

The Icarus Painting

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Back in the distance, beyond the little creek, up the steep rocky grade and over the guard rail, a red car slowed, pulled off the highway and parked right behind his jeep. And like a special little air about the day, two lively bodies – college girls perhaps – climbed over the rail and parked themselves on a patch of tall grass, their video cameras out, ready to record his arduous climb, hoping to be perilously entertained. And though he could not see their faces from this distance he knew they were hot, just getting started in their own adventures in life perhaps.

Like a flitting spectacle drawing curiosity another car pulled up, a father, mother and two teenagers – sisters. The girls, their attention peaked, hopped over the rail before their parents could stop them, their curiosities bringing them within full view of the little true-life play that was about to happen before their very eyes. And like a live circus they too plopped themselves down for the show. And out came their little phones, zooming in, recording every step of the way, hoping to catch something cool, something mind-blowing, and perhaps they might promote their own little summer adventure right on youtube. In any case it would be a compelling tale to share of their summer vacation, tearing them away from a dull and boring ride to “whereverville” if only for a little while.

Looking straight up, a good tilt of his neck, he grinned wide, letting the words slip from his mouth - a dominant attitude with a hint of arrogance, and pride for good measure, “Hello cliff. Today, you’re my bitch!” Standing there in the shadow of his next conquest, looking back to his spectators now and again, he could imagine them talking, perhaps wondering just what was going on up in his brain; perhaps fearing for his life since he seemed utterly incapable of such a thing himself. In any other capacity he very well might be donned in a cape and tights fuelled with superpowers and terrific one-liners to catch the kids, to have them wearing him for Halloween, keeping them buying his little lunchboxes, backpacks and figurines.

Stretching his limbs, gathering his breath and giving the little crowd a wave, he could not help but to smile, almost hearing their chilling inquiries, ‘What the hell is this guy up to?’ ‘Is he completely nuts?’ ‘You mean he’s seriously going to climb that without any equipment?’ And for the moment, the passing vehicles – semi trailers, cars, vans and trucks – seemed to slow and look out in his direction, giving his resolve a boost, tethering his morale to the rock like a harness and safety lines, saying ‘Don’t worry man, I got you!’ Still, the little crowd could not tear themselves away, thinking him an idiot, but rather amused nonetheless, rooting for him.

And though the sheer rock wall before him – the very beast that climbed twenty-storeys straight up, seemed rather smooth from the highway (as though there was no place to find purchase) that certainly was not the case. The fact was that the rock face was filled with a million little places to grip his hands and feet. And if you took into account his vast experience, that he had conquered much more respectable venues ranging from the Petronas Towers in Malaysia to the seventy-seven storey Chrysler Building in New York City – that he had scaled various skyscrapers in Paris, London, Istanbul and China, it became easily understood that he was a professional.

Gathering an unshakable faith in his self, in his endurance – looking straight up, he made his way to the base of the cliff, stretched his neck and tied his laces before digging deep into his little bag of chalk powder. Dusting his hands for grip, he shook his legs one last time and took his first step up beginning with a quick few strokes of his limbs, and before he knew it, twenty-feet had separated him from the ground. His blood was flowing nicely, warming his limbs, and like that he was home in his element, enjoying his treacherous little affair. This is where he was meant to be. This was his fate: this day, the little crowd of onlookers, his heart gleaming in the shadow of a series of steep cliffs that stretched over and down into an even steeper gorge.

Looking back to the highway once again, he saw that two more vehicles had stopped to watch him. Finding purchase, hand over foot, slowly making his way, grip by careful grip he came eye-level with his spectators.

Hanging from one hand, with both feet planted securely, he waved and blew them a kiss. And to his heart's wonder, they clapped and whistled, cheering him on, perhaps adoring him his crazy ways, his daring, his courage and his stupidity – the air of it all crashing wildly in their chests. They blew him kisses back, giving him wings; big white beautiful feathers held together by wax, flighty and fragile, like his soul, his warm-heart and his winning smile.

On and on he climbed, a certain special method in each step, like a step closer to God each time his fingers wrapped themselves around a piece of the rock itself, stopping now and again for self-enjoyment rather than the need to rest. With a single hand he hung on, looking back, loving the day, adoring his little fans who seemed to shrink in size and distance the higher he climbed. And from here the traffic of the world passing by seemed largely insignificant, as though he could not give rise to care for such things as other people, their drama, their little lives and their stories. No. Today, now - this very moment - he was all alone in the world; just him and the wonderful breath of a new and invigorating day. With that he noticed an Eagle flying so high above that it was but a simple speck about a great blue sky, just waiting for him to climb up and say hello.

His penchant for climbing began around three, about the same time grandma had given him the nickname 'Tarzan' which his closest friends still called him. He missed Mickey and Bazzar. Mickey was somewhere in Tibet, lost on his own wild adventures, searching for his deeper, more enlightened Zen self. Bazzar was in Brazil, honing his skills, becoming a more proficient Capoeiraista, enjoying the comfort of the steep hillside towns, the mangroves, the lagoons, the lush tangle and the beautiful way the people spoke their Portuguese. It was a nice thought, Brazil...Portuguese, something inviting about it all. And the language itself, the words, swift and strange, the heavy accents, so...soothing. And he smiled and said to himself, "I guess I'll just have to climb Sao Paulo then." He was serious. He sighed comfortably, alive in his soul at the thought. "Well there's another entry for your 'to do' list Ramone."

And almost without knowing it – as if he were off somewhere else in the world, and not here on the side of a two-hundred foot cliff, his limbs kept moving while his breath came in steady and paced. It was that good habit of soaking the lungs with fresh proper air which brought with it the hot rush of blood coursing through, making him impervious to the chilled shady breeze. His skin found it more of a blessing. And with every heave of his shifting body, with his muscles only beginning their workout, he simply forgot what it was like to be afraid, as though the cliff itself would protect him to the very end. And the little crowd, and the traffic too, became that much more entangled in a real life day dream happening within his mind, his very essence somehow traversing the distance of their hearts, infiltrating their minds, tickling their curiosities. And in a moment so spectacular that words could not outright explain – nothing else mattered.

Looking up – way up...the Eagle still circled high above, as though to ask, 'Are you mad man! Have you gone and just forgot your marbles at home? Have you ever wondered why you weren't born with wings in the first place?' And he smiled, suddenly remembering perhaps the most glorious painting that he had ever had the pleasure to lay eyes on. The painting, aptly named 'Icarus,' hosted a young man with his new wings spread high, his life glowing utterly as he soared through the air high above Ancient Crete, finally free, a childish giggle sweeping him away up in his mind, expressing glee and pride and vanity.

And just like the painting, The Gods did seem to look down upon him, blessing him right there on the side of the cliff, and like that - the second the sun climbed over the cliff, staring him in the eye, something happened that would change his life forever. It happened like an extraordinary moment in time one ever only hears about in the movies or some twisted tale of fate, and never in a million years did he believe this could happen. And like the first snowfall of the year, the moment was of the purest he would ever know. It was the first time he was able to kiss the Gods, give thanks that they looked upon him well enough to grant him his wish for flight!
Cowards! Brutes!

And without warning, without pre-tense or worry, a piece of rock cracked once, twice before letting loose in his hand, freeing him from all things daring.

And like that, the painting came back to him, his mind crashing with a sudden wave of adrenaline, the extreme wash filling every vessel, coursing through every vein and artery, his heart pounding something wild, soaking his blood like suds. And the wind now was filled with a strange cautious breath, like sound advice warning him to be safe far too late to be utilized. The moment he was free of leverage, resistance and purchase – truly flying – the very second he began his plummet, sharp talons choked him off at the lungs stealing away his ability to scream, locking him deep inside his own speedy terror.

And like that, the mountain found its voice, seeming to whisper its own sweet revenge, like the Sun in the ancient Myth of Icarus seeming to deliver its own final ploy to keep man grounded, keeping him from attaining too much power, allowing him a vast secret of the Gods; their ability to take flight, if only to say ‘Here...! The secret is yours. You worked hard for it. But...unfortunatley you’ll never get the chance to share it.’ And it was right about then, when time itself seemed to slow to a final crawl that he remembered his own cocky words, his sure stead attitude; unwavering in the face of adversity... “Hello cliff. Today, you’re my bitch!”

A quick thought broke on his mind: God, I shouldn't have said that. And then he thought of the first time his adventures in climbing began in the backyard, his very own jungle gym that Tommy Boy passed onto him when he grew too big to use them, when girls and his friends stole away all his attention. And he remembered Tommy Boy well enough to know that it was he who gave him the nickname 'Tarzan' and not grandma like most people thought.

As the wind raced fiercely through his hair he thought of mom, how it was only last week that she turned sixty. She looked so fit and healthy, so filled with zest, urging him to be vigilant in his quest to find himself. And mom always had a way of putting things into perspective, and right now, as the ground drew closer and closer, he remembered her words, so wise and fruitful, so meaningful and enduring, “Sometimes you have to lose yourself completely in order to find yourself.” And then there was the question of Fate, eating him alive like little fire ants, like the wise words of a wise man – words that he himself might have said to his own grandchildren one day - though in a much wiser and more experienced tone, harping about ego and fate. “Son...never forget that Ego is the heart of Vanity.” Or “Fate, child, is too grand a toy to be so easily assembled.”

And then he thought of his little roadside fans; curious strangers, here for a show, not expecting one they would never forget, the tragic ending he was writing in real-time, with very real results; a kind of self prophecy: one man’s fateful plunge in his quest for freedom. And then he thought of his “to do” list and how he would never get to the ending of “Lost in the Ark” by James Wellmore. And even now, as the world raced by, as the rock wall became lost in its own strange blur, he rooted for Atroli The Crafty to find a way off the ship, finally. To freedom. To Endower, the last human refuge. And he thought of Alfred P. Ewing, his Iguana, wondering how he was doing roaming free in the house. And even now it bothered him to no end that there was no one better than himself to own such a highly capable killer. And if he weren’t flying through the air right now, he might just call Nanna and tell her where the back door key was hidden so she might feed Alfred.

A wonderful kaleidoscope of images passed through his mind like quick dreams, his brain racing to process them into one final episode of life, one final tragedy, one final comedic act. And how he remembered those little details that he had forgotten he possessed, his ‘first kiss’ with Amy Wilson, his first fight against Claude Lemieux which he lost terribly, and his fourth grade crush on Ms. Maple. He remembered pictures of Dad and Tommy, and even as the world rushed up to make his acquaintance, he thought of the car wreck, the picture so ugly in the papers, the windshield torn away by the impact, the front seats pressed right up against the

dashboard. And of course, the blood stains.

With that, he thought of Carza. Sweet Carza Tomopoli, his lovely Fiance' who had been begging him to push their wedding date up for months now. It hurt his heart dearly how she would be so broken up by this, after all her warnings for him to be careful, to not get too comfortable, too careless and to take care not to be too risky. And he remembered too, how he always had something to say, some stupid little thing. 'See, that's where you're wrong! I've climbed the most spectacular buildings in the world without gear! There's nothing I can't climb! Gear is for sissies!' And he would say it in a funny-faced lisp if only to see her smile, if only to pacify those alarm bells in her heart.

And as though his sense of all things became like crystal, clear and bright, he could almost hear the little group of onlookers gasp, trying so hard to believe that what they were seeing was real and not imaginary. And never had the sound of traffic sound so alluring, so at one with the world, with civilization. And one final image of Mom, Dad, Tommy and Carza rushed out at him from an impossible plane – one that can only be unlocked by keys holding such circumstances; when life forces all those sweetest memories upon you, feeding you images against your will, if only to confirm for its own sake, that you had ever existed at all. If only to compute and deal with the sheer terror that grips you when the world rushes up at you at a hundred-and-twenty miles per hour.

And before he had his final kiss, before the world rushed up at him to take him home to the other side of a strange, strange world, his lungs were freed to do as they pleased, and what better moment to scream out of utter exhilaration and horror, of love and beauty and fear. And even now, the thought of death meant little to him. No. Only the thought of life; that he would be leaving it behind very shortly, that he would miss it with every breath, that he would soon be another statistic, another headline in tomorrow's news, another viral video on youtube or some other, more vile and sinister site that hosts such things as death. He had seen some of those videos and it always bothered him the uncomfortable way people looked when landing from such heights. So morbid and fleshy and bloody. Gruesome.

With his instincts guiding him he threw his arms out to brace himself from the impact. And even as the solid crunch stole him up in a bright flash behind his eyes, he heard it – seemed to have seen it for himself; the man falling - and then he made a little sigh just as the spectators back in the distance screamed, pointing in his direction. And he could not believe his eyes! His heart leaped out of his chest! Whoever this was that had a tragic accident landed at his feet, his bones shattered completely, blood spattered on the hard cold stone, his arms and legs like rubber; twisted and limp. He turned around reaching for his phone. His pockets were empty. Just great!

He turned back to the little crowd and yelled urgently, "Someone call nine-one-one!" He could only make the slightest voice, his air suddenly drained, "This guy is...shit man, this guy is messed up for real!" And it was an odd thing the more he stared at the figure just before him, it felt as though something terribly odd was going on! Same clothes...! Same hair...! Same little necklace...! His heart began in his chest, the world suddenly becoming loud and bright, hosting dark areas away on the day, and even the rain far off seemed to hold its own lively properties, and the sun itself was extra bright and hazy, something strange.

And something he could not outright deny was a last little detail that tore him open in his heart. It was a tattoo on his calf muscle that read, "In the land of Giants the biggest mountain is King." His hands went up to his mouth and he gasped, a terrible light flooding him through, bringing him down to one knee.

On shaky knees he leaned far down and looked into the eyes of the victim and he let out an awful moan that

seemed a tad too loud for his own comfort. He could not believe his eyes! It was him! Same eyes! Same nose! Same blond hair. Same rough goatee! Same...tattoos! He let out another cry, one set in deep misery and strange wonder. And his mind troubled with the math of it; how it could be possible. How he could be dead! And right there in the sky was a strange new light, sitting right next to the sun, illuminating the world to an even brighter glow. And there were voices in that light. Mingling! Speaking! Singing!

And one last thing did he remember before his new journey began. Strangely enough, it was the painting. 'Icarus.' And the painting, in all its glorious splendour did not depict Icarus falling or plummeting, no. Rather it depicted him...flying! Soaring! Cherishing the warmth of Heaven's cosiest white blankets. And it hit him hard in his chest like a failing memory - like trying to think and remember without a live functioning brain - that Icarus had gotten too excited, too careless, forgetting his wings were made of wax. And then there was the big old bad sun, there to melt them all away and give him the gift of true flight! And he would be haunted forever forth from this day by the painting, by the beauty and grace and the power of flight. He would take with him everywhere he went, the boy who flew too close to sun and plummeted to his death: Icarus. Himself. *Incarnate*. And he would never truly forget the Icarus painting. Not ever.

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