



As we wait in line for the carnival swings, my boyfriend turns to me and says, "Have you ever wondered how in the hell Icarus didn't realize his wings were melting?"

I look up from my shoe, a fresh wad of gum like a bloodstain on the heel, and glare at him in response. This man has a question about everything except why we're still together after all these years.

Icarus at the Carnival

JEFFREY HASKEY-VALERIUS

"You'd think he would at least start to feel a little warm the closer he got to the sun, and then just, you know... would stop doing that," he says. "Right?"

I take off my shoe and use the bottom of my T-shirt to pull off the gum because there's nothing else to use. It peels away in long strings like a grilled cheese sandwich.

"That's disgusting," my boyfriend says and turns around.

The line starts moving. I put my shoe back on and hobble to keep up because it still wants to stick to the blacktop, crackling with every step. When we get onto the platform, my boyfriend turns right, and I want nothing more than to go left, to find a seat on the opposite end. But I can already hear the argument afterward, so I follow him.

I sit in the swing behind him. After the attendant buckles us in, he turns to me and gives a thumbs-up like a little kid. I pretend not to see.

At liftoff, my stomach flips. It's not that I'm afraid of heights; I'm just giddy at the idea of flying.

We go slow at first, like drones wheezing through the sky, but before I know it, we're hurtling at a velocity known only to eagles and airplanes and rocket ships alone. The carnival lights stretch and twist into shapes I've never seen, neon specters against the big sky.

I had thought my body would want to sail out of the seat, that the metal bar would struggle to keep me in, but no. This is as natural as anything. As easy as love. As simple as heartbreak.

My boyfriend laughs hysterically, excited about how fast we're going. When did I begin to hate his smile? The angle of his jaw? The sound of his laugh?

The thought paralyzes me midair. I'm still flying, but frozen.

That's when I know the answer to my boyfriend's question. Of course Icarus knew his wings were melting. That's precisely why he soared as close to the sun as he could damn well get.

To escape. To be free.

