

icarus screamed once - Adrita, Year 11, NSW

Diary Entry: 22 January 1892

*One evening I was walking along a path,
the city was on one side and the fjord below.
I felt tired and ill.*

He is not a madman.

Edvard Munch tells himself this as he aimlessly paces the halls of Antwerp's Royal Museum of Fine Arts, stubborn paint-splattered shoes shuffling against the hardwood floor. He is simply here for Inspiration's holy finger to point him in the right direction, which would only be true if Inspiration did have fingers. He pauses for a moment in front of a large glass window separating the seemingly endless row of meticulously painted portraits, then continues his trudging.

He needs the money. His tattered coat, the finishing touch, the varnish, to his wrinkled tie and scuffed shoes, makes this painfully evident. Edvard however, does not want *their* money. *Their* money in exchange for his very being, his presence in every brushstroke, every hue. For such an emotional undressing, a revelation in the form of oil paint, should not be formulated based on their slightest desire to appear in rose-tinted light no sane man would ever view them in.

Such a niche dilemma takes root in his mind, captures it like a bloody prize and holds it aloft as he drags himself from corridor to corridor in his – some may say favourite, but he says only – place.

Edvard passes the corner he has passed several times. He eyes the painting he has briefly seen several times. Softer strokes of ships sailing through a deep greenish blue engulf the background. Hard-working farmers – a shepherd and a ploughman – toiling under the sweltering heat of the afternoon sun in the foreground. No doubt reflective of the poor artist's demanding patrons, determined to be viewed as persevering, diligent – the foundations of this world. Edvard grimaces and makes to turn away.

Then he sees Icarus in the very corner of the painting, kicking at the water, barely visible against the floating ocean foam. Proudful yet tiny.

Edvard hesitates, then steps closer.

*I stopped and looked out over the fjord – the sun was setting,
and the clouds turning blood red.*

Icarus kicks and kicks at the water but to no avail, and Edvard smiles slowly, gripping the wooden railing before him. The sun is lower on the horizon – he must have fallen hours ago. The farmer works away at his crops, no time to spare even a glance towards the glorified winged creature struggling against the ripples of the tide. The ships pass by, and Edvard can smell the salty water lapping at the shore, hear the livestock grunting, slaving away.

A small, surprised laugh escapes Edvard.

But Icarus remains almost forgotten – no glory, no fame, no pity. Each brushstroke of feathered divinity is washed in a light blur – so hubristic yet so unstable in existence in a working man’s mind. A character whose goals are far beyond anyone’s understanding, whose pride sizzles against their skin, whose vanity drips off them, is hardly noticeable to the poor in the foreground.

Edvard finds himself almost leaning over the wooden railing, wishing to run his fingers over the waxy ridges of oil paint, the deep blue of the ocean, the shrubbery, the few strokes dedicated to Icarus. Such an intense and wild satisfaction rings in his ears, vibrates in his fingertips. Bruegel had outdone himself, truly.

Who said *this* could not be art?

*I sensed a scream passing through nature;
it seemed to me that I heard the scream.*

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Once, only once, Edvard remembers, he painted an emotion called grief. Unfinished strokes, tattered outlines, he poured himself onto the canvas, colours twisting, swaying to his nature. Edvard was twenty-two and naive. Edvard was an artist, yet blind. His palm was outstretched for payment, maybe even acceptance, but it was promptly smacked away.

“Madman,” they whispered into the very cracks in his being.

“Insane,” they breathed, biting wind wrapping around his wrists, directing his paintbrush, a sick spectacle.

The next time Edvard truly gazed at his work, it was gone, lost to the wind. In its place were billowing dresses, puffed sleeves, polished top hats, and not a shadow out of place. The lines were clean and crisp. The light from the chandelier bounced off the gold drapery behind the wealthy, illuminating the riches to their names. Edvard painted the glinting diamond on the lady’s ring, the shine of the gentleman’s polished shoes. No-one would ever know of the grief it was painted over.

Edvard sealed the painting and sighed. A man who speaks requires the tune of coins jingling in his pocket, music to his voice.

Therefore, a hungry man cannot speak.

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Breugel's painting, hung on these walls stands defiant, yet subtle.

The hungry may not speak, but Edvard can still paint. And if the colours mixing on his palette, shapes formed by his brush can create the very shades of vengeance, done quietly, insidiously, then he will do so. If his mouth is sealed, then he will express through what he has always done. He will weave blood into his sky. They will clap, they will marvel, they will pay, and he will accept with one hand, paint crusted brushes crossed behind his back with the other.

He turns, resolute, craving the feel of the paintbrush between his fingers, and begins to leave.

As he reaches the bend in the corridor, Edvard takes one last glance at the painting. The peasants toil away. The ships continue to sail. Icarus, in all his lofty glory, is nothing but a speck, a random smear, not even worth the very dabs of white encapsulating his entire being. Something breaks in Edvard, he grins – wild, untamed – and walks away.

*I painted this picture, painted the clouds as actual blood.
The color shrieked.*

This became 'The Scream.'

– Excerpt from Edvard Munch's Diary