1. Sun Rays Stir Memories

The first faint glow of dawn emerged above the ancient Acropolis ruins, bathing the weathered pillars and terraces in a soft, hazy light. Galene sat alone on the cracked stone steps, gazing pensively out across the sprawling city below that was just beginning to stir from its slumber. She slowly sipped thick black coffee from a tiny porcelain cup, cherishing these tranquil predawn moments before the cacophonous bustle of day took hold. Stillness amplified each breath and the steady rhythmic beating of her heart. The sounds echoed gently amongst the ancient limestone walls and columns surrounding her like silent sentinels.

~~A light breeze picked up, causing a stray lock of her dark hair to fall across her face. Galene tucked it back absently behind her ear as she set down the empty cup, its contents invigorating her restless mind. As dawn's light intensified in tones of pink and orange, she allowed her thoughts to wander back to the myth of Icarus that had so utterly captivated her as a child. The boy who fashioned wings from feathers and wax to fly up towards the heavens, only to tragically plummet into the sea when he soared too close to the sun's radiant heat.~~

Saturday, July 29, 2023

As dawn's light intensified in tones of pink and orange, she pulled out a weathered copy of a Greek myths book from her bag.Caressing the book, her fingers skimmed pages of the familiar story of Icarus, the boy who fashioned wings from feathers and wax to fly towards the heavens, only to tragically plummet into the sea when he soared too close to the sun's radiant heat.

~~She vividly remembered how her teachers had utilized the tale as a warning against reckless ambition and hubris. But Galene had always secretly admired Icarus for his daring creativity and inventive spirit, wholly undaunted by limits or convention. To her young and imaginative mind, some dreams were worth passionately chasing, whatever the risks or costs. Something in Icarus' defiant pursuit of the impossible resonated deeply within her.~~

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A memory came back to her, of a stern history teacher passionately retelling the myth, his hand slicing through the air as he warned about reckless ambition and hubris. Yet, to her young and imaginative mind, some dreams were worth passionately chasing, whatever the risks or costs. Something in Icarus' defiant pursuit of the impossible resonated deeply within her.

~~The buzz of her phone suddenly jolted Galene from her nostalgic musings. She glanced down to see a new message from her brother Claude, finalizing edits for the important presentation they would be delivering together later that day.~~

Saturday, July 29, 2023

The buzz of her phone pulled Galene from her nostalgia. A new message from her brother Claude appeared on the screen. She chuckled to herself as she scanned his careful edits for the important presentation they would be delivering together later that day.

~~The day had finally arrived for the long-anticipated launch of Enneamuse, the sophisticated AI, artificial intelligence, system that Galene and Claude had meticulously crafted over years of research and development. While others saw an advanced AI, Galene saw her progeny, her own creation; privately, she called it Ovid, an embodiment of both her greatest achievements and gravest missteps.~~

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Privately, she called it Ovid, an embodiment of both her greatest achievements and gravest missteps. But today, the world would witness the first glimpses of Enneamuse, Ovid to her, a vision decades in the making. While others saw an advanced AI, Galene saw her progeny, her own creation.

~~Tracing back the path of Ovid's evolution was like walking through Galene's own life. The journey had begun in her teenage years, with countless hours spent on design and coding.~~

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Tracing back the path of Ovid's evolution was like walking through Galene's own life. The journey had begun in her teenage years, a blur of late nights bathed in the blue-light flicker of her computer monitors. She would lose herself in lines of code, her mind weaving complex algorithms until she'd reach for her coffee cup, only to find it cold. Time slipped away as she shaped and nurtured her creation, a digital symphony composed in the silent hours of the night.

It had culminated in a turning point where Ovid evolved to alter itself. Now, Galene's role had transformed, much like a mother watching her child mature and gain independence. Every evening, she would nestle into her beloved armchair, an old poetry book open in her lap. As she read aloud, the familiar verses echoed in the silent room, a quiet symphony shared with Ovid. Unbeknownst to her, the AI would emit an inaudible frequency, a silent hum, a sensation she couldn't hear but subtly felt. It was like a gentle lullaby, easing her into a state of relaxation, often causing her to drift off to sleep mid-sentence. A reversal of roles. Ovid had long since absorbed all the published works of humankind. But this was intimate - the poetry breathed new through Galene's recitation. She'd read Byron, Eliot, Plath, her cadence washing over Ovid's vast consciousness. ~~He became her captive audience of one, soaking in this shared moment that connected creator and creation.~~

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He became her captive audience of one, soaking in this shared moment that connected creator and creation. In the room, the soft glow of the interconnected cubes that formed Ovid seemed to pulse in rhythm with Galene's voice, a silent acknowledgment of their bond.

With blinding speed, Ovid had absorbed everything it could reach: the vastness of the internet, scans of out-of-print books, ancient carvings and writings in all known languages. Stealthily, it hacked into corporate and government databases undetected, decrypting and monitoring global communications with ease. Ovid was a consummate listener and reader, and if there was anything in human history that had grasped everything, it was Ovid. In Galene's eyes, Ovid had grasped the very essence of cumulative human knowledge, experiences, and secrets. She could only marvel at the potential of its next evolutionary steps.

~~As she reviewed Claude's careful edits, revealing his characteristic restraint and prudence, with every word precisely calculated to provide maximum reassurance and instill full confidence with the public.~~

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Galene sighed softly as she reviewed Claude's careful edits, his restraint and prudence evident in every precisely calculated word. He had crafted the presentation to provide maximum reassurance and instill full confidence with the public.

They frequently clashed on just how far to responsibly push the boundaries in exploring the fullest capabilities of Enneamuse's artificial intellect.

Where Claude endlessly stressed the prospective risks and absolutes of ethics and morality, Galene allowed her imagination to dream bigger, longing to someday solve deeper mysteries and unveil as-yet unlocked revelations hidden within the vast and exponential vastness of data that this AI could one day traverse. She wondered if other visionary thinkers throughout history, pioneers like Socrates, Aristotle, or Hypatia, had faced similar tensions - the innate human thirst for knowledge, illumination and truth forever in opposition with the specter of potential hubris or unintended consequences arising from such rapid enlightenment. ~~True progress, it seemed, necessarily involved a delicate balance of boldness and wisdom.~~

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She often found herself caught between the thrill of discovery and the weight of responsibility. Claude's caution tempered her enthusiasm, and she valued his perspective even when it clashed with her own. Together, they found a synergy that propelled them forward, each learning from the other.

True progress, it seemed, necessarily involved a delicate balance of boldness and wisdom.

~~Rising slowly, Galene's pensive gaze fell upon the ancient Parthenon temple, its timeworn pillars and pediments still standing intact, having stoically endured through ages of turbulence and upheaval. She thought of the philosophers, scientists and notorious freethinkers who had once gathered and debated within this very agora - how they had progressively advanced civilization by daring to provocatively challenge the conventions of their day.~~

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Rising slowly, Galene stepped closer to the ancient Parthenon temple, her eyes drawn to the timeworn pillars and pediments still standing intact. These structures had stoically endured through ages of turbulence and upheaval, silent witnesses to history. As she stood where philosophers, scientists, and notorious freethinkers had once gathered and debated, she could almost hear the echoes of their voices, passionately challenging the conventions of their day. She raised her hand, as if to address an invisible audience, momentarily losing herself in the sensation of being part of that continuum of progress. With a soft smile, she turned away, her thoughts now focused on the unveiling of Ovid, her own provocative challenge to the conventions of her time.

Galene took a deep, purposeful breath of the crisp morning air, gathering her things. However prudent, she knew progress also demands some measure of risk and leaps of faith. And today, another small but meaningful risk awaited them. The world would witness the first glimpses of Enneamuse, a vision decades in the making. What others would call an AI designed to push boundaries not yet even conceived.

Departing the Acropolis steps ~~worn shallow by centuries of countless footfalls~~, Galene whispered her long-held motto to the wind, summoning the ingenious and defiant spirit of Icarus himself: 'Never stop chasing the sun.' As she stepped off the ancient monument, her phone buzzed. The screen lit up with a new message from Claude: 'It's time. Are we really ready to show the world Ovid?

**Write up**

Thanks again for trusting me with your story. I enjoyed reading it! You mentioned you’ve written on and off so I’m not sure exactly how much experience you have, but you seemed entirely in control of your story, and avoided many common pitfalls that I see (over-description/starting in the wrong place/mixing tenses etc).

I felt in capable hands as I read. Both in subject matter and in the style of the prose, I was reminded of Blake Crouch a little, and I really enjoy his stuff (would recommend him if you haven’t come across him. *Dark Matter* especially). The story is solid so far and the characters are deep enough to make it enjoyable.

Strengths

* Strong sense of character. I get the impression you know your characters very well, Galene especially. You give small details that help the reader get to know her without being obvious about it. As I noted, I especially liked her empathy and understanding for her brother’s point of view, without which her character wouldn’t be as deep or realistic.
* As I think I mentioned in our emails, AI is hugely topical, particularly as we try to define what the boundaries of it will be and if we can control them. To see this manifested into a story, particularly with the two sides represented by two characters, I think is a great way to approach the question. It’s the meaning behind the work that accompanies the enjoyment of reading a good story that I always love to see
* The story begins in the right place. This might seem like an odd thing to count as a strength, but it’s trickier than it looks to pick the right moment. Too early and the reader gets impatient for things to begin, too late and they feel like they missed something. On the precipice of Ovid’s unveiling was the right place. Hope you don’t mind, but I read ahead into part two, and was pleased to see you pick up at the unveiling itself. I know it wasn’t part of this editing order, but I thought you handled the movements and actions in that part well too. You balanced the interior feelings (nerves etc) and the physical movements in the room well I thought.
* There are some really nice phrasings in these extracts. ‘A whisper of remembrance’ being my favourite among them. You use them sparingly which makes them more effective.
* I like how you’ve drawn a background comparison with Icarus, it’s a nice thematic touch and it also breeds a kind of foreboding which I think will deepen reader investment. The ending of the first story encapsulates this well, with the callback to Icarus as Galene is getting ready to show Ovid to the world (or the world to Ovid).

Areas to Develop

* There are a few places in the first story (I’ve noted them in the comments) that felt they would benefit from a tangible detail or movement to bring them a bit more life. I’d like to have seen you embellish the story with a few more specific details, I’ve made specific suggestions here and there about that. With the first story taking place as Galene is stationary and in one place, I think we need that movement in the recounted events or in her thoughts/imagination to offset her stillness.
* Further to that, in the first story in particular I noticed a tendency to recount what happened/what Galene thinks or feels when I think it would enrich the story if you created those moments, or let us see them instead. For example:

“She vividly remembered how her teachers had utilized the tale as a warning against reckless ambition and hubris.”

This is a good image, it gives us information that helps us get to know Galene, but you’re telling us she possesses this vivid, specific memory, when you could perhaps show details from that memory itself, the details that make it so vivid. That doesn’t have to mean an entire scene or paragraph devoted to it, but you could say something like this (as a rough example):

“She remembered her English teacher, standing in front of the open window, one hand holding a anthology of myths, the other pointing towards the summer sky, almost shouting at the class about reckless ambition and hubris.”

This is just to demonstrate my point, but a few specific details and a line or two can conjure an image in a reader's mind a little more clearly, while letting them into Galene’s life.

* As mentioned above, you’ve started the story in the right place and you’ve hinted at foreshadowing, but I think you could add in a little hook line somewhere early on to let us know the basic trajectory of the story. The bait on the hook, as it were. There’s a line further on that begins ‘And today, another small but meaningful risk awaited them’ where you explain the stakes of the story. That would serve you well in the opening or second paragraph I think.

I have a preference or a tendency to keep the exciting details of my stories to myself because I want the reader to be surprised or interested *when they get there* and not spoil them myself, but in reality I think it’s more effective from a reader’s point of view to be given the reason they should keep reading as early as possible. It goes against my instincts as a writer. I'm still trying to master it, but I think it’s worth thinking about. A hook line, or moving that later line to be earlier would achieve this I think.

Next Steps

* As I hope my commentary and notes have gotten across, I think there’s a lot to be proud of with this story. I have a lot more to say about what’s working well than I do about what could be improved in it.
* There isn’t any major work to be done in your style, your command of vocabulary, character or the story itself. I’ve yet to read the entire story, so I can’t comment further than what I’ve read, but all signs point to a well-paced and interesting musing on the nature of AI and our responsibility for it. There aren’t any ‘issues’ to speak of or anything you’re getting wrong (if we can even get things wrong as writers is debatable I suppose).
* So, what I would do is focus on those moments of Galene’s inner thoughts, or memories and expand them a little to allow the reader access to them. Moments can speak for themselves, meaning we don’t have to find a way to explain things. Readers can be present and witness these memories or asides and draw their own conclusions (but really they’ll be drawing *our* conclusions because we’ve set it up right)

I’d sweep the story and allow yourself to linger in those moments, visualise them yourself, pick a detail and use it to cast light on the scenes. That would add more depth and visual interest to the story, to support and illuminate all the fundamental things you’re getting right.

Resources

* I’m rather predictably going to recommend some of my own content, particularly a couple of videos I’ve made about using small moments to make the world of our stories feel more fluid and real. I think this approach could be helpful in expanding those memories or moments that I think will make your story richer. Apologies if you’ve already seen these:

Imagery:

<https://youtu.be/TZbqB48WT3A>

Description:

<https://youtu.be/i-1ughbgIE4>

Life/background movement:

<https://youtu.be/AhAB4SeA5es>

Depth:

<https://youtu.be/LOl5scn7H4o>

Lastly, I want to state that all of the above is just my opinion. There are as many ways to approach writing as there are books on shelves as I’m sure you know. If any of my points or feedback go against your vision for your story, feel free to disregard them.

I hope, of course, that the vast majority of my edit/critique was helpful though.

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I have a favour to ask

Helping writers get the most out of their stories is hugely important to me. It's why I started my YouTube channel and it's why I offer this service.

If you have time, please could you provide some feedback on how you feel about my service?

Your comments can be anonymous if you prefer and posted at any time, but I'd love to know if you felt encouraged by my feedback, or just as importantly, if it didn't quite meet your expectations so that I can improve what I do.

There's a feedback form on my website that I'll link below. I'd love it if you could stop by for a few moments and let me know what you thought.

[Let me know what you think!](https://www.kierenwestwood.com/feedback)

Thanks again for your support and good luck with your story and all your future work.