

There was a boy on the beach, as unmoving as the blue sky above him. His arms and legs were sprawled about him in the wet sand, waves sucking at his toes. Wet sand was clumped in his rust-coloured curls. There were feathers scattered around the beach like flower petals, crusted over with that same sand, bound to the earth for evermore.

The boy coughed, a mouthful of water dribbling down his chin. Clear blue eyes snapped open. He pushed himself up on his arms, looking around him.

*Where am I?* He wondered. *Who am I?*

He got up, shaking the sand off his body and looking out to the never-ending ocean, a perfect blue expanse stretching out to the horizon where it met the slowly rising sun.

"Hullo?" He yelled, his voice echoing through the emptiness. Looking around, he spotted a pattern in the sand made from rocks. He walked over, the wet sand squelching through his toes pleasantly.

The rocks formed a word, noticed the boy, and the word spelled *ICARUS*.

"Ah, yes, that's it." Said the boy out loud. "Icarus. That's my name."

There was an arrow traced into the sand beside the word, so Icarus followed it. Further down, he found another pattern of rocks. This time, what the boy saw was unmistakably the letter *U*. Another arrow was traced beside it. Icarus followed it, arriving to another rock pattern, again a simple letter: *R*. Beside it was a series of arrows pointing to a cluster of trees. Icarus followed them, the sound of waves roaring in his ears, the smell of salt burning his eyes. Birds chirped around him, the smell of salt accompanied by earth forest smells.

Icarus smiled, stopping for a moment. He closed his eyes and, leaning on a nearby tree, *breathed*. Then he tried to remember. Anything, really, but whenever an idea came to him, it fizzled out before he could properly grasp it. Icarus opened his eyes, frustrated, watching the beautiful golden sun glint through the leaves above him. He got up and kept walking, determined to find some answers.

The trees gave way to another beach, sunlight glinting off white, dry sand.

There was a small girl on the beach. She was humming as she placed rocks on the sand, prancing around her creation and stepping back from time to time to admire her work.

Icarus yelped, putting on a burst of speed as he ran to catch up with the girl. She jumped at the sound of his voice, looking up at him as if he were risen from the dead.

She was two heads shorter than Icarus, with dark hair pulled into a messy braid and a smattering of freckles on her cheeks. She was wearing a raspberry-red shoulder bag over a navy-blue, baggy sweater and her legs were exposed beneath a pair of jean shorts. Icarus just looked at her. He'd never seen anything like her.

Then she looked from his face to her work sheepishly. Icarus looked around her curiously to peer at it.

The last pattern of rocks spelled out: *DEAD*.

Icarus took a step back, and the girl blushed, rubbing the back of her neck.

"I am confused," said Icarus, his eyebrows drawn, "Icarus u r dead. Oo rr dead." He looked into the girl's eyes. She was staring at him in total disbelief. "I... don't believe I understand your message."

"Seriously?" She demanded, looking at him like he was an idiot. Icarus disliked it quite a bit. "For real?"

Icarus just glared.

"Ugh!" exclaimed the girl, recoiling. Then she looked back at him. "Okay, look, dumbbo, you gotta say the letters like you're *saying the letters*, not their *sounds*. Icarus. You. Are. Dead. Get it?"

"Icarus you are dead. Icarus you are dead..." Mumbled the boy softly, turning around abstently. Then he whirled around to look at the girl. "*Excuse me?*"

The girl was seated on the sand now. Her mouth was full, her hand plunged in her shoulder bag. She held out something to him that resembled a red-and-brown glob.

"Want one?"

Icarus recoiled a little, and raised his gaze to meet hers in a question. The girl looked back at him, confused, then exasperated. Icarus sat down in front of her, feeling a strange sense of satisfaction at the girl's exasperation.

“UGH!” she cried, looking up at the sky, “ANCIENT GREECE!” then she turned back to him. “This,” she said, voice painfully slow, pronouncing each syllable, “it’s a *cupcake*. It’s for celebrating stuff.”

“Er...”

“You EAT IT. I figured a THICKHEAD like yourself would enjoy a snack after DYING. YOU’RE WELCOME.” The girl shook the cupcake a bit, the icing tilting dangerously to one side.

“Oh.” said Icarus slowly. “Er... I make it a business of mine... to never to eat... bright... red... things.”

The girl rolled her eyes and shrugged, stuffing the entire cupcake into her own mouth in one shot.

“Shuit yourshelf.” she said, mouth full, licking red icing from her fingers.

“So... Er... What are we celebrating?” asked Icarus uncomfortably.

“Your moronic death, of course.” answered the girl, not looking up although he could still see her grin. She stuck out a sticky hand. “Name’s Melina. And it’s okay, I already know your name.”

Icarus looked down at her hand but didn’t take it. Instead, he asked: “How... exactly did I... you know... die?”

Melina looked down at her hand, an expression of mock disappointment on her face, then paused, and burst out laughing, flopping out on the sand like a starfish. Breathing hard, she sat up again.

“Oh, you don’t know? Well, buddy, I gotta tell you, you become pretty famous in the future. It’s great: Icarus, the idiot who ignored his father’s warning and died. It’s kinda sad, really. Every time you read it, you think: don’t do it, don’t do it, just stay beside good ol’ dad, but you *never do*. Never! It’s annoying, really.” She looked at his pleading face though and sighed. “Okay, okay, you asked for it. COMPUTER THINGY!” she yelled to the sky, jumping up on her feet. A rectangle of light appeared in front of her face, framing the blacks in her eyes. She shot a reluctant look in Icarus’s direction, and added:

“Show us Icarus’s here’s death.”

The light blinked out for a moment, then filled up with an image: two people in the sky, their arms bound to white, feathered wings. A boy and a man.

All of a sudden, Icarus remembered. He stepped closer to the image, pressing his fingers against the man’s face. He remembered now. Painstakingly so. And now all he wanted was to forget.

“Father.” he whispered.

“Icarus, boy, don’t fly too close to the sun, else it will melt the wax on your wings and you shall fall.” warned the man on the screen.

“Yes, father!” cried the boy, his face round and shining with exhilaration. Yet even with that promise, he beat his wings harder and harder, soaring closer and closer to the sun.

“Oh...” breathed the real Icarus, fingers trailing on the screen in front of him. “I understand now.”

He watched himself rise higher and higher, and as the wax started dripping from between the feathers like blood from an open wound, Icarus felt tears on his cheeks.

*Icarus.*

Icarus pressed both hands to the screen, and watching his body fall from the sky, he suppressed a sob, fingers digging into the flat surface in front of him. He felt a hand on his shoulder and jerked away from it, shaking.

*Icarus.*

**ICARUS!**

...

“Icarus!” Icarus awoke to his father shaking his shoulder. “It’s time. We must leave.”

Groggily, Icarus got up from his cot, and took the pair of feathered wings his father handed him. They were soft in his hands.

Daedalus led them to a ledge in their cell. Father and son took a last look at each other and the tower they had called home.

Then they both launched into the sky.

Icarus’s father yelled out his infamous warning, and Icarus nodded absently.

The second they were in the air, Icarus laughed. He flew around his father, flipping and diving and soaring. The wind rushed to his face, whipping curls from his face. He flew higher and higher, the warm sun beating on his face.

Icarus looked up at it, smiling, free at last.

Then he soared back down to join his father.