The Flight of Daedalus

Long, long ago lived a proud and terrible king. His name was Minos. With a fist of iron, he ruled the kingdom of Crete.

Daedalus, another proud man, also lived on the island of Crete. He was a sculptor and a builder. He may have been the finest builder of his time. Daedalus built many fine buildings for King Minos.

The most famous structure that Daedalus built for Minos was the Labyrinth. It was designed as a prison and a trap. No one could find a way out of its passageways without knowing the design. Minos imprisoned his enemies there.

One day Minos became very angry with Daedalus. The builder had given away the secret of the Labyrinth. In anger, Minos imprisoned Daedalus in the Labyrinth. Within a short time, however, Daedalus managed to escape. Minos had been foolish to imagine that Daedalus could not escape from his own trap.

The sculptor found his son, Icarus, and planned to flee from Crete. But Minos was determined to recapture Daedalus. The king's soldiers searched all the ships before they left the island.

Minos knew that Daedalus and Icarus were hiding in the countryside, but he didn't care. He was sure that Daedalus and Icarus could not escape from Crete. So Minos decided to let Daedalus wander free for a while. "Soon the master builder will realize that he is trapped here. He will have to admit that he is in my power and will give himself up. Then I will give him many difficult tasks to perform."

Daedalus tried many times to find a way to escape from the island. He stood on the rocky hills of Crete and stared out to sea. Above him, the sea gulls and other sea birds wheeled and dipped in the sky. Below, the sun glistened on the water in the harbor and on the helmets of Minos' soldiers. Daedalus could see the trap that Minos had set "I cannot let Minos get the better of me," he thought. "I must escape with my son. There must be a way off the island."

At times, Daedalus feared that he and his son would be captives on Crete forever. But his quick mind kept searching for a way out. As he pondered, he watched the many birds that soared high in the blue sky. Suddenly, Daedalus was struck by a thought. "Minos may rule the land and sea,
but he cannot control the air!" Daedalus said, as he watched feathers drop from the wings of the sea gulls.

He quickly sent his son Icarus in search of stray sea-gull feathers. Icarus found tiny, soft feathers. He picked up long, strong feathers. He gathered black plumes and white ones. He found blue feathers and brown feathers. Soon, Icarus had made a great mound of feathers of all kinds.

Then Daedalus set to work. He built a large wooden frame shaped like a bird's wing. He fastened feathers to it. Some he sewed on; others he stuck on with wax. Finally, he used wax to mold all the feathers into shape. Once he had finished this frame, he made another one and covered it with feathers, too. Now, he had two huge wings, like those of a giant bird. Daedalus fastened the wings to his shoulders. Would they work? He flapped the wings and tried to fly. After some minutes, the wings lifted him from the ground.

He could fly! But Daedalus soon learned that there was more to flying than flapping his wings. He had to learn to swoop, to soar on the winds, to turn and gather speed.

With all haste, Daedalus made wings for Icarus. Icarus watched gleefully as his father sewed and glued the feathers in place. Icarus could scarcely wait to put on the wonderful wings.

At last, the wings were finished. Daedalus fastened them to his son's shoulders. Icarus looked very handsome. The beautiful wings covered his entire body. His golden hair shone in the sunlight, and his eyes sparkled with excitement.

Icarus learned to fly in no time. He seemed to have been born to it. His father, knowing how daring Icarus could be, warned him often to be careful. "Don't fly too close to the water," he would say. "The fog will weigh you down. And don't fly close to the sun. Its warmth will melt the wax on your wings."

Icarus listened impatiently to his father's warnings. He thought, "I can take care of myself!"

One fair morning, Daedalus said, "The wind is just right today. We shall fly to Sicily." Strapping on their wings, Daedalus and Icarus walked to the top of a rocky hill. Daedalus flapped his huge wings, rose in the air, and flew out over the sea. Icarus lifted himself with his wings and followed. Minos could never catch them now!
Daedalus headed out over the ocean, peating the air strongly and surely. Icarus swooped and turned as he followed his father. Flying free in the air, Icarus knew the joy of being a bird. He looked down at the white-capped waves.

How wonderful to be soaring above them! Then he looked at the clouds above. How exciting it would be to fly above them!

Icarus forgot his father's warnings. Beating his wings faster and faster, he rose up and up. As he flew higher, the sun flickered and gleamed on his feathers. On and on he flew, higher and higher. The sun grew brighter.

The air became very warm, but Icarus flew on. As he flew, it became more and more difficult to climb higher. His wings drooped. Feathers began to fall like snowflakes. The sun's heat was melting the wax! Furiously, Icarus beat his wings, but they could no longer support him. As he fell toward the glittering ocean far below, Icarus cried out to his father. Daedalus heard the cry and turned. He caught only a glimpse of his son as Icarus plunged into the white-capped waves. Nothing remained except a few feathers floating on the surface. In deep grief, Daedalus flew on to Sicily. He went to the temple of the sun god Apollo There he hung up his wings as an offering to the god.

Daedalus had beaten his enemy, Minos, but at the terrible cost of the life of his son. Perhaps the gods were punishing Daedalus for daring to do something mere mortals were not meant to do: fly with the wings of a bird.