grounds, over the beaches, and headed out to sea. A shepherd looked up and saw them; and a fisherman looked up and saw them; and they both thought they saw gods flying. The shepherd prayed to Hermes, and the fisherman prayed to Poseidon, with glad hearts. Now, they knew, their prayers would be answered.
49. Icarus had never been so happy. In one leap his life had changed. Instead of groveling in the dank tunnels of the Labyrinth, he was flying, flying free under the wide bright sky in a great drench of sunlight, the first boy in the history of the world to fly. He looked up and saw a gull, and tried to hold his wings steady and float on the air as the gull was doing, as easily as a duck floats on water. He felt himself slipping, and he slipped all the way in a slanting dive to the dancing surface of the water before he could regain his balance. The water splashing his chest felt deliciously cool.
50. "No...no..., " he heard his father call from far above. "Not too low and not too high. Keep to the middle air..."
51. Icarus yelled back a wordless shout of joy, beat his wings, and soared up, up, toward the floating gull.
52. "Ha..., " he thought to himself. "Those things have been flying all their lives. Wait till I get a little practice. I'll outfly them all."



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## Daedalus - Day 2

53. Crete was a brown dot behind them now; there was no land before them, just the diamond-glittering water. Old Daedalus was beating his way through the air, steadily and cautiously, trying this wing-position and that, this body angle and that, observing how the gulls thrust and soared. He kept an eye on Icarus, making mental notes about how to improve the wings once they had landed. He felt a bit tired. The sun was heavy on his shoulders. The figures spun in his head.
54. “I must not go to sleep,” he said to himself. “I must watch the boy. He may do something rash.”
55. But Icarus was flying easily alongside so Daedalus hunched his shoulders, let his chin fall on his chest, and half-coasted on a column of air. He shut his eyes for a moment...just for a moment...
56. In that moment Icarus saw a great white swan climb past him, wings spread, shooting like a great white arrow straight for the sun and uttering a long honking call. Icarus looked after him; he had already dwindled and was a splinter of light, moving toward the sun.
57. “How splendid he is, flying so swiftly, so proudly, so high. How I should like to get a closer look at the sun. Once and for all I should like to see for myself what it really is. Is it a great burning eye looking through an enormous spyhole, as some Libyans say; or is it Apollo driving a golden coach drawn by golden horses, as the Athenians believe; or perhaps is it a great flaming squid swimming the waters of the sky, as the barbarians say; or, maybe, as my father holds, is it a monster ball of burning gas which Apollo moves by its own motion. I think I shall go a bit closer, anyway. The old man seems to be napping. I can

be up and back before he opens his eyes. How splendid if I could get a really good look at the sun and be able to tell my father something he doesn't know. How that would delight him. What a joke we will have together. Yes...I must follow that swan."

58. So Icarus, full of strength and joy, blood flaming in his veins, stretched his home-made wings and climbed after the swan. Up, up, up, he flew. The air seemed thinner, his body heavier; the sun was swollen now, filling the whole sky, blazing down at him. He couldn't see any more than he had before; he was dazed with light.
59. "Closer..." he thought. "Higher...closer...up and up..."
60. He felt the back of his shoulders growing wet.
61. "Yes," he thought. "This is hot work."
62. But the wetness was not what he supposed; it was wax—melting wax. The wax bonds of his wings were melting in the heat of the sun. He felt the wings sliding away from him. As they fell away and drifted slowly down, he gazed at them, stupefied. It was as if a great golden hand had taken him in its grasp and hurled him toward the sea. The sky tilted. His breath was torn from his chest. The diamond-hard sea was rushing toward him.
63. "No," he cried. "No...no..."
64. Daedalus, dozing and floating on his column of air, felt the cry ripping through his body like an arrow. He opened his eyes to see the white body of his son hurtling down. It fell into the sea and disappeared.