

ARIADNE'S BROTHER

A NOVEL
ON THE FALL
OF BRONZE AGE CRETE

by
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KALENDIS

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ARIADNE'S
BROTHER

I

In the Lair of the Minotaur

2

The Monster Responds

Incense of sandalwood, because she liked it, and for healing; of cedar, for justice; and old dittany. Ariadne's smokes ascended and diffused through the darkness of the central court around her, and as the flames in her tripods cast trembling light up the pillars of the shrine, she gathered the fumes about herself with subtle spiral-gestures of her hands, and breathed them, a comfort, a cleansing, bringing herself to fullest presence. Then she lifted her palms outward to the shrine's three stout crimson pillars and their crown of the Great Year's horns. She stood quite still this way for awhile and began to softly summon all those Powers and ancestral persons she called our wild mothers, paused to listen, listen, and then bowed with her face hidden in her hands: there seemed such a weight upon her posture that I thought all of them must have imposed their Presence on her communion, until her shoulders shook and a bitten-back sob escaped her. She was only weeping, an animal sound, like the bark of a dog abandoned. She started again, and burned offerings. Crickets and nightbirds kept on chirring and peeping from the darkness of garden and tree all around the Labyrinth and the night was so calm and spring-voluptuous that one could believe too well the world would just

go on, blithe as ever: now Ariadne called forcefully aloud, with palms upraised again, standing there naked and wholly aware, trying to open herself or disappear in order to become first daughter of our past, imploring the wisdom that had sustained the House through all extremity. I could hear her deep breaths though I stood across the flickering court, up in the highest darkened colonnade off our rooms in the east wing. At last some measure of strain eased from her body: she wiped her eyes in the crook of her left arm, and then cleansed and charged the space round herself once more with casts of salt and water. Finally she took herself before our brother's bier: it lay at the center of the court, the heart of a quincunx of tall candles, heaped with all the good things of his life in lieu of his body. And her voice, as always singularly clear, commenced the rites to bring his spirit home.

— *Come to your House*

Palesus Dionysos, true of speech

I light the fire, I pour the wine:

The clothes that still smell of your being

Are here, the linens of your bed

And the good silver earrings,

The little ship for your journey

And the foods you always craved set out in bowls:

Come to your House,

Palesus Dionysos, true of speech

I pour the wine, I make the offerings

I should not have been watching. Everybody else had abided her wish to begin these unprecedented rites in solitude: by this hour all doors in the Labyrinth around us had been closed, in the first-night custom, the valley was

silence but for animals, and Cnossostown a maze of empty streets. Across the countryside a single lamp marked the door to each house, all bobbing in breezes like sea-reflected stars, and under the waning moon the Kouretes had lit a beacon-fire high in the south atop Mount Juktas. But I couldn't stand to be alone back in the rooms brother and I had shared: I was too tired for sleep that day, so many immediate councils. And I needed to see his soul come home, perhaps in the shape of a bird that might perch on the long-hafted Labrys by the bier—or to open myself and take healing from this dance of Ariadne's now below, from this noumen turning and leaping through the steps of the moon's serpent-path up and down the flickering courtyard, holding nothing back and our Dead holding nothing back from her

She slipped and went down hard near the court's south end. She got up and strode directly back to the pillared shrine and took up her cuttings from all thirteen trees of our year. Birch, rowan, ash, alder, willow; but only half-singing through her anger, she prayed, and dropped each month into the tripods' coals, and told our brother he could not resist the turning of The Wheel. Grieving him now, soon to be leaving him behind: it would've been the same for myself or any man. I felt her responsibilities, feared how this poison in the world would touch her—brusquely she turned her slips of whitethorn, oak, leaf of holly to smoky flame

But how to use this surge of instinct to protect her with my life? I knew that was why I'd been born as I watched her at prayer, yet I'd stabbed a man, defied her in public, brought danger nearer our people. What *scorn* in her later when I'd tried to defend myself with Glaucus' words about using one's power or losing it—*And that is as far as*

you consider these things? she'd said. *A contest nobody wins? You hurt my body when you did that, my body*

And then she'd walked away, escorted to meetings with mother and their women. Yes, once the man had honor in fighting the beast at the mouth of the cave. But things were different now, the cave and especially the beast, who would come back with purpose redoubled and not alone. Or were they different? What could it matter for her to say *I have no enemies*, when a beast was coming who showed not a qualm about hurting bodies? How could she look at our brother's belongings and think any vision or rite would stop a spear?

When she'd burned the final cuttings of yew and silver fir, the signs of his death and ineluctable rebirth, Ariadne anointed herself from a bowl of minted water, then opened out a full-length veil woven her by women of Melos, one sheer sheet of diaphanous violet. She carried it across court and then crouched almost below me, and lifted her eyes to Hermes, guide of souls shining low in the western night. Then she slowly rose from the veil that had curled round her feet like a violet sea, and turned and chanted, enticing, imploring, drawing him home with all she had. Even now I envied him her. The sweet scolds. Her restless seriousness—Already she was striving to move her life beyond this, and lifted her voice to protest that except in union with Her he could do nothing

It was rest she intended for him, rest among our Dead, whether or not any of us were ready for it. Begin to do without him: then she'd go away awhile to the mountains. I'd just have to leave her alone, let her sound her grief and devote myself to Minos' preparations. A terrible timbre of helplessness filled Ariadne's voice now, as if she really wanted to lie flat and beat the slabs

of the empty court. And the best I could do was to leave her alone

Could she share none of our father's cool malicious savor for what we had in store for our brother's killers? Oh, to hit the mainland armed for slaughter and treat with these barbarians in their own terms, yet never exceed what we called (for the people's sake) the Mother's wish that no harm be done—that had been the thrust of Minos' words this evening, cool malice in his swollen eyes, his voice a rhythm like a bull-roarer's swung by a priest, full of that heavy dread, the power that made things happen; but this without the roarer's promise of rain. Holding up, as he'd spoken, clay list after list of personnel and ships and allies in our web to call upon, the nobility of Cnossos sitting forward on their benches as this man before them, stricken father and Law of the Sea, left no doubt he meant to take larger action for Crete through this one death. He'd been careful, too, as High Priest, to ask trustful indulgence from the dubious, Ariadne herself, Paria's elder women and others, unconvinced that we could turn so many hands to war and not get one. *We have to be ruthless now*, Minos had said, *we must turn this tide back Crete's way this season, or there'll be more deaths of kin, your own, in the colonies and, at last, right here in Crete.* And people had nodded, frightened not least by the Labyrinth's own loss of blood, our powerful brother's sudden utter vanishing: tax collectors offered figures, officials from nearby townships guessed how many people they could pull from the fields for temporary service in the fleet, in the yards, in the home guard we'd need while our strength was at Athens. And pending Perides' return, whom could we get to pilot us up Athens Bay without moonlight? Admiralty officers set up councils with Iris

(dubious) and her Daedalaë, to count the forges and weight of bronze that would quickly put a weapon in everybody's hand

This had gone on in one of the lower east wing's great council halls: at last my mother rose from her chair of inlaid olive wood, to still the voices for outright war and console the conservatively pious with bloodless rite of prayer. This last, she said, was to make plain to Goddess once again that we had only Necessity's intention of real harm: she'd seen to the care and sequestering of Cadimmetes, and already her heralds were on the roads to Mallia, Zakros, Phaestos and points between with that same message, requests for ships and bloodless offerings. But if most matrons of our clans—with their gathered powers of birth and in the trades, the very mistresses of the land's wealth—had long trusted Pasiphaë with their children and their interests, and rendered her silent gestures of consent, Ariadne alone had gotten up and left the hall, every eye on her but the room quite stilled. Grandmother Paria felt it but, for now and for herself, had only kept listening with her back to us, lighting candles on offering-benches round the room. And the mothers grouped before Pasiphaë's person looked amongst themselves, anxious but finding Ariadne perhaps too proud, and clung to the Queen who had guided them these years, our mother, still the center of the realm

Had I begun to love Ariadne because I'd seen her trying to hold worlds together in a way quite different than Pasiphaë's? Ariadne could say, quite as plainly as our Queen, that Goddess was for people, power for us—yet *The Mother* seemed just the model by which Ariadne was shaping power, power to be hers with the throne. Perhaps where Pasiphaë accepted nature's brutal profligacy, Ari-

adne brought to bear a strict solicitude that left not a single child's fate out of her balances, that would not allow pain if there were other ways—Had this been the fruit of her seclusions, her up-country communion with those wild mothers, mountains, animals, ancestors and people, a new sort of wildness for the blood? Ariadne's was not the ecstasy of suffering sought-out and drunk-deep. I think she'd carried within her these years the way we'd felt together in the mountains of our youth, where you breathed the clouds and could stand eye-level with eagles, watch them lazily climb beyond crows' reach up out of a valley—She wanted to bear into this world a radiance she remembered in her blood: hers was a religious cause, though like Europa, she might abandon any custom for that radiance. For me, desiring her was only partly envy of her women's generations of learning. It thrilled me as nothing in life to be near her *as a Creatrix*: I wanted to be near her tomorrow when she started to *work* her powers openly, to stand with her in that wind that ran between the worlds, through one's waking soul. I longed to be her comfort in this grief; to have hers

There were other paths for both of us: the commander of those Taurian marines, Alxiona with the healing neckwound, got herself readmitted to the Labyrinth as it was closing. On one knee before us she swore she'd fetch back help in plenty from the northern islands, and meet us with a thousand fighters at Callista. She praised the audacity, too, of massing our contingents at that island, right under Velkanos' nose, for the secret sail to Athens: yet for all my father's relish of the plan, he recoiled from this woman's obvious hopes

— You remember, Alxiona, that if you join this venture you act in my name. It is my name that will answer for

what comes of this. Accept our gratitude, but remember that if you usurp the cause, you become my enemy.

For a moment we thought she'd argue: hadn't Minos publicly sworn to fight Aegeus himself if need be, and with Pasiphae's assent? But after a glance at me (and my knife) she'd deferred, and left us. My father had folded his arms then and smiled, the evil relish back in his face.

—They say she has a small collection of raiders' left ears on a string, he'd said. —But I don't believe that. She's shipped many seasons with us now. Why did she look at you that way, Deucalion? Out of your sea-duty together?

I'd shrugged, but Pasiphae knew. In me, in the shadow of my brother, Alxiona had seen a future king to her purposes against all Aryans. But Minos was already so caught up in the plan that he'd forgotten he'd not be among us next year. This crisis was taking him once more out into the world and that was a radiance he'd not looked for

Ariadne had raised three luminous yellow-red cones of ash in her tripods. She'd left the veil behind and knelt down with her back to me, before the shrine; and though I could make out none of her words for her whispering under the sounds of night, her voice was an equally ceaseless flow of ululation and chant and passionate prayer. Her head and torso rocked gently with certain phrases and I knew she was beating her breast. What were the words? What was it like, her pure communion with The Powers? The low, passionate murmur of the solitary voice, the fist beating *in time with the heart, beating*—my life was only The God's desire to know her, to honor her

A breeze flickered the light in the courtyard and in the south the fire on Juktas leaped higher, casting up a spray of embers, the Kouretes heaving on more logs to help guide our brother home. It looked like what old people

told of the sight of Velkanos years ago, spitting fire into night sky. Before my birth that catastrophe had happened, and here we were for it, father in possible combat with Aegeus, me with this Theseus. Did she expect me to die for her uncomforted, condescended to, unblessed? Mother was worldly, yes, letting father's rage run in service to her vision of Necessity. Maybe Ariadne was praying for me, for help: she knew as well as Alxiona this plan's dependence upon the right Consort to help see it through

I heard her tears, and I cursed what I had done. My sister. A widow before a Queen. In the spring. And from this day, what would people see in The Aridela, celestial rose the flower of dark earth, the ancient vision of the world's own love of living, or more a figure whose beauty awakens pain of loss, of betrayal and bereavement: a wonder that shines despite some crime, despite some violation

No matter which way I turned in my heart there was a violence. Who of The Dead had told me to dare what the heart felt? Trapped: I wanted her, but my duty against these gentlemen-pirates promised most to alienate her more. Who was she, that she could object to the ring of weapons being raised around her? Did she know they meant to throw her in the dirt if they could?

You will stop them. You will pay any price! my brother's spirit cried. Between two pillars of the colonnade I got down on my knees in her posture, prayed and beat and listened. I pretended I was her for a long while, listened and prayed; and asked for all the power I could wield with wisdom.

— That, and no more, for I have learned a thing today. She was still there between the worlds as I withdrew.

Very next dawn Minos woke me himself with aggressive shoves, and we all got first sight of him in a war-helm of white boars' teeth. The man of lily-brimmed caps and peacock plumes, Husband of Earth and Dancer of Changes had forced his priests to find him a brown wool tunic and a sword, too, for things other than ritual. These gave him the mountain man's fierce air, but the helmet's strap creaked under his jaw when he yawned from his bad sleep, and with his lovelocks stuffed up into the crown he looked, in fact, gutted of power by the loss of Palesus, almost ghastly, a plucked bird in raw light

As these new brutal days went on, though, toward the massive move on Athens, the pained quips by which people accustomed themselves to this unknown side of my father died away. He made himself the heart and scourge of our men's preparations, from shipyard sawpits to blade practices: running and drill, wrestling and swimming and sparring and more running and wrestling again, every day with more youths showing up in the mist-dampened fields near our military port of Katsambas to train for the home guard, or crew the ships—people worried how long Minotauros' age could keep the pace. But helping Minos was the simple thought that, regardless of when Admiral Perides' summons brought him back to us and he took over, a few weeks at best would decide this matter. Either we terrified Athens into capitulation using the dark of the new moon just over one month from now, or we'd find ourselves in the first rank of a slaughter. The prospect also helped Minos to mollify elder Kouretes' objections to their High Priest's brutal ardor. On the West Road out of Cnossos just beyond Paria's villa there was a good spot where you could look up-valley over the white buildings

and roads among the trees and beyond toward Mount Juktas, its head a cloud of early mist above the stillness: there my father liked to stop the whole Cnossian running-troop each morning on our way out of town, that he might consecrate his strength anew to the city, align with The Powers. And Cratus and others would wait him there, sulking, complaining of a gesture that to them seemed so cursory, after years of proper rite behind their king. It was no wish for soft living: the Kouretes were Cretan men's men, hunters who first of all ritualized our life of taking and giving-back with honor on the land. It was just that they prided themselves on that reciprocal relation (especially since Achaia's come-uppance), and Minos' becoming a warrior-king like the Lion was anathema. Lions gave back only bribes out of spoils

—Anger The Dead, Deucalion! he puffed as we led our numbers northwest between orchards for the seaside fields. —You see, that's why they are priests. The Dead will be far angrier if we stay home and chant, believe me. But you respect these factions, they balance the ship. It's for the best to have these old fellows around, to tame down new ones with ideas. Do you hear? Like ourselves! he half-laughed, puffing and looking back to be seen for his pace

It was not the time, though, to ask him how to respect the very things one felt compelled to challenge. I wanted to show him I could learn, that what he'd loved in my brother lived in me, that with his guidance I could serve these youths behind us. So when he spoke with Mount Juktas mornings, I asked it too the way to both victory and peace

They looked such powerful spirits, these bands of young men we found waiting us each morning (most of

them my elders) in the scrub-fields, groups of them from the villages standing barechested under the misted trees with their hunting-spears, younger ones with staves or stick-knives, banding each other's hair up in fighting-crests. The well-born, the junior officers of my brother's circles were consistently there too and they made it everybody's habit to draw their weapons in hail till my father gave blessing. Whatever their birth, most had kin of some experience in the merchant or military fleets, and now these raw ones saw for themselves why we kept these operations as separate as we could: they worked as hard as Minos demanded because they believed their families' safety depended on ours, but not many of them cared for the hardened Cretan and Carian officers heading up the drills, men with our looks to the dark hair and eyes, but who seemed reptilian beings, living only to animate their flashing war-gear, the crests and tasselled boots and studded armguards. These picked trainers spoke in barks, had no mercy for failure or excuse, and browbeat every mistake with sure death: I hardened myself to the meaning of Bull's horns across our House's roofs, but at night our young men's eyes and another real world within them would return to me, their bewilderment and anger at a betrayal somewhere. It was like a purchase of shallow strength at the price of a poison-sickness, a spreading numbness—Day after day we had to be broken out of an animal inertia, startled out of a preoccupation with the bright feel of the seaside morning and its freedom, with the herbs in bud at our feet and the rabbits in the wet shortgrass. Flawless early-summer days of sun with no south wind had never been distractions before. Most of these youths, raised by their matriarchs to hold nothing so important as planting and tending and harvest, did not

want to become cracks like these trainers in their faces. There were fights when the ridicule went too deep, say for getting oneself mock-killed while stepping around a home-bound toad in the weeds. No, they wanted to strike in one mad spasm if they had to strike, but others—Cre-tans of course, but that blue-eyed mainland refugee Orneus too—would mock village notions of war, and there'd be more fights. And then the trainers would come down on this violence with their own (*Pair off! Move, fools, on your life!*) and we'd find out what a measure of training might mean. I might've spoken out if I'd still thought this concerned only trade and foreign fineries. But now since Cadimmetes, clearly it was ourselves this tide of the world would overrun. I submitted myself to the officers and learned. In these proceedings you needed to get beaten only once; so it was life to learn to exploit different weapons and shields; how to suck your man in, dance him round with feints and insults till you could skewer the sun in his eyes; how long you might expect to stay up with this or that body-part bleeding

Truly these first days in the world without my brother were like a death of my own, as the parts of me died that had always looked for him home with crews or wagons up and down the sea's roads, or that looked to catch it from him if I didn't do this or that. But now I stood as close to the throne as he'd stood; and as our father replenished his strength every evening with feasts of meat, his zeal with councils among our cousin-houses, there was new regard for myself in brother's place. I met with youth of our Kindred I'd not seen since our manhood-rites and our Bull Dance; and, while there was no lack of young gentlemen fitter than myself (by age at least) to reign at Ariadne's side, especially in the houses of our uncles

Rhadamanthys of Phaestos and Sarpedon of Zakros, it seemed that someone, mother or Paria or both, had gone before me, and turned my youth and chest-wound and rescue of Icarus—not to mention the stabbing—into prodigious signs of deeds to come from Cnossos Labyrinth. Maybe they took their places behind us just so that Cnossos could earn their long-lived fealties; but if they fretted about Ariadne's aloofness these days from both Minotauros and myself, and still found me approved and enroute to the throne—this promised them something uncanny. They sheltered their own disquiet with this war in what Pasiphae had given them, a sense that something fateful about Deucalion would justify so much killing-preparation, somehow, with the new young Queen. I was not the only one seeking peace *and* victory; and it was one deft course being steered by Paria and Pasiphae, both rousing up the realm while keeping order

Meanwhile it was expected too that, as further reassurance of the public, we should take leisure wherever we could. I had a grape arbor of my own in the southeast gardens that I liked to prune and train and fuss with but it needed small attention just now: I tried taking Icarus down to work on our boat more than once but, for these days at least, he wanted less than I to do with that whole world. More and more it was only the craftshops that could pacify his convulsive moods and spirit. Iris taught him clay and he immediately produced a lively long-eared dog that had whipped its head round to look back over its tail; but if he then rudely ignored the shop-staff's praises, Icarus couldn't get the piece fired fast enough. He wanted to take it to my mother. She enjoyed her share of indulgences toward him and the curious island airs he'd chirp to her, sitting on her bellskirted knee. But she'd al-

ways have to ask me or a priest to relieve her of the boy, so much to do, and then his fits (or his tantrums) would resume. The shops were not a nursery and it'd take a few days with Tukato up at Archanes to calm this wild one again. What to do with him? The priestesses said we might trace his home island by his dialect but it was out of the question to put him on a ship right away: I tried keeping him with me to sleep because I needed someone myself, but he was utterly restless, would go roaming the halls for Pasiphae, get lost and waken the whole House. It was strange to care for him but not trust him, there was too much consistency in his fits

At the same time, what Minos had begun to call the Guest List was taking shape. Wherever across the seas our builders had gone, our painters and potters, healers and priests and priestesses; wherever Glaucus had wed foreign queens as Minos' proxy or there was a debt of any kind to Crete, there we now quietly called for a contingent of ships, and so far this meant about thirty cities including Crete's own, five ships each our expectation with maybe thirty hands to a boat. One afternoon I was sent out to Katsambas concerning these figures, and a little surprise we had in store for Athens: I was to bring back final estimates on the number of merchant-ships our wrights could refit to the plan, how many warships new-from-the-keel they'd have finished this moon—and deliver the order that five thousand torches were to be cut and readied to burn within the month. But if the total figure for new ships in our hands seemed meager—no more than ten, perhaps three hundred more fighters on the sea—then possibly all we needed, if this was a bluff, was maximum illusion of numbers. We could do without a ship or two and double the number of torches for Athens'

surprise. They'd catch more terror of the sack from the threat of footsoldiers than from seamen, so I gave this order before I took it home, the yard-master said he could work with it, and it turned out that the throne approved. It was then that mother took me into the sanctuary and confided that, after the funeral for our brother had cleared the way, and after my Queen had spent some time in the mountains, well, I might find that indeed she cared for me. Mother was proud (in a way) of this defiance of Ariadne in favor of what was best for the family. The choice of Consort, she said, would be the Queen's as ever, but she did not think my Bull Dance and so much else would be in vain. As I walked outside through the dolmen doorways I could have wept for the bright simplicity of the sunshine, the feeling that after all, someone very much wanted was near

And I saw Glaucus again, as usual by way of his latest briefing and travel. More than anyone of the Labyrinth it was Paria who knew the cities of the East and the houses and names that Glaucus would find most responsive: she loaded his ship with bronze talents and boxed gems and textiles, pyxes of dittany and exquisite vases of rock-crystal, and then laid out his voyage within our plan. I put its stations clearly in my heart because he and I swore to keep brothers across the sea through this moon, and it helped me through the days to share his trials. On the stabbing Glaucus would only say I'd done the right thing wrongly, and for that I looked the more to his return

When you sailed you hugged the land. From Cnossos to Zakros, usually two days; from Zakros to Cyprus, figure four; from Cyprus to Byblos, allow two days, and then another four days at least to marshal mercenaries. Between Canaan's rites round their nearly-done harvest of wheat,

and the movements of local militia in Pharaoh's wake, there might be some disorder in the cities just now but Glaucus and his aides should find troops available: Egypt's finest liked to go home for their holy days. *Spend the riches and promise more but bring every fighter you can*, Paria told them. Then (with luck, bearing giants) perhaps seven days' sail back to Zakros, where they'd all link up with contingents from Rhodes and Cyprus, from Ugarit, Pharos and Gaza: two days later Glaucus' host would join all the Cretan ships lying off Amnisos, and by then the Whitethorn Moon would be full, a very strong time for the ships to move north. At last there'd be a space of ten days to assemble our northern and southern fleets at Callista; three more to thread the Cyclades en masse; and thus we'd reach Athens on the first day of our seventh month of the year, when the Thunder Moon was new, and as dark as the heart behind our bluff. So there was time let all through the plan for mistakes and haggling with Canaan's Baals, for trouble with the winds and seas; and time, yes, to be attacked ourselves. But we'd only grow stronger with the days and become more a spectre to the mainland by waiting. *Let the wait for us break their sleeps*, grandmother said with a fox-smile as evil as our father's

Inevitably, though, the worst of the shock and fear out of brother's assassination subsided enough to make discipline problems and in-fights increase on the training-fields. Minos, holding off the crack officers and their solutions, decided to put it abroad that Cnossos Labyrinth had confirmed the secret building of a fleet up north, of warships, there was no doubt any longer that Achaians were constructing ships in their smallest coves and yards where we Cretans rarely called. This was true in the sense that it had always been true, they'd always been building

to follow us toward wealth, but to hear it these days on leading lips proved effective, for awhile. Blade practice was better attended, and orderly. Then one morning as our running-troop arrived before the lifted blades of my brother's circle, that youth Orneus took it upon himself to begin a chant, something no doubt his own (given how lame it was and how obviously his own heart was not in it). He was trying, like some hopeful royal page, to enlist all these men in deeper commitment to his would-be lords: Orneus shook his spear high and sang some borrowed fragments about *His Glory like the Sun*, and *Filling the foe's mouth with dust*, all sorts of fodder he'd picked up learning our ciphers now under the Foreign Office. And my father, coloring with angry embarrassment, immediately disowned and humiliated him. I was sorry that this Blue Eyes' exile with his mother from the mainland had made his life a thing of homelessness and cozenage—but not everybody believed that Orneus had had no promptings, and next day numbers of youths were neither with us nor home in the villages. Very much as in the oldest stories of our people who'd come here from Egypt before there were armies to serve, they'd abandoned (naively enough) this whole *contest* for the mountains. And now since they couldn't be easily caught, at least some penalty for their villages was necessary, and here we were caught up in the world's tide again. Minos issued vague threats for the nonce to give them time to return, and I stayed with it. I stayed hard with it to shame those whom he couldn't frighten and I know my brother's friends grew the fiercer for it, seeing in *younger brother* once more the priest they might've preferred themselves to be, these days, seeing the more what it cost us to break mainlanders' sleeps

Our trainers with one trick or another were slaying us each more than once a day, which defeat you could scorn because they were cracks. But one day when we'd grown skilled, four of them stood back to back before us and told everybody to do our worst against them, and we saw the numbers of people four disciplined fighters could handle. It made you feel impotent and stupid and if there were youths here less eager than myself, we learned to want what they had. So long as they held their formation, and so long as we feared getting killed, they could move as they pleased around the field, it was power, and its simple price was coping with protest and not caring what you stepped on. And it all began to confuse us worse because the better we got at this, the more one felt dead: so we'd find ourselves in rage, and each time we got up there was more of a strange tingling enervation in one's limbs, in one's chest, a mortification and the only thing to bring back feeling was a harder swing of the sword. I felt this in others' blades I crossed with, harder and harder; which made the numbness worse, and the hunger inside it angrier; like a poison spreading through you

How I prayed that she'd speak with me soon —Would she not because perhaps she had no position except disapproval? I hated what was happening and sought communions of my own in the shrines of our great Dead, even in the crypts of Europa's tomb up the inland road from Cnossos. But for our priests' help in grasping the oracles' meanings, there was only the answer that what our people became, the House would answer for

In the midst of all this one of our youngest Kouretes, named Yamo, brought it before the throne that his colleagues—the six new young priests and six priestesses under Ariadne's to-come administration— were willing to

dance Bull again, as part of the impending rites to betrothe their Queen anew. Both my parents sat forward: the man was offering risk of his life, and of a hard-won future in the clergy, and so would they all be. But, said this Yamo—who'd come as close as any in our Dance last year to a chance at the throne itself—besides the fact that the example of our brother's Offering had been stolen from the people, it was a time when the House should most display its depth of strength; and my parents immediately consented, glad to have the Dance to match the fears they'd put abroad. I spoke more with Yamo later, though, a rough-looking cat-like man of twenty-two with expertise in herbs and the bull-roarer rites of his home near Mount Ida. He had his folk's almost overdone insistence on the grand gesture and he told me, Oh, the idea for another Dance had been Rusa's, his love among the new priestesses. The two had been as one since Bull had chosen out all of us, and when I jokingly asked if he were really just out to impress her again, Yamo said he wasn't sure. *We must all help now*, he said. *But she is Goddess to me, Deucalion, I would dance Bull alone and blind for Rusa*

Another evening alone amid many people, with the blisters and aches of blade practice hardly soothed by the bath. My mind would not leave off asking if all were that simple. We called some chosen one Goddess and then came running ourselves to serve, obey and tremble before *her* soul's rights and wrongs? And next day all through blade practice I seemed to have something to prove and I actually knocked my trainer down once, though when I went in with the knife he slid his shield aside and there was his sword point-up. Without his foot to my chest I'd have run upon it. He laughed, and said I'd learn to fight

coolly; but I wanted to hurt him, slap his face. My father saw this and ended the session and had me take a group down to the sea: I gave us a painful run full of detours and obstacles and then I left them for Cnossos, and next I knew I was back with Tallay, in the House of the Horae. We did no drinking or chatting or *games* this time and I pulled her right in on top of me in the bathtub: *Oww*, she said, *It's tight, you have to play with it first* but I kept pushing and kissing her deep to distract her and soon she liked it, all the birthing-hips and ass and nipples of her, she liked it that way didn't she, *Don't you* I said but she moaned, quite distant in communion of her own. Enough of that! I squinched myself round to get on top but instead the tub went over and we spilled out—*Ignore it!* I said and she looked a little afraid, but it was only the animal soldier's force in me now that was meant to protect her, its knowledge of frightening and hurting other bodies at will—I grew intoxicated as if I'd breathed too long near a heaving vat of fermenting spirits and I bit at her in kissing and at least that, that pain brought her awake to whom she was with, lion-awesome I was, she averted her face and I kept on, pounding into her. And I reached my end, but without any shiver of The Presence or delicious loss of mind: she didn't, and put my hand to her pearl. Well, hurry up. I could have slapped her worse than a Carian somehow and it showed by the time I left, mortified and angry—*Why was I so much smaller than she*, her eyes knew my shame and still she said not a word

Outside. Alone on the causeway, the sun falling cool behind the trees. It was strange how I'd had all I wanted, and yet still wanted: a wanting not of the body

—Deucal-ion!

The voice was Tukato's, sauntering down the inland

road from Archanes. I let him catch up: Come on man, what

—Excuse me, sir, he said: as usual he wore the smell of horse, and there were sloppy stains of his latest decocted medicinal weed on his bright low-cut robe. Everybody had to look upwards to meet Tukato's eyes and this made me uneasy just now, not to mention his standing round the town

—I've been wanting a word with you, sir. Where is Icarus?

—So far as I know, round the shops with Kudru and Iris. Good day

—Wait, Tukato answered touching my elbow, and when I turned his eyes looked darker than a moment ago beneath his bald head's sun-speckled brow

—Very well for one boy then, he said, —but I've been after you days on days now about those horses.

—What horses?

—The horses you used to entertain those *guests* of yours. You left them right there at the Guest House spring, did you not? Do you mean to say you cannot remember?

He was pointing that way in his dainty robe with the hand on which he wore his ring of rare iron, a gift from a healer whom he had healed once in the north: his hairless features colored, too, as he stared down at me. There'd been a lilt of (womanish?) anger in his words, and the lust that was my mind recoiled—Was this all he figured I had to think about?

—Shrug and nod to me—Well you left them *drinking*, by themselves, Tukato said half-turning toward the spring in a stormy deference, then back to me. —You don't *do* that, sir, after they've been used to pull three people all

the way from Amnisos. The horses became sick, do you understand? The House staff here sent for us. I never!

I was wholly at a loss

—Oh, it's alright now, Tukato said. —Just a touch of the cholic. But I protest, sir, you may be losing *touch* with a few things around here

Scold me like one of his charges? I looked around, and took pause; but (admirable fellow) Tukato walked away.

Yes, I was losing—many things, but first, in my flesh, all the sweetness of wanting her.

* * *

Ariadne seemed almost at ease when she came to my rooms after sunset one evening later, she looked freshly bathed and oiled, rested and strong from any number of helpful rites with her priestesses. She'd swept her hair with its strong dark roots down over one side of her head in a careless way that to me was enticingly wild, and its ends just touched the collar of her loose-fitting dark blue robe: her ease seemed to say that she had what comforts she needed, and it touched a fresh wound to see our brother's features in hers. Yet, by tradition, men came to her, and here she was at my door wanting to talk—I could only let my shame and confusion keep me grave as I asked her in.

Outside my pillared porch the moon was up above the gardens, horned, waning: there was light on the river here and there and the houses up and down the fragrant valley still wore their lamps bright, mindful of the funeral to come. Making herself comfortable Ariadne stood looking out on it all for some moments and then sat down precisely next to me on my skin-covered bed, her right thigh

flush with my left. Her scent was sandalwood tonight and, keeping her eyes to the painted wall before us, she breathed deep, apparently waiting for me to offer words: then she ran one hand through her hair and shook it out. I guessed I was to watch, and desire, which I did, but the Labrys pendant between her breasts within the robe's décolletage kept other matters present with us—I was not proud of myself, and kept still.

—Well, she began, —we've worked out the rites for him, brother. Tomorrow the town will search for him: then the second day, whether a bird comes to Labrys or not we'll announce him found and create his image. The third day we'll raise him of course, that will be your moment and your real entry to public life, Deucalion. I know you want to honor him as I do. And then when I go away I'll take him with me to a lovely place I know, in the mountains.

—And after that, Ariadne added with a gentle palm to my knee, and freeing up some friendly sparkle in her eyes, —I'll be back to do everything I can for this business. Considering what that Yamo and Rusa plan to offer with our young clergy, you could say that we have the easy work, don't you think?

I felt so old, verily polluted next to her deep-grounded brightness, even in grief—*our* clergy, she'd said. How strange to feel so much of my being dead, after days and nights of wanting! I only asked her intentions for *this business*.

—I mean I've decided on our betrothal, she answered.
—We need unity, and mother and Paria have sown your name everywhere. Besides, do you know that just now you are the only one of our kindred who stands sanctified by Bull? I'd thought it was only healthy rivalry between

you and our brother that you so insisted on sharing the Dance with him and our group. But now—here you are, brother, and I'm glad. We can resolve our problems. We certainly don't have time to choose out another, this moon at least! Ariadne half-joked, letting me share (I guessed) her councils' considerations. —I mean I'm sure we'll work well together, won't we.

—With so many solid stately reasons, I said.

—Perhaps you don't quite understand yet, she said with eyes hardening their look to search my own. —If you had killed that man I'd have chosen someone else and quickly too, Bull and blood of the kindred aside. There are things a woman learns out on Dia Isle that show custom to her for what it is. I won't hesitate against tradition if it's called for. I don't mean to threaten anything, I tell you so that you know. But even with your defying me in public, I have to admit it looks as if your sort of halfway gesture will bring you grudging support from most factions. You bled the anger some, I grant you that, the Earth has been calm, and the animals better than lately before the altars—But we need to work together, brother, because besides our father's so-called Guest List and his own elation, we're going to need to keep things calm, keep people calm when the soldiers begin to gather real numbers here. Let him think as he likes for now that he can act as selfish as the sun. The fact is, we cannot *handle* a war with the mainland, and he calls the plan's bluff a mercy! Well, between us, brother, I have a showing-forth of my own in store, but I expect you to work that way till I come back. Then we'll do what we have to do.

—Sounds like a wonderful union, I said, rather rudely standing up. —Why don't I fetch a scribe and have all my orders set down

—I don't want to marry anybody! Ariadne exclaimed to my back: now she herself rose up and headed for the pillared porch as if to call upon the lights and the scents out there, and thus we stood at opposite ends of my main room. I'd never meant to leave and began to pace between the spiral-painted walls: she took a breath of exasperation for us both before she turned and gave me her eyes anew

—Yes, I've been hard, she said, —but it wasn't all about you. So many plans he and I made have been crashing down. Next year we were going to sail all around the island and bring the townships together like never before—Would you make that trip with me? You're the only one I've asked, Deucalion, Ariadne offered and I knew it was real pain that knit her brows together for an instant. —We'd chosen a place for a new house up in Lasithi, too, and when I go to the caves there now I'll have to see it. I'm sorry. No, brother, stay there, because I want you to hear me out, what these moons before the throne have been like.

She was going to cry, and fought it off with ferocious effort

—You can't imagine how old and thick-as-blood things are among our women. Maybe it's the same with you fellows, but we are expected—They've taught me all my life to become our wild mothers, to be in one body all those things that make us what we are. And for giving myself to that, I've wanted my *hieros gamos* to make the world new. So deep in union, I mean, with our Dead and our past that there won't even be what we call yesterday or tomorrow. Maybe our old sister Perdix is losing her wits with age, but she says she remembers a Crete like that, the Crete her mothers said they knew. When it was

all people cared about to lie in the bosom of their families in the old clan-tombs, before Cnossos rose. You remember the tale of Pandora All-Giver, who rises up one day with Her jar of gifts and simply pours them out for the taking, *I give you grain, I give you love*—I wanted to be that. For my children, Ariadne said reaching one palm gently to the wall at her left, —and for that I did everything asked of me, to get the power to give people what they want

—And where do I find myself, down here in the towns, Deucalion? In a race that has killed our brother. Maybe it happened because the House wouldn't see any other way the dozens of others it kills, whose names we hardly know. What powers do you want, then? The ones Glauco sees, that destroy the world? Or what is truly important to you? I work and work to find my own feet, seeing what's ahead of us. But I tell you this: I will *not* allow you or anybody else to keep this House running after next year according to mother's defaulted dreams. She is a true Queen of Paria's line, and her style does intrigue me, the great shows, the intimidation games, but—she thinks for one thing that we can just bring this Poseidon, this priestly fraud into the House and not be changed. Her name means *She Who Shines For All*—Don't you think her years of nights with Achaian pupils instead of in father's bed have changed her? Is he crazy now for letting all that pass? I know, I know you do your best for me, she tried to conclude, —but I cannot have uncertainty at my back. Not now.

She lowered her eyes and I tried not to speak right away, though my heart beat with how alike we were—equally burdened with office, and confused. I thanked her for her words and asked if we might sit down

together again: we did; and if I still felt unfit to be near her for what I'd done with Tallay, my soul thrilled for her touch as she took up my left hand, and just looked at it between her own palms. Willing to hear me out.

— Priest, brother and man, I love you, I always have and will, I said. — What does it mean, though, that brother and father and so many have come to the same conclusion about Necessity? I haven't enjoyed these days with any clear heart. But you haven't been to sea. Our crack trainers say it's quite likely that this old gray Aegeus and his son will meet us on their beach ready for glory, ready to die just for the honor of hitting us. They've been praying to the sun too long, *the young man dies most beautifully*, they sing. And they tell us our kings are fools. Ariadne, if I don't give myself to this and a fight breaks out up north, he's going to kill me. I sound afraid. I am afraid, and it's not the same as fearing Bull or The Offering because it means you'll be next, and everybody in this House. I want to stop it. Our brother's spirit will drive me mad if I don't try.

— Then we have to find a way that won't drive us mad. Grandmother's is a good plan, I think. All the animals bluff that way. And I love to see you strong, your hand feels like leather. But our father is confused, Deucalion. I owe him very much for all his life taught me of seeing through things in the shadow of death. Death has its place in the realm, but he's lost sight of what it is

I was following; but if the men we called heroes were those who'd harrow the Underworld, for love of Goddess and the sake of one's people, lost souls

— Then what you're saying is, if it comes to blows, to let myself be—that's what it will come to, Ariadne, and soon after that they'll be at Amnisos. Bull is the power

our family has not been afraid to use, and I don't know how else to honor the trust in which we receive the House

—But I asked you what's truly important to you, Deucalion. The question is, have you lost your soul for not looking far enough. However you must do it, I want you not to kill in revenge for our brother. It's not always *where* The Offering is made—It's the love you bear your people through me, your people who remember and plant and build for the ones to come, because you've moved them. Your choice to Step Forward makes their pain smaller, and the world—Hear me out, please. You know that we take the same news and rumor, and that in more lands every year now, these skypriests are putting up their temples of the sun and such-like, and calling them the holy places. What does that make the rest of the world? Profane. Unholy. So the people go inside these places and speak the most noble sincere intentions for honorable lives. And what happens when they go back outside? It's not the sacred world they see anymore. Their life-eternal is decided elsewhere. So they become divided against their best hearts. Out there they have to be *practical*. And through that divide comes what Alxiona's sisters call the Night Mare. They should know. They fall asleep. They forget it's their own doing because for some land or some thing they've sold away—Goddess. I mean they've sold off The Powers that, once, they believed would take care of them, like the old clan resting-places, if the courage to do the right thing cost them a home, out of a world of homes. Or one life, out of millions of lives, Deucalion, Ariadne said squeezing our joined hands as I looked to the running spirals along the room's walls. —Don't fall asleep, brother. I search and search for better understanding, for what to do, but right

now, please hold onto me and try to believe me, that no one can really hurt us—It's hard enough to be always in the middle. Give me the chance to find out what we should do. That's all I've come to ask you for tonight. And now you smile at me?

—No no, I said quickly. —I just—we've heard old Europa's story at a hundred gatherings, but I never wondered before what people back in the East must have thought of her, when she told them they'd better take to the sea. And then to think that dolphins met them and led them here, and a whole new

Suddenly Ariadne dropped my hand and pulled me close and kissed me for the first time as lover, lips unbelievably soft, slippery-sweet as the sea-urchin's roe, her tongue shy but there and tickling the corner of our melded mouths

—Water to a heart's dry soil, she said. —But perhaps our powers will be greater, and better-spent, if we wait for the betrothal ceremonies. Don't you think? Mmm. I'd like much more. You mustn't forget that I'm challenging you to be braver than any Carian officer will, husband. Can you make yourself as terrible as the plan needs to work, and not become a lost soul? You're much more a thinking man than our brother, but I must say a little hesitancy becomes a fellow, these days, she smiled.

Oh, the beauty that sang in me when she looked happy: her visions, her lips, her pain, her power, I'd never felt so certain of being able to make a radiant world with someone: for me there was no one like her for seriousness or wondrous intelligent dreams and she was even becoming a little playful now next to me on the bed, brushing at my hair and smiling and touching me with a fire that, with ease, called my soul forth. But for all this,

things wouldn't sit right yet. There had to be real peace between us and I asked her to cleanse me of Tallay's offense. I tried to explain what I'd done to insult those women who brought love into our community, tried to say how this poison deranged one—Ariadne listened, and then in keeping with her own challenge, prescribed no rite except my going to Tallay with these same words, and an apology. Then, Ariadne said, the girl would be wiser with others so afflicted. Now she rose to go, and told me plainly that desire was the reason.

—If it's better for the fields, alright, I half-smiled.

—We can plan our trip when I get back from Athens. I'll let that dream purge the poison.

—Yes, do that, she answered with a florid brightness perhaps none had seen for awhile: a dream coming back to her, I hoped. —Yes Deucalion, good! Ariadne said.

* * *

Our brother's funeral filled the next three days with drinking and the traditional chaos of a search for him, all through Cnossos and roused-up valley: together the wine and the ritual's built-in confrontation with his absence purged people's grief, while by night there were huge bonfires and singing and dances round them, persons of every age (our grandmother too, no less) jumping through the flame with riotous yells, the joy of it all to fetch our brother home. That no bird, no sign of his soul came to perch atop the Labrys by his bier was like one more sign of something fading in our old world between the worlds; but the third day's wrestling and boxing and other competitions honored brother's intensity, and in the bodies of Cnossos' youth it was plain what strength

outlived him. When our final procession with his mock-sarcophagus wound up Mount Juktas to the sanctuary there, and Ariadne departed with it to find him our king's traditional secret grave within the bosom of the land, I cried bitterly for his murder: when this passed, the way was clear to draw comfort from the better understanding with her, and I'd never felt so determined to serve my kin. In the days' mixture of rage and love I even found myself slashing my arms with my father and our priests before the altars of Juktas, and as we danced, the blood-drops flew from me like seeds till I dizzied and fell: I had not known you could become more powerfully yourself by losing it and my grandmother talked to me much about this, she and I seemed to have a new tongue between us, by way of Ariadne, no doubt. Old Paria—she kept everybody's heart up because people knew she was pulling all the evil strings she could for the plan among her elder women's societies, even while drunkenly hurling outrageous satirical couplets at people (the higher-born the better, for her). Amid our cousins and clan of Phaestos and other houses she and Pasiphae kept on working, accepting condolence and farming out anger

My father, though, mostly itched to get back to this moon's business. I think the wildness around him unburied the fact that things would be wild next year too, without him. I was proud that he took care to rotate the home guard's people through shares of the rites, but next morning after their closure he was all horns of purpose and had the Kouretes begin bringing foreign embassies before him and Pasiphae. We'd keep to all the drilling we could but it was becoming high diplomatic season, and the Guest House was near over-full

Our clergy knew foreign affairs enough to keep the

ambassadors of the Hittites and Egypt quartered separately: Egypt's couriers were much like the man Payare but with more wealth on show, while the Hittites never seemed to own their splendor, a people of harsh wooden manners for all their silks and elaborate curls. Still, for our staff's efforts, with their two nations at war (in a land that belonged to neither) you'd see them trading their accusations and watching each other wherever their Cretan paths crossed; but if Ariadne would've called them men asleep, we were quickly roused ourselves by some news from Hatussas

As soon as the season's formalities were done the Hittites told us that a self-proclaimed Sacker of Cities was roving the islands off their Aegean frontiers: according to reports this was an especially large hosting too, a thousand men with even horses and chariots aboard. My father sat up straighter, and Pasiphae with him. Where were they from? Where were they now? The Hittites answered that a few weapons captured in skirmish with sea-coast garrisons suggested a northern-island origin, they knew of these Achaian followers in our trade-ships' wakes; so, we at Cnossos *might* wish to dispatch a contingent or two from our mighty fleet and ensure the continued stability of so many long-abiding and well-behaved settlements of our own along the Asian frontier, Caunus, Cnidus and such. Their own invincible troops were a trifle occupied inland just now, driving barbarian invaders back south of Syria. *And* in further token of Hatussas' goodwill (snap of fingers), these Hittites had brought to us three ingots of most precious iron, gift of the very Cloud-Riders. No metal would serve one's cause like this one, they went on, and no people so understood its secrets in the forge

—Well, Minos, said my mother when she'd dismissed them, — don't look so shocked to find something substantial behind your own words about fleets building in the north. At least it looks a safe wager that a thousand-man hosting will fetch your young men back to the lowlands.

—Feel this for weight, Deucalion, Minos nodded, trying perhaps not to think that Ariadne'd had to do with his words' unpleasant offspring. —We'll have two iron swords for our talk with Aegeus. One blow across this and your man of bronze holds a stump! We cannot lose, I tell you

—But a thousand rovers, father. They could turn up anyplace

—Stop your tongue! I know. Or—or they could keep allies from sending the ships we need. Blast Mykenai! I ask you, what *use* is a High King like the Lion? All his barons and princes abroad at play and I suppose he'll know nothing about it. Trading more waterpots!

—You hold your course and let me work on home guard numbers, Pasiphae counseled

Sacker of Cities. *Ptoliporthos*: a title of high regard up north. You could almost imagine social evenings within the Lion's citadel. Ahh, here comes Lord Yellow Beard. Is it six cities he's raped now, dear? Seat him near the groaning-board and don't turn your back when the wine's gone. Not for a god, not for trade-routes, but for gold and silver, booty of horses or kine and, above all, beautiful women. Idiots who'd have you believe this the way of the world for getting wealthy, advancing: Conquest brings riches brings fame brings followers brings bigger conquest, and all this brings a name to outlast your corpse. Remember me and the fear we spread together. Cnossos in fear for the first time, to our shame

—Have those swords made for us, my father ordered
—I think you'd better, said Pasiphae. —Our son's
knife demands it now.

We saw what was happening to ourselves, and soon, some mornings when her bad joints allowed, grandmother placed herself like Ariadne's agent of conscience at that crest of the West Road, where my father often stopped our running-troop. Not a word: after all, it was Paria's own plan; but not even grandmother had expected such disruption of our normal ways, and she seemed to possess in just her eyes all she knew of contemporary foreign houses' fates. Cratus and his faction of priests had mercy on my father and let her sustain their critique for awhile, but as we ran past and left them standing there together it seemed that this act of our bodies was exactly where we'd lost control. To a man, we'd have said we'd prefer not to do this, and there we went, doing it. It was a seductive mortifying pleasure and I lied to myself that, amid days of diplomatic half-truth, it was good to come back to the simplicities of weapons. It got easier to accept the pleasure's price of numbness because I trusted Ariadne to heal it somehow later, and she trusted me. And as that rumor of the thousand rovers spread, many youths did come back. This time, nothing was said to them

The season's delegation from Sicily was yet another kind of fulfillment. In the first years of mother's reign she'd shipped them not just jars of olive oil, and leather hide off our fine cattle: planning to give them an export-economy rather than deal with them as obstacles to our ships bearing tin from the Balearics and beyond, she'd sent them whole tree-grafts and paired cows and bulls, and this year their petty king Kokalos sent her oil of his

own and two prime calves, to show what they'd learned. Trouble was, they'd also developed their own small fleet for patrolling western waters in our web, and this year they were less subtle than ever concerning remunerations for this. They *hoped* we could work out new terms of partnership but, if not, they might be forced (by whom was unclear) to take their pay in tin. King Kokalos' embassies, however, bore a proposal: we could send him that island-renowned painter of ours, Iris by name, let her and some staff perform their wonders in his house and teach his own people for a term. Were we supposed to believe this would sate the little man's ambitions? Grandmother warned us not to repeat old mistakes with the mainland: my parents told Kokalos to keep order out west, let the tin ships pass and wait for more thorough reply—End of audience. The embassies did not look eager to get home with this. There was a mountain-of-fire or two on Kokalos' very island, it was said, and we wondered if he worshiped them or hoped to make their thunder his own. But no one felt we should trust him and so we put no call upon him for ships: best to put him off till we'd dealt with the north.

And meanwhile a woman-merchant with a straight-enough tongue arrived from Rhodes, adding into her business here a self-appointed complaint that to us was familiar: new money from the mainland was helping Achaian traders to horn in on the business there, in everything from rosehips to wine. Why hadn't the Labyrinth done something, she asked (begging pardon), since it was clearer every season how our rivals meant to set up a gate to the East for themselves? Generations of labor had made our station there at Trianda only an asset to Cnosos, but there was going to be trouble, in her view of it.

She said that Achaian oarsmen were usually warriors as well, they could often do their business without either asking or charging for military escort, and those kinds of fees would soon be too sweet for old partners to pass on. Things were coming slowly undone in the East and (again, begging pardon) the woman warned that we'd better soon draw the line. We were aware that Achaians were now even scouting a station of their own in Rhodes, at Ialysa? The woman herself pointed out Rhodes on Paria's tapestry and said *They're everywhere, like shadows*

This woman did not lack blood-kin in Crete and had the well-meant audacity to repeat her complaints outside the Labyrinth. Soon after, at night, we'd hear anonymous jibing voices beyond the courtyards, *Do something Minotaurus!* and more than one noble originally dubious of this plan requested audience: *Your Consort spoke the truth, Great Lady, there is trouble in the colonies, stretch forth your hand and quickly*

We'd given them expectations, and they knew less than we of soldierly waiting. But after three more days, Admiral Perides beached, and behind his *Talos* were no fewer than twelve Carian warships out of Cnidus and Miletus, six from each. Our message had sent a shock along the Asian frontier, he told us; but twelve ships were all he'd been able to pull from Caria's patrols out there, because of reports of a Sacker of Cities on the roam. My father rejoiced that even so the sons of Goddess Car had sent such strength: at Amnisos we watched this first contingent land, three hundred fifty squint-eyed regulars splashing ashore and staking their ram-headed ships to the beach, all of them just like our trainers with crested helms and leather corselets, short slashing-swords and shields with patches here and there—a seasoned company. Perides

greeted me gruffly and checked the scar at my rib: with my arm-slashes healing he seemed to see other change in me he could approve and, after blood-sacrifice at the altars up near Amnisos cave, we marched together to camp the Carians close by Katsambas' drilling-grounds

—Beached here this once figuring people would need a lift, Perides told my father: for now that was as much as he'd touch my brother's loss. —Oh, for a tub of hot water! Give me the plan, brother, when do we move?

—Talk later, my father said waving blessing to people along the road. —But this time I'm coming myself.

—What? How can you? Have I failed you sir, or my sister the Queen?

—Of course not, but we won't get the numbers we need for an Admiral's sake. And you're no negotiator—that's what we're out to do. I'd like you to spar me when you've rested, brother. Deucalion, show him your blade.

—*Spar* you? By Car, that's iron! Where did you get it? The biggest lump I've seen is on our own Tukato's finger. Negotiate with that, eh? Look at all these green marines falling in with us, have you slept once since I put out, Minos?

So we saw these squadrons camped where there was hunting and fishing for them through the wait: the coast kept eyes on the game these strangers took but slept easier for their presence. My father invited the Carian officers to meat and a briefing after evening ritual: Perides, after he was bathed and shaved and attended, grew more conversant and could scarcely believe my brother was gone. For that he wanted action and lost no work-time over the brooding mood among the Kouretes. Our priests had diligently devised rites for Minotauros' protection

even as they scowled at him in regular duties—it was their lives to reassure the land and The Dead that The Offering would be accomplished, and thus not a one would leave Crete with him. But as my father went over his Guest List with Perides, he realized there were only eleven more days to departure, and Cratus and others took a snide satisfaction seeing him wring his hands with anxiety

Perides suggested drill in the morning for this but the chance never came. Hippeus and the rest of Cnossos' heralds were fetching back more and more tokens of assent and cooperation from towns large and small across the island. Each had to be answered, ritually thanked, placed within the plan, and hurried: official figures from Phaestos and Mallia came in, they'd each send the five ships asked for, and Paria soothed my father for those houses' tightfisted concern with a home guard (Mallia, after all, sat right on the shore that was no longer safe). Where was Glaucus? Would he make it back, and what would he bring? And before this afternoon was old, Podes' cousin Cordax came up from Amnisos with word that five new warships lay ready to be christened and crewed. And, he said, the Libyan contingent was come

It was happening

In the seaside brilliance of late spring it was like a festival of colors down there, except that a death-threat was at the heart of it: Libya's port-towns had sent ten ships, nearly three hundred of their best including the *Nut* which had known my brother's steps, and the whole contingent was led by a ninety-woman vanguard. When our family arrived at Amnisos my mother herself remarked on how the old rule between military and merchant was breaking down, even if these allies were trying only to re-

assure people: the so-called new warships were actually the refitted merchanters, too, the truly new ones just weren't ready. But this was forgotten as the Libyans' leader strode forward. Her name was Itiri, a black woman my height in the prime of her twenties, and for the soft beauty of her eyes their entire formation snapped-to as she gave them one snap of her raised fist. Her muscled limbs were scarred and painted, oiled and decked with brilliant cropped feathers and bracelets, she wore the goatskin bib of a Libyan priestess tight round her torso, and without going to one knee or any gesture of submission she presented Pasiphae her wicked-edged, double-bladed axe. My mother took it to her breast, then laid it back in Itiri's palms and kissed the woman on both cheeks. Itiri gestured again and a startling percussion and rattling rose up from Libya's numbers, axes and bows and lances beating on zebra-striped shields, plumed ankles jingling as they sang call-and-answer—not a few of our locals backed away toward their houses

—*Now we are come*
—*with pounding heart*
—*for the ancient alliance*
—*evil art—Ay-yah!*
—*Ay-yah-yah!*

Smoked monkey-head talismans dangling from belts: red coral earrings, lion-tooth necklaces, brows scarred where the healer stuck smoldering twig to cure a headache: for fatigue they had a rubbing-stuff mixed with nettles

—I'm glad they're on our side! Podes told Cordax above the din

Up at the altars we offered a single sheep in honor of our timeless ties of kinship and cult: then the Libyans (with smiles of their own for our new men's greenness) became gracious witnesses to my mother's work, in which she gave our altered ships new names and bestowed formal arms upon one hundred twentyfive of our youths from drill. I noticed that young fellow Orneus and greeted him myself but, if he'd been eager for the arms of a Cretan marine, now he looked disturbed to realize the possible ferocity of foreign foes. He was not alone. Still, he did take ship as smartly as the others and they pushed off for a maiden voyage round Dia Isle: when they'd rounded the isle's western end the *Nut* set out quickly the other way, to give them their first mock-ambush as a christening-gift. Later we heard that our neophytes didn't fare too badly; but now it was our priestesses' turn to be affronted by such play, so close to The Grove

So our two strongest allied fleets had sent their due. Crete's contingent was sure to be the biggest, maybe six hundred fighters in twenty-odd vessels while Pasiphae swelled the home guard with the too-young, and elders. And already a kind of jocular militance began to pervade the supper-halls and the streets of houses round the Labyrinth. Some resisted the presence of just too many armed men by matching them with strolls about town in their own new gear, and small boys with sticks trailed after these: at night small parties went on around watchfires lit atop the valley hills, it was becoming a novel game

— I hear people joking on Athens' and Mykenai's *obvious* diplomatic absence this season, Iris told me one day, — and how the best mainland houses will degenerate if our artists don't visit anymore. I'm inclined to agree. By the way, Deucalion, do repeat my thanks to the throne

for not sending me to Kokalos in Sicily. Their ambassadors never mention his queen's name, what does that tell me? I never liked beards anyway.

—I heard one fellow the other night, Cleite put in, —that if we have lost the Laurium mines up north, we can just invade Sifnos. Said he heard-tell that that island has a motherlode of silver scarcely dug yet. This had better end soon or we could see our old friend behind me—you know, she ended carefully.

Cleite did not look round northward with her words about Velkanos' crater, but went on picking her way across a broad limestone pool carved by the waves, wading among the sharp black spines of the sea-urchins she and Iris liked to gather and eat when they talked affairs between their professions. I'd brought Icarus with me to Katsambas this day as I'd checked on the cutting of torches for the plan, and we'd met Cleite and Iris along the shore road: it was a rare time when Cleite lacked a birthing or burial to officiate, Iris an artisan or shipment in some kind of need. They were sometimes lovers, too, and might've wanted privacy but Icarus had told them he liked to collect urchin-shells for their bright pentacles underneath the spines: *I'm hungry too*, he'd said, they'd shrugged and here we were, myself lounging rib-deep against one side of the pool. *See how the roe are bigger and tastier with the moon waxing, Icarus?* Cleite told him now: this might've been one of my public leisure-duties but the mention of the moon made me edgy. When it was full, come Glaucus or not, we were departing. I bathed my arms' scabs and gave myself the more to chat with these elegant shorebirds at their pleasure, Icarus like their gangly young one crack-cracking urchins open with my knife-hilt

— In any case I have word that your Queen will be back tomorrow, Cleite informed me. — We're told she's well, but it was no rest for her, between clearing her heart in the caves and trying to keep a lot of farmers from coming down with their pruning-hooks. They change their minds when they get to your drill-field from what I hear, but seeing her—well. It will be good for her to visit with that woman Itiri just now, a wild mother if there ever was one!

Krack!

— Kokalos after my Iris, this other man invading Sifnos, Cleite growled. — Why can't you men be like Itiri? She doesn't turn into a frothing dog for a little power

— Civility please before the Heir and the boy, dear, Iris smiled. — It's good we met today anyhow, we can discuss new commissions, Deucalion, she said squinting over the glare of the pool beneath her cropped-feather headband.

— We've had some meetings and the Daedalaie are eager to do something fresh for *hieros gamos*. They only get the chance every nineteen years—though you understand, Iris added (catching a look from Cleite to remember my life was at issue). — I know Ariadne loves her dolphins and goats and birds, what about you? Vinery? That makes lively border. Or I know, trees or pillars wrapped with it! A Great Year symbol, very suggestive, what do you think?

— I'd like to see that, I said as Icarus handed me a small mouthful of urchin-roe: fine flavor, and yes I was going to enjoy my reign, irked as I might be that I'd not received personal word about my Queen. It woke old angry thought that maybe I was only the right man for their needs right now: I savored the taste for memory of her kiss, and watched the light's wiggling trapezoids play in the pool

— You should also know that I'm coming with you to Athens, Cleite announced as she knifed another one free from the rocks at her feet. — Yes I am. I'm old, Minotaurus, and I want to be where something is needed while I can. You may well need an old healing-specialist up there. It's also my chance at last for a kind of revenge for the takeover of Delphi. I studied there two years, ages ago when I was a girl and the oracle was pure Dionysos and Goddess. If I have my way it will be so again. But between us—thank you, Icarus!—at a council with our Queen it was suggested, you know, that Diamat go along, for her skill putting rites together, and she declined. Mind, some of your younger sisters like Clio volunteered, but Pasiphae asked me next as an elder, since poor Perdix gets very sick at sea. Her mind is—Do you know, though, Diamat took me aside later and I thought she'd say Good Luck, or Avenge us all—and she said *Cleite dear, while you're at Callista would you pick up some pumice-stones for me?* She can get more than she wants right here, I told her. *Oh, but Callista pumice comes in such nice colors!* she said. Is that what's on the woman's mind these days, her rough skin? I may be too dour myself but I remember Diamat from our own Bull Dance—she was like that young what's-her-name up at Archanes, Phaedra, you know, utterly devoted, half in a constant trance. Well, so much for the Labyrinth's good life, I suppose. Here boy, open this one. I thought you wanted to save the shells!

— Phaedra hates me, Icarus said. *Krack-krack!*

— Because why? Because you cling to her skirt like a child? Iris asked him: it appeared she was losing affection for him with his behavior round the shops — Speak of Archanes, Iris went on (not waiting for Icarus' answer but

reaching out to help Cleite sit at her side on the pool's rim), —when are you sisters going to come down on that foreign fellow Razorclam? I don't think he should be allowed to dress like a priest of that sort unless he's, well, made a certain decision. I can't help thinking it's too much like the sharp edges we're losing elsewhere these days. I heard the Queen yesterday coming back from the Libyans' arrival saying *My, aren't they cruel-looking? We must have a handful permanently for the House guard.* Forgive me, I don't mean to gossip, but she *is* our example. It must be hard for Ariadne to be less than at one with her mother, to feel that she's not dealing with the world the way Pasiphae says it really is.

Iris tacking away from my mother: I might have agreed, but declined to mention there were still ships bound for Sicily this season. Icarus, meanwhile, had pricked up his ears for all they said of Pasiphae

—I badger Tukato about that fellow, yes, Cleite answered, and she put her arm round Iris' waist even as her eyes discerned my thought. —But oh, who can say what world this will be one month from now. With Yamo's and Rusa's splendid offer to Dance again we don't even know who the new young clergy will be. Let's hope Bull keeps those two on at least! But a number of suppliants from good houses have shown up to challenge them again. We're only letting back into this Dance the ones who really stood out at your own and your brother's, Deucalion. Times demand that, I'm sure you'll agree.

Hieros gamos with Ariadne, and the Dance: all this to come before we set sail, close as that was. Quite a year so far. And I'd only begun to get to know the half-dozen young priests and six new priestesses. Each Great Year it was for Bull to choose out one-half new Kouretes and

one-third new priestesses: as my father had said, our system retained more old conservative blood behind the Consort than behind the Queen. Young sisters, so the wisdom went, would be less likely to press for radical change. They hadn't bargained for Ariadne—And how many of my Kouretes rankled at this as I sometimes did? Most had kept well behind Cratus since the stabbing, watching their steps awhile

—But listen, my beautiful Osiris, Cleite said to me now, rising up and coming with unexpected gravity across the pool to stand dripping over me. —There is another reason I go with you. You are aware that, if anything happens to your father

I needed a deep breath to nod her answer: Ariadne herself had not spelled out like this who would take his place on The Tree next year, if necessary. Why not? Wouldn't it give me reason to keep him from striking the first blow? I did feel fear, but all around it in my chest, pride, that she'd thought enough of me not to point it out. And the chill reminded me meanwhile why I was getting this new regard from our kindred: vibrant young men who wanted to stay that way

—Well, my dear Iris, said Cleite turning, —the Queen herself must pass away like her lover, for better or worse. Where's our wineskin got to?

—She'll be Queen as long as it takes! Icarus scolded, stabbing at the limestone so that I had to wrest my knife from him before it bent; but we all noticed these words, surely not his own.

—As long as what takes? Iris asked him: no answer: his mobile face was glowering, very red

—Minotauros, I drink to your Great Year, said Cleite, troubled.

— And a moon full of honey! Iris smiled.

* * *

The rites of our betrothal waited, though, another three days of this interminable month until the Whitethorn Moon began to wax in earnest. This spread more auspicious energies about the new throne, as our clergy said, but it also left just two days after till our fleet cast off, so that people might not over-think the game. So with each our own duties and private preparations I did not see Ariadne through the wait, but fed on her presence back in Cnossos and drove myself—I was now the more determined we should win (whatever that meant), for I knew the rest of my days should want for nothing if we did. The worst of this time was the wait on Glaucus, since one bad summer squall could turn him and so many ships to wrack on some beach and we'd never know it. Still, we'd be going; and I drank all the nectar I could from the days in my hands.

Birth, Initiation, Marriage, Rest, and Death: these were the five stations of the life between our Queen and Consort, and for each Ariadne and I had a betrothal-day to remember. Under the first day's sunrise every able-bodied female that could get here followed Paria and Pasiphae seaward with a switch of birch and drove all bad luck and malevolence out of our precincts: at the sea's edge the men behind them beat shields and drums and blew conches (with a great freshness for having done so just last moon), and then the *Oh-lo-lo* rose up again as The Aridela appeared, swimming inshore this time on the morning tide. This was Her Rising and it seemed to me that, as she walked from the mild white surf before us,

with the seawater sparkling and dawn's rose tinge over her body, her quiet smile was to say that the grief of the ages could be cleansed away, one only need let go—at least it seemed possible as, amid this vision, I noticed Talalay giving me a smile from the crowd's edge, following through on her forgiveness. The Kouretes then formally presented me (it was my place to answer Her roused desire, like the great serpent made by Goddess in the stories) and I laughed with nervous joy as they turned me about, displaying the robust sign of my health before the people. Bull-roarers swung, their heavy humming-sound thrilled the air beneath the drums and bawdy praises: people showered us now with young barley-spikes, fig-pods and tiny votives as the clergy whipped us lightly with green squills of sea-onion, all to rouse the fruitful Powers of the land, and a fine procession then brought us together back to Cnossos, where we were bathed and anointed and robed to receive formal tributes. Ariadne saw that I was all but overwhelmed, and showed me ways to begin to forget my name, as father had

You will see the hard reasons why I linger here over these glories: at the time I took them to my soul as priest and lover. The rites' second day, all Cnossos valley crackled and smoked with burning furze on every hill and I trooped round fire to fire to trade initiation-cups with elder men of each clan tending them, giving and taking family standing and plenty of randy exhortation: then with one man from each clan I led them up Mount Juktas, prefiguring tomorrow's trip to The Holy Mount, and made my public consent to The Offering. My throat thickened with what I was promising before these people and the presence of ages of our kings: there could be no backing-out later; but when fear subsided, just as Ari-

adne'd said, you looked at the sky and could think the very pattern of the clouds the same as a thousand yester-days'. All was *now*

From there we marched again to the sea, where I tossed that greatest of mothers a golden ring and, having just surrendered my life, I did feel grand enough to wed her: as long as we were strutting so much strength I tried to undo my brother's gesture toward our Achaian guests in the bargain, asking my priests to initiate that fellow Elphenor if he wished. He didn't mind, and even laughed once at the duckings and hazings that were part of the day; and as the men got me more and more drunk (it was honor for each to have me drain a cup in his house, and we were a crowd) Elphenor's rigid sobriety dawned as a strength to me. His bearing helped me to hold to a bit of reserve. It was a thing I grudged to admit but our own Cretan fellows seemed to admire it, even as they drank themselves oblivious

By the third day my whole being ached for her, and I rose up early in the more uncomfortable sense. But the moon had gone down in the south, all things were in dark blue shadow and silent but for sounds of running water; and the moon had laid down so thick a dew that, in morning's first warmth, the whole luminous Labyrinth steamed and glistened among its flower-beds atop our hill, the Kephala. My body would not sleep so I just walked the outer colonnades awhile, brooding on the processional murals, the valley's slopes and the town beneath the last star: my body's unattended want had diffused soft flame within my skin and I thought the good green smells of the valley keener this morning, and somehow for me. To breathe was a private communion, a deeper acceptance of what I was marrying, as well as whom. There was no

use trying to imagine what they intended to do to me someday: that was for others to contemplate as they saw me live my life in the face of its sure coming, and if people foresaw their own deaths with less fear for sharing mine, then I had served. What would it be like, to be sown back into the life of the world, to be everywhere, nourishing all as I dreamed the world like old Mount Juktas, purely a part of the stream of things? The strands of white vapor rising off the palace hill amid its myriad gardens and creepers made the place look so ancient, yet steaming like a newborn in the grass, and the presence of our Dead felt stronger than ever: I spoke to the grandfathers I'd never known, and to my brother, and as I promised anew we'd not fail them there was a stirring among the birds in the misted cypress trees

Ariadne came gravely to the rites of our third day. We were to make our first killings and offerings together beneath the noon sun, and though her strokes with Labrys were clean and unhesitating, there was simply more regard in her manner for the beasts than our mother showed before the altars. We couldn't know if Pasiphae had begun her reign thus, or grown harder; but in the way Ariadne laid her hands to Bull's brow; the way she coaxed the signs of consent from he-goat and ram, took the cockpartridge from old Perdix's arms—clearly her reign would be no time of extravagance in blood. She was bent down to look straight into the eyes of each animal as I swung the stunning-mace hard to the backs of their heads: she would not take Labrys from the sisters till she was sure they were wholly in sleep. She was making it plain that for her blood-rites were a thing to be minimized. This might make The Offering the more dreadful in public eyes, but I think she wanted people to see these

traditions as she did, a kind of apology for something else lost through time. Grandmother, though, had counseled her that you could not take custom safely away without replacing it; so Ariadne gave the more weight to what came after these deaths. As people bore their house's best rhyton full of their blood-portion before us, we anointed them at brow, breast and loins, and then they followed us together in stroking it over the House's master-pillars, on the columns and horns of the central court's great shrine: it was the Circle Ariadne loved best, the fact that these animals had come from the people and, as they gave their strength to the House, she was reciprocally entrusted with their interests, peace with the land, with the all-important Dead. People got to notice her blended pride and sensitivity and, accepting it, they showed her more confidence, for surely the land and The Dead had to love this daughter, would speak to her Their secrets of our tomorrow? And now affairs passed onward to the highest communal rites of the betrothal, as elders were ushered into our innermost shrines, took seats along stone benches and accepted libations from each other as Goddess or God. Some took this with mortal seriousness, others with a smile, but the light in their faces was more than the sun's as they came out onto the court again. And if Elphenor and his Achaian fellows kept a blasphemy-fearful distance from rites like this, well, they had to be allowed every right to confine themselves that way

At last we were decked with necklaces symbolic of the fields' and orchards' fruits, and the caprifying dance of our love was come. In the central court local clansfolk and representatives from all our other townships laid out cuttings and provender and pyxes of soil around us: we held hands right-to-left, left-to-right in the forever-sign

and began to improvise a lively progress around the circle, moonwise of course, exciting lust in each other and so in everything. We turned and spun within the turns, kissed and body-caressed each other, rubbed our flanks together laughing: our clergy raised a wild music and I thought I'd burst unless I joined with her soon, watching the way she threw her head back and her breasts pressed together between her arms, her black tresses flying as we turned. She looked tranced and happy whirling and ducking in close to nibble and caress, her eyes half-open with deepening want, and the people around us beyond the cuttings kept up clapping and cheering, the men's strapped-on leather dinguses wagged rhythmically and women fed everybody bites of vulva-shaped honeycakes, clapping more and feeding, exhorting all things to give, *give*. And now they fetched out the squill-whips again and (we'd been told) that was our moment to halt: once more they flicked and snapped about our bodies and at last Ariadne could hold no longer, she gave a wonderful cry and we broke out of the circle to loose the Power into the world. She took off and snapped her necklace too, and I after her—*Lords* my raving genitals felt bull-big and jounced like a drunken clown as we ran out the Labyrinth's north gate

And for all their need of assurances, people let us run off to it now, though every field we passed had a furrow hoed up in the hope that our love would take there. I'd have spent the day making sure nobody was disappointed, but when she finally took me (it was in a place where she saw butterflies at the dug-up soil), it felt like for all the world. She had more to teach than I could dream and I did not care where she'd learned it, I was astonished by the hunger the mouth and heart and body could sustain,

the burst of the sun within the animal shudders, a song like something out of the Moon in my ears as we smelled and tasted Earth together in and through and for each other, our entire race behind us, before and with us. She showered shivery handfuls of tilth across my back as her body contracted and her teeth set hard behind her smile, and she let out an uncontrolled moan: Oh, if I'd been a pale old wandering ghost I'd've looked to see what creature made sounds like hers, a daemon drinking honey perhaps: I could not get close and deep enough and at last she reached underneath to coax forth my seed and I poured into her, a first little death for the land and The Ones Below her. And *Oh, that's a good sign!* she laughed as I immediately slid down her belly to devour her deliciousness and my snake resurrected as I did, and we started again: her gently-closed eyes and smile gave her just the look of tranquil ecstasy I'd seen in Canaan's images of Mother of the Grain, and I gave her all the loving-wild pleasure I could and rocked with strophes of rowing-songs as we ploughed, on and on

And after we'd been bathed once more we came to the rite by which I became Crown Prince beside my Goddess: my father showed me his pride as they tied (for today) his gold-foil diadem across my brow, but he cried outright for Ariadne's radiance as Paria and Pasiphae placed on her head a chaplet of roseleaves worked in milky-gold electrum, and Ariadne stood to bless, attired in an open-breasted gown of passionate heather-red, chased with silver. They'd wound her hair up too in a sacral knot, to safely signify The Powers more potent than ever in her now: Ariadne turned to the shrine's horns and pillars to make her own thanks and silent vows and, as I looked on, somehow I most loved that delicate tangle of loose hairs

under the knot behind her neck, touched so finely by light and air

We slept (now and then) late on that next day of Rest, mainly holding customary first audience together to hear petitions, oversee healings. Help our clan bear another girl-child; cure my palsy; bring our son home from patrol; send a priestess to break ground for a new well. It might've been easy to think you could do everything for all, but Paria's elder women had a Crone's role to play in almost every high moment of these days, *Hoo-Hooing* like owls behind the most celebratory uproars, wailing like the sea in winter from the crests of the valley that fifth and final dawn. Young as I was, it was a terrible sound, but a chastening no Consort could honorably object to, since it was nature to die and give way to the young. But if those sounds sang of the void, the void that waited to swallow every name and all achievement, it lit one's defiant courage too. So by the time I entered the courtyard under the moon that night, the Kouretes having strapped Bull's horns to my head for the final maze-dance, I could brave a little laughter before the crowd who, naturally enough, would have smiled at any man dressed as I was. The horns were as old as our Consort's very office and in this last rite I was to prod my way with playful implacability through a spiral-maze of masked dancers, in effect forcing my father through to the opposite end, where he confronted his Queen: from there Pasiphae, out of her own stance back-to-back with Ariadne, led Minos down the east wing's great stair, returning with him to that world below human sight, and leaving Ariadne and myself in the center of the clergy. It was but a dance, but watching them descend those stairs together was chilling, and a taste of royal burden: you were

alone before the people now. Later I asked my father if he'd felt dwarfed by the throne's enormities: he smiled and said that few men were born with the great heart, that come winter we'd go up-country together to the deep caves as he had with my brother. There was yet the Dance of Changes to learn besides, and with it more traditional things that (I'd see) served to steady the Heir

For so much nectar, though, there was blood nobody looked for out of the Bull Dance, which graced the middle-three of these five days. Our young priest Yamo, that is, won back his office: Rusa, the priestess he loved, was killed. Everybody felt for them: from the first of the Dance's heats they'd looked something special among the nine women and twelve men out in front of Bull. It was not Yamo's cat-like physical cunning or Rusa's long-legged powerful grace in her kilt and wristbands of corn-silk-yellow, her big-toothed smile, but the way they carried themselves with almost cocky generosity toward the other dancers, as if they'd never imagined they could be eliminated

This all took place on a bright sandy fenced-in athletic ring east of the Labyrinth where our clergy supervised games as part of funerals: it was surrounded by long raised wooden benches and an overflow of people never failed to wrangle their duties feverishly just to get here and see the Dance once, to share the *Kyklos* (round dance) of a generation or brave the sword-jumping *Kybesteres*. The families of dancers got better seats than anyone, for if their children had passed examinations by incumbent clergy—what useful skills had you mastered, in what shapes did The Powers speak with you—then only Bull, to whom you could not lie, stood between each dancer and high office, or the throne itself in proper

years. I remember how all of them wore some luck-charm in their belts from hopeful and terrified kin and how they all strutted and crackled with eagerness, yes it was good for us to see this now; but on the opening day we knew that that Bull down there was a thinker, for so much humped muscle behind his neck and the vicious up-curve of his horns. First thing he did was turn in mid-charge away from the first man holding and holding in place before him to try for a leap, and he lowered his horns upon the woman just behind him instead, who'd meant to give that leaper a steadying-touch upon his landing. (That was near the heart of the game—blending brave and generous team-play with whatever it took to show yourself the best.) The woman panicked and ran and got clear of Bull, and that was the end of her Dance: if she'd held and tried to manage her own leap from there she'd have been hard to beat, but the flat-out running to save herself had cut her. Watchers bunched along a clan's bench let out their disappointed breaths. Of course there were honors and lesser offices losers could accept for having come so far, but in sight of the Labyrinth, Bull gave you just the one moment to show yourself

Yamo and Rusa, meanwhile, not only helped to distract Bull enough for each other's successes, but more than once risked everything when leaps went badly for others, helping a woman off with a broken arm, dragging a trampled man clear of Bull's kicks. They did their natural share of shoving and maneuvering past others when they needed to shine among some glorious play—an attempted flying-handstand on Bull's back was worth two clean leaps to the crowd—but between Rusa's close-up claps to Bull to come, come and get her, and Yamo's exaggerated gestures of fear as he played his lanky body be-

fore the horns, well, they were more *artful* about it than any. And besides, most people knew of their choice to risk hard-won office for the sake of public spirits: it touched the same feelings as The Offering, showed what we meant by *the cream of our youth*

What happened was, on the Dance's last day (our day of Rest), there was only one place in the clergy left undecided, between Rusa and a woman: Rusa had got herself leaping-position in front of Bull, and rendered Him her trademark of a high gay salute, a spirited something extra when most dancers were on their toes praying. Bull came on with a wag of his black dewlaps and curls, slow-footed but with stalking eyes, head slightly cocked, sun on the right horn's wicked tip; and then he wheeled away from Rusa with his trick from the first day and rushed the woman still in the game against her. That woman held her ground, though, and ran to meet Bull head-on as Rusa obliged and caught up with his tail. But Bull wheeled once more this time, and caught Rusa flat, and his right horn went straight through her chest. She gave an *Uhn!* with the impact, and floundered and then went limp, every voice died with her, and Bull trotted a moment with his hanging prize, then scraped her off: the other dancers, Yamo too, had simply frozen, sure and shocked she was dead, and Bull just stood over her surrounded by silence, the pipes of birds. He sniffed the life as it pooled on the sand and sank to The Ones Below

Pasiphae stood up in our box and held her palms toward the Earth: it was accomplished. Beneath her gesture, Perdix and elder priestesses moved first, and signed the family forward to help them spread a purple pall of honor over Rusa, while assistants came out with their nets and nooses for Bull (he'd be turned loose back in the

mountains of his capture). Minos, Ariadne and I stood silent with fist-to-brow for the chosen ones below our box, and the rest of them: I did not look down at Yamo, nor at my Queen standing live and strong beside me

In the end, this Dance was like a confirmation of the previous one with our brother, for Rusa's was the only office lost. Through the rest of his betrothal-duties Yamo held up strong, and he lacked for no attempt at comfort from the House. We held further ceremony to honor Rusa's family, who took her body home to Myrtos in the south: then as soon as he could Yamo got staggering-drunk and accosted various colleagues for some kind of wisdom. I don't know what others told him but, when he came to me, I tried to honor him by admitting that I had none for my brother: he took it as I'd hoped, and setting his cup aside said *Oh, Deucalion, this morning I almost walked into the ocean. But she wants us to live, the ocean, eh?* I thought he'd be alright, even if he did refuse for the nonce to touch those horns which the priests brought out for our final maze-dance.

A ship bearing some good fortune, anyway, beached on the eve of departure: it brought to us two windcarved salts whom Perides' northern-based officers had known from Aegina, our old station up in Athens Bay. These men had been captains in the seaborne trade there, wanted its declining business back, and had served as part of my brother's last improvised escort on the journey to his death: out of all this they said they had reason enough to help and meant to pilot us clear up to Athens, through new-moon darkness. While they'd seen no major signs of cooperation along the Isthmus Road up there, they had heard that Athens looked for trouble when the moon was full: *Good*, Perides exulted one step ahead of Minos, let

their strength go slack when we failed to arrive as expected. He took these men before Paria's tapestry and asked if they knew a certain nameless rock in the sea just west of the straits between Kithnos and Kia Islands: they did. Then on the day of the new Thunder Moon they were to meet our host of warships there, and take us north after sunset. All was agreed, and Minos looked sanguine enough. It was just as we bade these men to hot baths and food that our friend Elphenor came into the throne's anteroom, and said that some of our priests were defiling the shrine to Achaian Poseidon

It was Yamo, and three of the younger new Kouretes who'd had Bull-Dancers' bonds of their own with him and Rusa. As priests they naturally saw Poseidon as a less-than-pure adoption of Crete's ancient Bull: by the time we got them to stop hacking at the shrine's murals of seaside mountains and smashing the vessels of offering, Pasiphae was there, Icarus with her (curiously), and finally Ariadne. Yamo's rage was loose and he shouted that with all respect due from a priest to the House, it was high time to have this god *out*, and he wasn't alone

Pasiphae quietly reminded Yamo that she had given this god a place for reasons: his shrine would stay for as long as she reigned. Yamo knew enough to defer (after searching my and Ariadne's eyes for help)—but turned his virulence on my father now, exhorting him to deal with this pirate overseas with blood and fire, *And I will come with you, Minotauros, to see to it, by this hand*. Ariadne's face colored with anger and I wondered how much drink could make Yamo (my elder) behave as I had—all of us bristling on the brink of departure

—Isn't it enough, Yamo, Ariadne demanded with a gesture at Minos, —an iron sword at your High Priest's

hip? I say, you will not go and then, later, serve my House.

—Oh, talk with Itiri, daughter! said Minos. —There are things to be learned from time spent under the sun. It's called Necessity! Now, Yamo, listen

—As you'll find out, *War Leader*, she answered before our father had turned full-away from her, —I *am* learning. Yamo, do not test me!

—Can we go away Mama? They can break any god they want? said Icarus up to Pasiphae as we stood there: she shushed his fear, and a moment later Yamo stalked out of the shrine, his young cohorts following

Well, Ariadne prevailed for now: against our father she took what action she could with the time left. Through all these days, of course, we'd received no few shamefaced heralds from cities that would not respond to our call: Ariadne had one clay list of these drawn up and bluntly dropped it in Minos' lap at a council that afternoon. But instead of daunting him with less-than-universal support—Ephesus and Samos, for example, meant to keep all their strength at home against that hosting—Ariadne's act made him worse. Adding in the way Yamo's grief brought Minos' own, he meant all the more now to squeeze what he could from his freedom to act. And still no Glaucus, whose numbers would make or break the action. While Cratus and some of the priestesses shamed Yamo's group for selfishness and the House seemed ready to fly apart, Minos took it out in doubled blade-practice, had more torches cut and readied. He'd been invoking the sun in more than one way and drawing still on the Powers of the moon to bless his will: *It's what a king makes of it and no more*, he snarled at me, though I'd not said a word

We were walking back late and sweaty from Katsambas when Cordax caught us on the road. Glaucus and fifty-two ships were off Amnisos. With one day to spare! We ran the shore hills to see, yet hearts were bad to think how Minos might plow right over her now

The whole blue sea between Amnisos and Dia Isle was filled with ships, row beyond row of them jammed with strange armed men, the sails being brailed up for beaching, banks of oarblades gold in the falling sun. Warships beaching here again: later we learned it was only because most captains would go no farther, too many nights at sea to get here. But they'd come, and we'd never seen the port so full, and with so many *kinds* of ships

The first contingents were disembarking by the time we got down there, professionals coming down gangplanks from the stern and others wading in with gear on their backs: I ran (this once) ahead and lifted Glaucus off his feet with welcome and thanks. His graygreen eyes were hollowed with sea-fatigue, salt and stubble crusted him but his thighs and arms looked bigger for taking turns at the oar to get them here—his ever-confident presence lit such a brightness in me, we were going to win

—Look at you, the change of wonder every time I beach! he said

—Look at *them*, I said as he appraised my upper arm.

—Let's bring them in before my father and then you can bathe and rest. Well done, well done

—Rest till tomorrow that is, he answered: a sea-change in his eyes

So we stood at the mouth of the road and watched them, ship sliding up next to ship like so many teeth biting into the curve of coast. There'd never been such com-

motion here and people watched from under the tamarisks with hands on children's heads as Glaucus filled us in on each contingent, presented the captains. Faces fierce as their warships' figureheads: in general a bath to them was a nicety for people who lived in boxes, so their skin, where it showed, looked a leathery compound of oil and sweat and earth. *Scum of the sea*, Egyptians called the mercenaries here. Perides wouldn't have gone so far—these men, after all, did things even Pharaohs wanted done, but would not do. But he was Admiral because he knew enough to array no small number of our cracks and home guard before their faces, and Minos gave them understated welcome

From Byblos: five ships, one hundred twentyfive reaping-hook swordsmen, *mar-yannu* they were called, who'd slain their share both for and against Pharaoh's regulars

From Ashdod: five ships, one hundred twenty more mercenaries, these mainly archers and slingers with hides of deep bronze, escorts of caravans along Canaan's sun-beaten Royal Road

From Pharos: five ships from our harborworks north of the Nile, but only half of the hundred twenty men true soldiers, and they with only broadswords: the rest were Egyptian halfbreeds, Semites, runaway *fellahin* out to dodge conscription to the mines and the tomb-works we heard about. These had no arms but came with monkeys or filched jars of exotic stuffs to trade for them, Glaucus apologized but he *had* been told to bring numbers

From Ugarit: five ships, one hundred twenty lancers with short swords at their hips and round armshields for in-close fighting: all fresh from defensive action against broken Hittite divisions who were plundering as they fled north. Their captain said they'd brought an extra ship-

ment of Elamite tin for the forges: we normally got Eastern tin only once a year through Cretan clans who'd settled Ugarit, but with the chaos round them now, our interests were theirs, and they'd need *us* soon

From Trianda, Rhodes: eight ships, one hundred sixty civilians turned swordsmen, only their captain really looked a fighter with the harsh bony profile of a hatchet-fish: the rest like island-boys, nervous, inward, struck by the scale of Amnisos' port. And they refused, frankly, to stay any longer than one moon: did the Labyrinth know of a certain roving—*Be quiet*, Perides told the captain

From Paphos and Amathus, Cyprus: six ships filled with one hundred thirty Pulesati, both women (cousins to Byblos and Ashdod) and men, all barechested, tattooed with their Goddess' sea-signs, in bright cropped-feather headbands, a marching forest of spears and drawn swords, some of iron, too. They were so rich with copper they could afford it when available, though none of their women used it: all warrior-priestesses like Alxiona and Itiri, the stuff was bane to them, sky-god poison

And there were the fifteen ships from our own houses, Phaestos and Mallia and Zakros to match our own Cnosian five, four hundred fifty more Cretan cracks with seasoned weapons: my aunts and uncles had come through. By this time no few Libyans and Carians had come down to watch with other people and even Itiri and our trainers were impressed with the force

But we all fell back as the *Annakim*, the giants came last along the road to their encampment. They'd come by way of Gaza in three ships, and though they were only thirtysix in number, we stood dumb

—I tried to get more of them, Glaucus said. —But they're on retainer to houses you don't want to antago-

nize and they charged us food and wine and transport into the deal. They won't sail without a king's deck-space, either, so that's why so few. I hope this will do, sir?

—Uh—What? my father said

I'd never believed our sailors back from African coasts who said there were men with fur who walked on their knuckles. Now I did. But did they come from giant mothers, were they family or only guild? They scarcely talked and I never got to asking Glaucus. They came in broad black tunics, hairy-limbed, with black chest-length beards and eyes near the size of eggs: not a one stood less than seven feet high off the road, and thick broadswords swayed at their hips as they trudged, the way you'd expect a tree to walk, oblivious, slow, unstoppable. On each head was a mare's nest of coarse black hair, and loose-plaited helmets of leathered bronze plate (the studs of gold) hung from their belts: they had no need of those high hats the Hittites wore to look bigger on the field, and you could believe they'd carry home the average foe's corpse thus, like pelts strung from a hunter's waist. Each hefted a bundle of wargear too heavy to risk keeping on at sea, corselets of linked bronze disc, greaves and arm-guards, gorgets, a shield like a Cretan house-door and a javelin in the other hand: their eyes were like deep water, even when a thing like Crete itself lit pleasure in their faces, and their standard was a Sinaian mountain-of-fire with Goddess' five-pointed star stitched above the flame. I wished their bootprints would last because I knew my children would never believe this

—I wonder would my Daedalaë paint them somewhere, Minos mused. —Ho, wait for me, Aegeus! he shouted then across the ocean; and I saw Glaucus covertly wince by his side. —Let's go now Perides, too much to be

done, he ended with a clap to the Admiral's back. — Glaucus, you may name your reward.

— To speak plainly, sir—Peace, and these hirelings off my home-earth.

— And what's this then? my father asked, feeling flanked after Ariadne's words. — When we last spoke, young man, you were considerably

— I won't trouble you now, sir. Allow me to see to my crew?

— You're exhausted, by all means. Well done! The Queen awaits you.

— He's becoming like me before a good tub, Perides put in as the giants lumbered on for encampment

Once so many such people had come, it seemed best to have suffered Glaucus' late arrival with them, for they'd've quickly hunted out these near hills. As it was, before their tents were up local boys were around with bundled kindling for trade and young girls of the flowering age came to sing at the camps' edges, some anticipating priestesses' lives and hoping to practice calming storms, others just after foreign silver. In some of the camps making love before war was anathema, in others it was medicine and power, what you were fighting for: in my camp it was the latter but I remained out late seeing to the torches' distribution with some officers, I hoped it'd please her that (like our brother) I wanted more prestige of service than of leisure. And *Listen to the ocean!* I heard young Cretans from drill exclaim: everything around us seemed transformed to a wonder and if I had no position like either Minos' or Ariadne's I knew I had to back him. I did all I could, but it was still his affair to leave the Kouretes in better order, and I left him first thing at the Labyrinth for my Queen. As I wound down

the east wing's great stairs I saw the moon, one night short of fullness, up above the lightwell; and felt my feet no more than the feet of my people, treading no more than a turn of the ages

We ate lightly in private from each other's fingers. I asked to know what she'd meant about talks with Itiri, what was this showing-forth she'd been mentioning, but Ariadne made it clear she'd prefer no talk. If this somehow filled my heart with the assumption of confidence I needed, it worked the opposite magic on our father next afternoon. Ariadne escorted Cleite down to the *Talos* and then departed without a single public word to him, and everybody saw it: of course with Pasiphae and other priestesses blessing the ships and binding their hair up for good sailing-days, Minos was not without vital approval, but it hurt him, how dared she leave things this way between them with return uncertain, and hurt him the more for not knowing what she'd *have* him do. One could gaze forever on Juktas as he dreamed above the coastal hills, but how else could people meet this crisis? *Weak, proud, naive!* Minos kept muttering, not unlike our clans with foreign fortunes to protect—Cleite, fresh from Ariadne's side, nonetheless bade him remember that Paria and her women were at ritual of their own in the deepest pillar-crypts of her villa; that Pasiphae's casual embrace was the confident sign people needed. But Glaucus and I saw him turn away

Then day was gone: our hundreds and hundreds going aboard were matched by the crowds come down along the shore, citizens, home guard looking ready to face any thousand; and though Tukato's people were absent a roar of praise outdid the sea as the bright full Whitethorn Moon cleared the hills. As we cast off Minos raised his

sword overhead to signal the precision of his purposes and about half of those who saw him shouted aloud for him, and all the soldiers: before long we'd cleared the eastern heel of Dia Isle, dark with its trees and folded hills and I glimpsed the great willow tree at the heart of The Grove as we passed, the singing back on Crete giving way to our own, to the lap of waves and the rhythms of the oars. All before us now, moonlit open sea, the darkness hiding the shape of Velkanos to the north: there was a thrill of strength in each forward thrust of Talos' hull, glints of spears and helmet-crests marked the seventy-eight ships fanned out behind us on the waters; and the night air was crisp and calm and salted, Minos up at the prow with his hands on the bronze horns drinking it, drinking the world. I sat with Cleite (Glaucus snoring), looking backwards to watch one ship after another ply through the path of silver cast down by the moon. You could almost forget what this was about, so graceful and eager these ships looked, and soon there were mariners' arias to hear, the little improvised exchanges that helped to hold formation darker nights. Somebody sang that he'd just lost supper, his sealegs not what they should be; another longed for the garden behind the house already, and a woman breathed Goddess' greatness in a breeze. Another gave cry that some young soldier had better keep hands to himself, there was laughter and whooping, spirits were high for the vulnerable feeling of being out here and committed and we plunged on, on, the sea a rolling ravelled indigo. Abandoning himself to everything under the stars my father came back and sang for the fleet: what he sang was backwards-appropriate, he was drunk on air but people got the drift, he gave them a catch from what shepherds comfort sheep with enroute

to town. A travel-song, but with a knife hidden up in its melody

Cleite stood up in her cloak. She shook her head, wiped her eyes, and leaned on the rail. *Sick?* I said. *We have some cold willow-broth*

—Quiet! she whispered. —Look at the moon and be quiet about it.

It took some time, but then I saw what she saw. It was no longer full. Some shadow was crawling slowly across the whiteness and the light, cutting off the shining by slow sure degrees. I took Cleite's hand on the sly, we both well-knew these things happened from our traditions, but who was doing this, why now, why hadn't we known it was coming and I heard Cleite arguing with herself—*We have to get back to land: It's alright: It happens: Oh Goddess*

It got worse and Cleite told me to shut my father up

—No, no! he started to shout when he saw, and Glaucus awoke, Perides pushed his way aft to us, all hands could see it now: the moon looked one-quarter waned, and before we could hope otherwise a horrible shriek broke out along the vanguard of Libyan ships, and spread across the blackening sea behind us. The shadow kept taking more light from the very waves. Some dreadful thing could rise right out of the black rolling sea and pull us under: I was trembling

—Cleite! Minos ordered

—Come about! Glaucus yelled up-deck to the tillers but they couldn't seem to move their grips on the steering: our oarsmen and marines beat together on the danger-tested wood of the ship, and they took right up with the moon-rise song Cleite tried for my father; but no good, the giants were bellowing out there and the screamings behind grew too loud for such civilized an-

swer. Even as allies cried out their lead-ships were pulling hard up toward *Talos*' stern now. No ships I could see had put about but the moon's silver had waned to weakness, compared with the lurid yellow of a few dozen torches on ships closing in: the moon was sickening still-worse and I hurt my hands for holding to the rail. I wanted to try to be Minos' priest and help him but if the answer behind all this seemed obvious, who could be sure, and what to do in that case? Eyes all around us were wide with terror in the fire-light and all I could think of was tales of squid big enough to pull ships under. Darker and darker: She looked gibbous now, weakened and sullied, perhaps the vengeance of an insulted god : a sea-going god

— You hags can warn for these things when it suits you! Minos raged. — You and Paria, you, you! he stammered, struggling to master himself, to raise his best prayers above his detractors', he turned in place sunwise and spoke ancient names of Brightness, of Dark, and nothing worked, nothing

— So beautiful in her crown! Oh child! Minos wept

— It's your puerile cursed sheep-tunes! Cleite told him, frozen herself now that the moon was gone but for a rim: every one of us paled as the dark enveloped everything, source of her Powers, sign of his Name

— Here come the captains! said Perides. — You've got to go on. Look, they're starting to drift back there— Show them this is your doing, brother. Show *me*. Do you realize how some of these hirelings can turn

Cleite laughed with a half-mad sound that shivered my spine

— *His* doing! Oh, let me proclaim that! Then I'll jump overboard, ho!

This was the one time ever that I saw my father give a

look with killer's will. No one knew what to do. And then it didn't matter, because suddenly the rim of the moon that had darkened first appeared again, as sharp as a Labrys blade. Instantly people seized on this and in watching, forgot their shouts: it was not a long while before we were wiping sweat, reveling in the sight of silvered waves again, wondering if we'd passed together through a fever-dream. Cleite climbed up on the rail to officiate a Thanks

But we did not go on that night. When we'd looked back for Minos he'd been half doubled over and then, gathering himself out of shame and trembling, he put us about. He did not argue when the protests erupted, he simply told Perides and the rest that there was time let into Paria's plan, and said once more, *Put about*. There was a falling in my chest as *Talos* turned; but it had been too long since we'd truly felt proud of him.

* * *

The people at home had panicked too, so although many heads shook as our mighty host came back sea-damp with the dawn, there was a fearful closing of Cretan ranks around the Labyrinth. Elphenor, with some admirable prudence at the head of our embattled Achaian residents, pointed out what good omen he thought the mainland would take from what he called such a sign against Goddess' potency: he was resentfully believed, so through the next days' constant ritual the people who came before our penitent father renewed their vows of all the help he could ask for. Let Minos change his bearing as he pleased, he was still the center he'd made of himself for controlling so many weapons in Crete's interest. Meat

and grain-stores arrived in bulk for the contingents, lumps of melted-down jewelry to pay and keep the mercenaries content, fasts and prayer-dances by whole clans replaced those festive evenings round fires atop the hills. And still, if Cretans ceremoniously clung to Pasiphae's familiar and palpable authority, neither she nor grandmother brooked discussion of what'd happened. In rite they together let people cling to the prayer at the heart of tradition, that things just return to normal; but as the public talked what they couldn't forget of the extraordinary, Ariadne's name was on their lips. Her public detachment from Minos became the single explanation for a very unsettling event, one normally foreseen as a matter of clergy's course.

—It must have been awful out there on the sea, she said as we took (again) our final night in private. —Deucalion, I tell you I never saw a man weep until he came to me. His time going, his son gone ahead of him, so much he feels his life hasn't done—it'd all made him crazy, he said. I tried to reassure him that between his family and the people I know outside Cnossos, we're fairly happy enough. Blasted politics. Is that what a man fears most, not to feel depended upon? How else could a Man Who Steps Forward feel, I don't know. I thought it was glory enough for a mortal.

She was sitting up in her chamber's bed with the skins to her waist, facing the silvery darkness of her lightwell, dark tresses tousled out to her collarbones as I poured out more wine. For so much change and learning, and that terror—plus how sated and poised I felt tonight—I smiled at her, to say that it was glory enough for me. Having asked her once if she *had* put that shadow to the moon, she'd asked back if I *had* to know. And then her

kisses had begun this evening's passion, and there the question lay still

—Glaucus says it's up here, the problem, I told her tapping my temple and padding back to the bedside with cups. She took as I proffered *Sweet Wine*, and her eyes lingered on me as she sipped. —Now let me taste you again, I feel brave tonight!

—I'm glad, Ariadne said when we'd kissed (a little too gently for me). —I say that because father and I—have something to tell you now.

And she added *Sit nearer* and drained her cup: two signs it was going to be bad. Had she taken me so wildly earlier, then, to blunt the edge of my heart for what was coming? If so, she understood me backwards. I'd hoped her desire the sign of her moonblood's coming, and now had to stifle alarm in my chest

—You're right that the problem is here, Ariadne said tapping as I had, but at my temple, not her own. —You know my sister Itiri is wise for her days, wiser than I. She says it has to do with why women are the high prize of plundering cities. To see on her knees what a man wants and fears most, to have and to disclaim

—What do you want to tell me? I said

—More than you're willing to listen to, perhaps, she said with a crisp patience. —Let me finish this time, Deucalion. Father thinks we may need to change our plans, our expectations, rather. He thinks that if we're really going to resolve the mainland problem, and make a long-term peace of it, then perhaps—and *I* say the perhaps—it might be time for a marriage of the bloods.

I said *What* but no voice sounded

—A marriage of the realms, *Sweet Wine*, she said reaching one forceful warm hand to the back of my neck,

to pull (or hold) me nearer. — This heir, this princeling up north will sooner or later be king of Athens. And he hails from some township within Mykenai's baronies. So he could stand for all of them either side of their Isthmus Road, do you see?

— Yes. And it'll be for me to stand *a-side* for them. So, has this prince consented to The Offering? Have you and the ladies decided on my Day, then? I suppose you can just see what happens from there. This makes me a *joke*

— I detest when you mock like that! Be a man! Ariadne said letting go and striking downward with her fists either side of her covered thighs: her hair fell forward and gave her a look at once deadly-purposeful and sultry, and I hated my own inability to forget desire

— Sit still! she said. — I expect you to think of your people before you go off to sulk. The marriage would be titular only. Look at Itiri. Don't you wonder how it is that a woman, a priestess, can be the killer she is and suffer none of the palsy that sickened our father? Why is that? Well, I asked her myself straight-out, and she shrugged to me. *That's how life is for us*, she said, *living near Pharaoh*. Please listen, brother. I told her how I struggle to keep our home as it's been since before Europa beached here, and she laid it out for me. Look: we can kill all our enemies, we can teach every young person violence against strangers, or we can stop engaging this poison by pulling ourselves back off the sea. But will any of those really work? If you're going to feel betrayed and hate me, then at least let me know *your* good reason, *your* better policy. I'll listen. My word, I'm listening, brother.

And she was. I put my head in my hands, breathed deep.

— I only think we can be sure, loved one, that this hero

has not done such deeds already so that he can lay them with his life at anybody's feet. If what you have will be titular only, how long will The Dead here put up with that? It will leave the world you want behind, completely. And, even then, how long do you suppose a man with this problem, I said beating finger to skull, —will settle for a titular queen? That won't bring him rights to what makes your mother the richest woman in the world. He'll look at you and decide to sack Cnossos single-handed

—Tallay found you a little familiar with such feelings, Ariadne said. —Maybe you're right. Peace isn't worth it.

—Peace? What do Achaians want with peace? Have you talked with Rhodians lately, people from Ugarit or half the East? Oh Ariadne, I said, and from the height of my life so far I plunged, shamed the very while for my voice's whine

—You *can't* think I want to lie down with some back-water beard, she answered, biting things back herself.

—Brother, I have come to love you. I think of you in ways I—still want to keep secret, let's leave it at that. If I can't be wholly free as I thought I was up-country, then let me serve beside a man like you. But look, you forget that this is only *perhaps*, and not a word of it outside, not even to mother. Deucalion, it would bind our interests. On the sealanes—we have to have tin, don't we?—and in the markets and, most important, in matters of worship. I know what we said before about getting rid of Poseidon, but Yamo's fellows aside, if you do bring this Theseus back we'll need something to start with, some way to try to make the both of them gentlemen. Like with every other immigrant Crete has married. We're living our Old Ones' very story, doesn't that mean anything to you? And for you I'm going to break confidence once more tonight

because I want to give you something against the pain I see. Deucalion, Yamo came to me and told me he was sorry but he couldn't bear to look at women since the Dance, and how was he supposed to worship with that in his heart? I told him that, in a way, he had to separate out the private from—like you and I were taught

—What to think of first above all, I ended for her. Fish heads, fish heads! She indulged me and sat very still as I wiped my eyes and got a grip on this bull charging in from a future none could see. Who knew, he might be a good man. Cleared his land of robbers. And was clearing it now of Earthlings. The worse man he was, the better my state and the more danger on our House. Hopeless! But I was not the same man either who'd left Amnisos the other night. Believing myself so close to death, I'd realized more what I'd've wanted *my* life to be

—And now what is up here? Ariadne asked reaching out to caress my brow and cheek. —I think I can accept however you might feel toward me, brother. But I ask you not to decide that yet. It's *perhaps*. Won't you talk with me?

—If I damned your eyes, I said, —it would be for the ache I feel looking into them. Why is it harder for me to give up what I want, for the sake of what we were raised the same to do?

—Don't be too sure about that, Deucalion.

—What can I be sure of then? The Offering itself? Just tell me between us, if even that is something you women invented and can dispense with if it serves. You said The Grove was a place to learn such a thing. Even Icarus sees how we handle Gods. But I'm afraid to go as far as you. Oh, how can the world come apart like this! Wait. I see. Let me try. Grandmother Paria, militant conservative,

wants to see you *vision* your way past what happened to old Hatshepsut and keep men in their Cretan place. Our mother wants you to match the world for its threats and give men more practical power, because she's sure she can control them. So here you are—and you'd give *Achaian* men power in Crete—and in order to hold the line with Paria! I understand now. It's not supposed to tally. It's like the House, it moves the more for trying to see it straight. And power stays nested quiet as a dove behind these circles.

—Now you let me try, Ariadne said setting loose what had been coloring her face, thrusting the skins off her legs and getting up. She nearly tore her blue robe from a chair beside us and pulled it on, then stood with fists akimbo

—Suppose I cut my hair off and be your woman. Would you like the right to cut my nipples off if I talk back to you? Just say so, and then make sure you have someplace to live when it's over up north

—Don't leave! I said before thinking and she stopped short by the door that led up a dog-leg stair to mother's chambers: its frame of running spirals framed her. It seemed that sign sought her out when she needed it, yet her face was set hard round unhappy eyes and I remembered her outburst before, *I don't want to marry*. Not even me, at bottom, I had to assume

—Alright. I've told you why I doubt it can work. I know you don't want this, any of it. Alright. First we serve, I know, I know it

—Let's just bring the fellow here first, she offered from so far away in this little room. —Let's see what man he is, or isn't. The choice is mine, Deucalion, and if you can believe me, I do love you. I can't help it either, if

that's what you want to hear, because Dionysos, and not Poseidon or mousy Apollo, is Goddess' consort first and last. That's how I was raised. That's how I know, despite Glaucus or Cleite, that we don't have to do a thing about Delphi. And this is not going to change, not for realms or trade-routes or anything under the moon. You must know that you can believe me.

Oh, how hatefully true, my delight to hear she could not help it! I pondered, or rather, paused carefully; then said I loved her too, and would fetch her back a hero. And when she smiled, and her marvelous form let go its tensions, and came near again (my body responding without my consent)—I told her it'd be best after all if I slept this night with the soldiers, did all I could. That surprised her (Good!) but she said she was pleased, I was growing up faster than Hermes.

* * *

Nothing could have prepared us for the beauty of Callista. The colors; the rich strangeness of its life; the astonishing fertility everywhere round the black rilled slopes of Velkanos' towering peak—Minos, with a new depth of calm, was breathing the isle in and pointing out sights as we ran the south coastline and the *Talos* fell into convoy with a dozen bright-painted Callistan needleboats. Guiding us eastward across the deep turquoise waters of a river's mouth, they took us past blazing-white houses along the cliffs, with blue doors and green shutters facing the sea and the back doors right at the edge of green-golden grain: I'd never seen a beach of black sand before, but that was where they harbored our contingents, a few miles north of their chief town (they had rules of their

own about warships in trade-port, and kept them better than we). The *Talos* alone was given berth at the foot of the easy hills leading up to Akrotiri's stone-built houses and, as Minos and I followed Cleite ashore to meet their Queen and Consort, we saw better the hundreds of people along those hill-crests, their clothes and head-dress as bright and finely fashionable as any in Cnossos. Almost everybody looked well-to-do, a hint that not all the world envied Crete; and the feast they immediately brought down made you think they received shipwrecked kings every day, hearts of palm, figs stuffed with pecans in honey-preservative, snails roasted with sesame, their good syrupy red wine. Nor could you miss the shy sophisticated allure of the local daughters with their big-hooped earrings that looked like the boats in their mothers' trades, their black curls and the wonderfully intricate patterns of their loom-woven vests and skirts; but of course none of them were Ariadne, and I could hardly get Velkanos out of my sight. Its dark enormous slopes stood over you everywhere, their feet in striated sea-cliffs of red, white and black ash, Goddess' colors, The Powers' Signature indeed. The whole isle was full of beauties, like pretty gifts from One who'd just crushed your hope of attainment. The Offering! *This*, for the death you'd consented to in public

—Monstrous, isn't it? my father often said gazing up at the mountain, whose crater, five thousand feet high in the sunshine, lorded itself above the isle and its rich-smelling fields. Out in the wild world: it dwarfed all contentions within our House, this mountain-of-fire whose rages had killed so many years ago—And now we'd spend lives holding off barbarians who found in its violent fits an ideal of behavior

— Wake up, he warned me our first evening there. — If she accepts this fellow, you win back nineteen years of life. If I were you I'd join the fleet. Look at this place! You know the song about our houses growing back better for Velkanos' knocking them flat? *Like flowers in ash*, it says. That line came from the harper's visit here, did you know that? There are two basic kinds of destruction, Sweet Wine. I am talking to you! If it's not to be that you have her this round, what of it? Millions of lives ahead of a man, Minos half-sang (Ariadne's words) with a sweep of his arm toward Callista's green brightness

And I wondered what difference, then, could *anything* make: he'd made *his* peace with mother and daughter. But the words would've shamed the House amid these rugged young island-men and the harder-looking sons of mercenaries with us: the scars along my arms could not alone and for always make them think a priest their fighting-equal. Besides, as my father relished the drills and sights and sea-air as never before, our men seemed to be gaining something from these days near his throne and the well-known terms of its power. Blade practices grew harsher, more *real*, as if there was decreasing fear of death in his presence: men might miss that, and seek to adopt our Great Year at home, add depth to our web. What matter that Cnossos' women could annul the very moon and His Mystery at will

Oh, this Fairest One of the Cyclades: try not to enjoy it. Callista's queen, Gelania (meaning Laughter) was a strong-built redheaded woman of forty who seemed the imago of her people, with their sun-narrowed mischievous eyes and a brisk imperturbable manner: you might've thought it calculated to gloss the isle's polite refusal of ships to the cause. But as Iris had said of most

Cycladics, they were simply more lively and less refined than Cretans: Gelania enjoyed their seaside meal more than anyone, gave out yellow honeysuckle plants as gifts in queer hanging-baskets they'd invented, to put up inside our tents, and asked Minos without a flinch if we planned to exterminate the Athenians. When he answered with words of Ariadne's about the coming of Night Mare, Gelania's features passed into awe for the name alone: I realized what Cnossos and its symbols meant to many out here, Minos' golden diadem, Cleite's tall ceremonial Labrys. To us this was a dubious military foray, and to the Callistans, with their love of spectacle and ancient pieties, it was magic, it was Goddess come in gigantic shape to defend the brood. Gelania touched at her breastbone's necklace of golden dragonflies, laid a slender hand upon my father's, and suggested that she and he renew first-hand the bonds ordinarily forged through proxies like our Glaucus. It never occurred to her, even with my father's boarstooth helm and iron sword before her, to ask if this might affect his war-potencies: he didn't rush to the question himself

Four of our plan's final nine days passed: the Whitethorn Moon entered last quarter, and even so cast a powerful dream-like shine upon the waters all around us, upon the slopes of the sleeping mountain. Perides and Glaucus kept close watch on the mercenary camps among the locals, we watched the sea northward for Alxiona's contingents, and added rehearsals of blood-freezing screams to our drills: the giants in full gear threw enormous shadows on the ground, they looked like offspring of Velkanos and sacrificed to it on their own. Waiting, waiting! If this had been any other isle we couldn't have borne it, but just the look of the grain here was some-

thing, it came up thick and big-headed, protected from the sun by morning sea-mists; and because Velkanos at times breathed sulphur and an irritating ashy sand, the Callistans went out of their way to plant trees and wildflowers. Swifts and swallows swooped through their lemon and myrtle groves, almond and oak, everywhere were fragrances of orange trees, laurel, jasmine: you often saw imported monkeys and striped African gazelle running about free, too, what harm could they do such surfeit of crops, and in Akrotiri with its stone-paved twists of streets Glaucus showed me how much better they did things here for cleanliness and order than in Canaan, where (he said) there was seldom any drainage among the houses, people just let their garbage and sherds pile up till they had to tamp it all down and lay new floor. Local families in shipping kept their chief protector Perides happy in the hot-spring baths: in Akrotiri people curried soldiers' favor with invitations up onto their white-awned roofs to clean feasts of crab, roasted sheep in outdoor pits. I might've gone to see Velkanos closer too, but the slopes were cracked into crevices sharp as obsidian, and it probably wouldn't have helped to climb high and sight home. To a man, above all, we loved to watch Gelania's women dancing in the evenings, tossing their hair in wild unison with their songs. One of them gifted Ariadne through me with an island-style libation vessel, too, a small porky hedgehog sitting up on his buttocks, proffering a bowl.

The place would break anybody down. These people knew how to live with a Velkanos' shadow: it was no *brutch* to them because they had no need to please foreigners. A Carian officer out of Cnidus told me his grandmother's home had been a lot like this, at least till anothe-

er such mountain at Nisyros had burst and buried a lot of their forebears' kin: it was strange what leaving could teach you of home's blessedness. My father was pleased with my better comportment, I got cooler and more cunning with my weapons just as our trainers had predicted: there was even time to gather that pumice for Diamat with Cleite. As we bagged the stuff along a black beach I couldn't help telling her that Ariadne intended to keep her on with us, as one of three priestesses always retained from incumbent clergy: Cleite's prominent brows furrowed, as if she'd rather just tend orchards like Paria and teach, but when she told me to *grab that nice pink chunk of pumice yonder* and I glanced back, I saw her lifting her palms out high to the sea.

With two days left us, Alxiona's host appeared out of the morning mists, and as soon as alarm gave way to recognition the whole island thundered with men beating shields. Gelania's priests and priestesses begged them to stop because Velkanos' slopes were soon answering the sound—but what a sight, Alxiona'd organized fortythree ships working under our summons, and if nearly every city had sent only the requested five ships, there was not a mercenary among them, all kin and trading partners out of the web

From Saliagos, Paros: five ships, one hundred spearmen and slingers with marble shot from their bottomless quarries: their blood as thick with the old ways as anybody's, they knew all about the Achaian settlement being tolerated on nearby Naxos—who'd sent no ships themselves—and hoped we might make this venture a start against such polite invasion, as they called it

From Phylakopi, Melos: five ships, another hundred, but these were young kilted swordsmen as fresh off

spring-plowing as our own, and not pleased at the needful interruption of their lives. Their shields were of unadorned wood but they were ready to repay their elders' age of debts to Cnossos, and each had a black obsidian dagger tucked somewhere for good measure

Pelasgians, from mainland towns too numerous to name: seven ships, one hundred ninety black-headed ones, looking like the last of the last with the spirit to fight rather than submit to Achaian change, or flee to found new homes. None of these people had seen my brother last moon: so far as they knew, the kin who had were already in his company. The remark went along with their poor discipline and weaponry but they truly were homeless, matrons and children had sailed here with them, goats and cattle on their decks

From Kastri, Cythera: three ships, seventyfive townsmen mostly archers, some playing goatskin bagpipes as they beached in hope that noise would make up for numbers. Who could blame them for leaving most strength home against reprisals: as you looked at our sea-chart you saw how close their island lay to the mainland, its great southern-reaching hand of terrain fast becoming The Lion's

From Agia Irini, Ceos: five ships, one hundred ten Long Knives, as these civilians called themselves to the amusement of our mercenaries: out to defend their shipping interest in the Laurium silver trade. Minos *would* take the mines back, would he not? Little men, but fierce like shrews when the grain got scarce

From Khalandriani, Syros: five ships, one hundred twenty men with double-axes or bows, their forelocks shorn out of a frightened certainty of battle: so many of their sister-isles had come that these middle-men in the

Cyclades' own web of trade could not keep themselves out of everybody else's cause, though (like most others here) they owed Crete for years of security, help with building and all the rest

And from Troy: five Mare-headed longboats, one hundred twentyfive seasoned guardians of their straits to the Black Sea, their stout swords with pommels of solid silver: horse-heraldry decked everything they brought, from their sails to the hems of their tasselled capes, and for their days at sea they looked as fresh as our well-scrubbed Admiral. Callistans could look to Crete to protect their ways: here were warier people who'd already walled their city. They came like an answer to ugly prayers. Neither raiders nor even discourteous; but right to the gloves and helmet-plumes they were ready to be *seen* by mainlanders when the lines of battle closed. Through Minos they meant to bring their feud to Mykenai itself. No one knew what promises Alxiona had made, but with the Lion King's shills pressing more every season for a share of the far north's amber and lapis and gold, they were set the harder on keeping the goods coming south at a lucrative trickle. Yet none of this was spoken. They cursed all Aryans in their Mare-Mother's Name and on that basis demanded a place in the front ranks

Minos assented, though when Perides remarked that it was going to be crowded up front, nobody laughed. With so much blood running high we'd be lucky not to lose control, and *What matter*, my father said: *whoever stands with us today, it will be Crete's name on mainland lips for this assault*. Against such worry, we endlessly checked our counts: one hundred twentytwo ships behind Talos, including Alxiona's eight vessels and two hundred of her fierce sisters out of Lemnos, Lesbos and Chios. We had

marshalled just over three thousand warriors—surely we could not fail? Cleite was troubled, though, by the *kind* of numbers that seemed to mean everything now. She'd noticed that after all negotiations and refusals, we'd fielded nineteen contingents, a sort of Great Year omen; but *Meaning what?* she asked us. *Why do I feel like a house-bred cleric to see it at all?* This with her gaze upon the ubiquitous mountain. She did think the moon's brief dimming had helped invest Labrys with more power out here; but something was dying in our midst and it was only now and then we could even sense it: no time: we had to move, to protect what we could.

Night had come down, an immaculate black bowl of stars beyond counting above our camp's meadow by the breathing sea. The commander of every contingent had a seat round the fire outside our tent. How different each was, giant, Cretan, Canannite, Libyan—with this in mind my father and Cleite had made a strong ceremonial opening, to maximize our authority; but Alxiona herself had still not joined us, we waited on her, and not long after Minos sat down all parties were haggling separate interests, the voices of stern home-councils of their own. Principally, the islanders demanded that Minos take not only Athens' heir, but six young men (at least) and six women, all of noble clans that controlled important mainland endeavors; so that until these influential young had been returned to the old ways among us, the present Achaians and mainlanders with their notorious mixture of ambition and neglect would take an interest in decent behavior. How unfortunate, Itiri put in, that simple reciprocity had come to this; but the strategy, said a mercenary, was no worse than Pharaoh's sometime-policy in Canaan (confirmation of our mothers' foreign intelligence was pleasure

to hear). My father warned that the very demand made war and not success more likely, and only the mercenaries nodded and thumped him support (they had been paid)—but the islanders did not much care, they had come so far for reasons, and Troy could lead them if Minotauros would not

This was when Alxiona came striding up the meadow, two sisters behind her with torches, and dragging something: they'd captured a priest of the oracle at Delos Isle, and brought him like an amusing tribute to the cause. They'd bound him up in a fishing net and at my father's nudge I braved my way between the three women, and cut the man free: he was past my father's age, with pink skin, a pointed gray beard and a round if stern face, badly abraded and bruised. His features were not unlike Cadimmetes', or Elphenor's. As I helped him up (a crane volant on the chest of his filthy tunic) Cleite brought a pyx of calendula for his wounds, and Glaucus wine, but he refused everything, even jerked back from Cleite's touch itself

—Come on, viper, be friendly, Alxiona told him.

—Know who that is beside Labrys?

—Do *you*? I said—The words had leaped from my mouth on the wings of my very fear of Alxiona and her sisters. What now! They looked as much killers as any mercenary here, with their braided-back hair and painted skins, twin knives at their belts, their eyes with the look of professional archers on a wall someplace—We stared, and I held tight to the changes in myself since our sea-duty, and she probed for fear and for the Minotauros' Heir she'd been planning on. Perhaps she recalled Icarus' rescue too, that I'd survived a serious wound; but that (with her own neck-wound healing) wouldn't have helped me

long. It was, rather, her look toward Itiri by the fire, the Libyan woman's presence of blended steadiness and ferocity that showed Alxiona her troop's somewhat isolate ardor. Callista's own women had not been pleased at these northern sisters' beaching: it had affronted them to see Alxiona's priestesses *purifying* the place before their numbers had left ship. Someone had sung out a question-in-a-couplet asking how the moon had grown eager to scorch the earth and, at that, the local women along the hills had lifted their flounces, one, then another, as if Poseidon instead were beaching before them with these self-styled defenders of the faith

—I warned you, Alxiona! said my father standing up to seize the one moment of hesitation we saw in her, and she met his eyes as she did most men's

—You seem to have shifted to tamer shape, Old Man of the Sea, she answered him. —Have you let this viper's work against the moon intimidate you? Of course he failed, she half-laughed to the dishevelled priest, whose face mixed wary detachment with a glowering. —The shadow was brief and never whole. Like your life, hmm? she nudged him laughing: he winced at the touch

—We set things right, coming south, Alxiona went on, trying to recover before our circle's stillness. —You who dare object, ask this *man* they call Echion how he came to be speaking for the Sybil of the Delian shrine. Ask about the killings of so many learned women there, just like at Delphi. Why? Because these sun-praising sky fools understand nothing, just like their pilgrims to this Apollo out of Achaia. It is time for deeds. We mean to cleanse Delphi and restore the double-axe there, too, Minotaurus, if you will not

—I also thought you could cleanse this way, once. I am

a daughter of Delphi, Cleite told her, and then said no more. I don't think Alxiona looked for indignation from an elder priestess, but there it was, plus Itiri's silent stare; and now Alxiona signalled her sisters (smirking bitterly) to take the man away from the council

— Stay here, sit down, sir, my father ordered. — Let the man be!

— He's going to sit in, sir? asked one Samas, the Trojans' leader with his helmet on his knees. — Sir, he's the enemy! Then you can't set him free, and that will make blood to pay

— I wish their world to hear me, through him, Minos answered. — And of course we can free him. The very moment it's too late.

— You're all as blind as cave-crickets! this priest burst out amid the smiles. — Go on, let these sweet daughters of this great Peace amongst you do what they will. I tell you, Moon-Bull and all, I know what this is about, they've been expecting you at Athens, oh yes, and—this looks like a story-circle! Well, let me tell you one, for a man who understands nothing. Do you all know of Gilgamesh, the old En of Erech, old cousin to the Erechthid house of Athens?

From my own listening to our clergy I thought this relation a far-fetched lie to grace the Rock of Athens with age, but the giants' commander and all the Eastern leaders clapped at the hero's name. Why wouldn't my father shut up this frothing fool and his stories of futile cosmic rebellion

— Good, said Echion. — Then I'll spare you the bulk of the tale and give you just the point to sleep on. Well, when you servants of the Sow go north and make your move, do you know what's going to happen? They're go-

ing to remember, just like Gilgamesh, all the cruelties your grand Mother has done to the sons of men. And they're going to kill you, Heavenly Bull, he said pointing, — and cut off your pampered genitals and throw them in Her Face! And by the gods of light, someday we'll do the same to Her!

— That will do after all. Take him away please. And keep him alive! Minos ordered. As it was done by Alxiona's sisters my father worked hard to reclaim the space and moment from his rival, bowing to the four directions with hands to his head like horns, circling us moonwise and dancing light steps with palms earthward, chanting to trance our people and cleanse away the priest's solar rage. And all around us the tide beat the cliffsides, the sound like a thunder of far horses.

Still, things remained low. I poked up the fire, but few of us had ever seen such weird virulence about ideas and genitals, and thoughts of armed young believers like Echion, waiting us on that beach up north, began to dance before us in the flames. Itiri now spoke up to wonder if that man had been what some peoples called circumcised: some tribes led by fathers, she said, carved up a young snake to give it a big knob or helmet at the tip (and, she added, in ceremony they called the bleeding *vagina*). She meant us to pity the man, I guessed, but it made you wonder how they could call Goddess cruel.

Well, if I was going to lose Ariadne, better just to love her as I could than swallow an Echion's poison. I did not know I'd be seeing him again

Cleite offered Alxiona the facts of discussion before her arrival, and then my father took the cue and launched into the plan, naming Paria as its mother and weaving in The Aridela's name, her arguments. Everybody hated the

idea of more sailing at night but loved the idea for the torches. Yet, when they heard that this really was aimed at bluff, the mercenaries shook their heads without thumps of approval this time, and as the islanders raised their haggings again, Perides barked for order

My father now answered Echion's tale with Kret's, the old prince of an honored Eastern house whose love had been kidnapped, and who'd won his fight for her sake without a war. The same applause they'd given Gilgamesh followed from our guests, no doubt many had heard this tale on their mother's knee, and a few murmurs went round weighing up the will to try it. They liked the plan's taste of evil cunning, its use of the new moon's darkness like a Gorgon's mask raised up before profane fools; but still, like Alxiona herself, the islanders had no wish to face home's councils later with nothing to show as a promise against their problems

— Nothing? my father asked with affected incredulousness. — Hear us then. To begin with, yes, this is the Labyrinth's quarrel with Athens. This is our time for deeds, as my sister Alxiona says. Our son was murdered; but the reasons for that are larger than either house, as you all know. But, sisters and brothers, if you truly think a war will solve these many problems, then go home now, and prepare for it yourselves. I only warn you that it will make you the double of what you hate. Do not tell me that while Goddess puts words of understanding in your hearts, you must face *this* world another way. The words never fail unless we fail the words.

— Cnossos never ruled any of you, only fostered the growth of things you asked for in trade with us. We have an order among our ancestors and we are here to proclaim and protect that order. But Crete does not answer

Goddess for you. If you meet these times with what we have called practical measures, who can stop the Night Mare's coming? Tereus of Ceos: the silver trade between us for an age may be over. Would you consider farming out tin to the islands as we open more mines in the west? Alastor of Rhodes: who decrees that Achaians may do no trade in the East? If their warrior-oarsmen bid under you, adjust your profits, or expand into goods they cannot reach. Are you superior seamen or not? Or you, Samas of Troy: as if we don't know the raids you suffer come out of your own tight grip on the straits! We say, hold fast with us to defend your young, but above all, let Achaia show itself as it will. If they have no order but to trade with the strong and sack the weak, then let their fate come to them for it, and what business is yours will remain so. If war were Necessity as you say, you might all be speaking Cretan with your ancestors. Live with us then, my Pelasgian brother. Crete will remain as safe as it is wide. Do you each understand we are strong as our unity?

—So, I have done. I ask you once more to honor our son through the wishes of his House. If you cannot abide what we intend, go with our blessings. But do not forget: my enemies are those who would lay blood to *my name*.

And my father stood up, the fire's light flickering his diadem, and waited: there was no lack of dissatisfied faces, even mockery in some of the islanders', the Trojans resented it all. But how to cross him, or even depart without a kind of shame? Minos waited longer; and then Itiri, then another and another stood up and placed the tip of their drawn swords to the fire. They'd all press, as we'd see, in their ways for more *deeds* than this; but for now they were willing to see what the new moon might bring. I looked at my father and knew I could never have dared

stretch the strands of our web as he had: Alxiona was last to join. But she did. And he'd made no mention of the great *perhaps* hanging over my heart: maybe he and Ariadne held it less of an option than myself. It was happening: we adjourned to set sail tomorrow.

* * *

Back home there were places where snowy mountains, greensward and wildflowers together surrounded you like a dream beneath blue sky: the Cyclades we passed in these last days' and nights' sail were all that and more. Island beaches of rocky limestone and dunes whiter than your eyes could bear, high scalloped-out cliffs and pillared caverns gulping and moaning like a huge dog in restless sleep, green orchards and forest giving way to hilly pastures of grass which it seemed the very light rather than the wind was combing lazily: even the winds that buffeted us off these island hills were laced with basil and honeysuckle and, after sundown, jasmine-scent. And while each stroke of the oars (when we needed them) carried us closer to what we feared, no one's face that I saw failed to seek the solace of these beauties, but gazed, and then gazed inward, long after each landfall passed astern. It was as if the isles themselves, their multicolored skies, their exotic promises of rich peaceful living, were just the mollifying influence needed for the host; for once we left Callista we stopped for nothing, we were not going to let ourselves be sighted and our foes forewarned. It was a peculiar stress to keep ourselves on edge like this, yet back from the point of real harm as our plan demanded: Gelania and her Callistans had felt it too, and after days of our drills their send-off had been as insistent as benign. By

sunset of our second day out we were steering west of Kithnos for that rock and our rendezvous with the pilots, and I grew belly-sick for awhile with sheer nerves for what was going to happen. We found the place by dawn, and the pilots were hidden there among swallows' nests: of all the isles this hump of stone scarcely broader than a village was the barest, and there was nothing to do but sit on a boulder and wait for this new moon's nightfall

Perides helped me stay busy and I saw to the torches' final preparations up and down the line: Cretan officers worked right behind my group reviewing order-of-battle plans in case of the worst, and the pilots with them described the lay of Athens' harbor. As the day grew brighter and hotter a lot of our islanders swam, every contingent had its final rites and comforts, the giants braided each other's hair, then dressed and napped like most of the mercenaries. There'd be no rest this night. We were very crowded together here and in the shimmering heat there were bickerings over boulder-shade: by midday I lay down under *Talos'* awning, and was no soon-er napping than awakened by cries of fright

When I jumped up with sword in hand my first glance saw nothing on the sea but that mellow sparkling that told me we should be off: then I saw Cleite, Itiri and Alxiona together pointing at the sun, men all around them looking up too with hands cupped to their brows. My father and Glaucus and Perides were running toward Cleite from this rock's far edge and in the very time it took them to reach her, the world grew darker still: all the giants stood up, their alarm a fearsome thing itself, everybody was on their feet now and looking up or around for the attack behind this trick, and people started to yell or slap themselves or rub Libyan nettles to their skin to wake up,

come out of this spell. This could not be happening, the sun not falling into the sea but going dark near the zenith of its day. Alxiona and her women were on one knee now, letting their hair trail in the dust, speaking prayers as most frightened men had asked them to; but somehow as I stood at the *Talos*' rails I was less afraid than simply watching everybody else, and just as I looked to see the omnipotent sun gone dark, with only a ring of gold burning at the rim, Cleite cried out *Aridela, Aridela* with her fists out high in the precise posture of Goddess' statues. And Alxiona's women joined with her, and as the light began to break free again, so did most men, so did I

This queer half-darkness became full day again before very long, and there everybody stood, three thousand non-plussed faces, in awe, still half-terrified, giddily amused. Minos made pronounced, grave gestures of homage to Cleite and the Lady of the Labyrinth she stood for, then asked the captains what they'd give to see that sky-priest today, or the Athenians: *Let it begin then!* he ordered and the terrific stir of bodies and gear could not have been more eager, half to exploit this momentum and half to be gone from this spellbound rock. We formed up by circling the rock until the sun hung heavy and misshapen near the world's edge, and carefully we watched it sink away, glad with our misgivings to see it die its normal death—as vulnerable as the moon. Just so there was balance! The wind dropped: the waves became ripples; and it was time.

The pilots took us well west of north from here, to avoid any watchmen along the Attic peninsula. Moving thus through gathering dark, neither could *we* much reckon by the land, but these pilots knew their home waters and kept close count of the beats of our oars at first. We slipped fast northward as full moonless dark came down,

our hearts surging with the power of the hundred-and-more ships behind us, only faintly smelling the lands far to starboard after several hours, catching occasional lights through what had to be Athenian barons' trees—and not a hint of sentinels? Nobody much liked to be out in the new moon darkness, but if Cleite thought them more afraid of walking Dead than we were, Perides argued that their time to expect us had passed, simple as that. I went up near the prow to be silent and alone and, as we moved with only the sea and the oars' groans to hear, sought to raise my anger anew about my brother, about what had been done to cousin-Pelasgians up here, about the mines and all the rest. Generations of bitten-back rancor were going to find answer in us this night, in *us*—yet he seemed to come to me out of his last living presence on this land, and called for deadly cool. It made me go back and seek out Glaucus' hands, and he almost hurt me with his own grip

Near what priestesses called the Hour of Stars we sighted the glow of a small fire dead-ahead: *Aegina*, one of the pilots said, recognizing his mother's signal meant to help us. *Your mother?* Minos almost laughed, *is she an admiral like Perides here?* We now bore northeast and my father had the men take us in till they said we should go no closer without landing: they could tell by the sound of the waves, melding with the mouth of a river out there in the black. By this time the land was palpable only a fair swimmer's distance to starboard, and just a few scattered lights showed their harborworks: now we were told that a high hill called Hymettus was looking down on us, and for the quiet it still seemed sure we'd not been seen. *What now, sir?*

My heart swelled as my father took up his two torches,

Perides signaled from the stern to fan out each ship sliding up behind us out of the dark, and Cleite came forward to Minos with a covered lamp: we lay gently rocking just offshore, our dozens and dozens of ships in a great loose crescent behind us, things glinting off in the dark like the folds of a snake. When everybody had their two torches, my father told the pilots to watch our drift, then kissed Cleite's forehead; and as the light of her uncovered lamp filled her face, Minos' torches turned into big licks of fire that hurt one's eyes at first as he swung them aloft and bellowed with all his hatred and anger, love and amoral excitement. On the instant the rest of our host became monstrous ships of flame across the bay and he touched his torches to mine, to everybody's on the *Talos*

The open waters of the bay were transformed, filled with savage-looking beings and ghastly figureheads and shrieking voices: more, and more ships appeared as from nowhere and with even the oarsmen holding up two flames apiece it looked like the ships were floating cauldrons ablaze, and the shrieking got louder, the curses and battle-names and high voices of women and deep warbellows from the giants beginning to come back from the illuminated shoreline of trees and harbor and hills. We were very close-in and I did see a few figures roused from seaside buildings running inland. You could only wonder how this looked from Aegeus' citadel, but the flames, the bellowing, the rows upon rows of ships and torches and daemonic faces had the bay lit up and reverberating from the shores of Salamis behind us clear to Athens' harbor-shingle, and far down the coast: my father kept yelling and Perides had men stamp their feet now too, you could hear those islanders' bagpipes under the

din and names of the Night Mare from a dozen lands. Cleite was crying loose a lot of rage with *Delphi, Delphi!* let alone our House's grievances, and Glaucus had never looked uglier in the lurid light as he kept on shrieking, torches high. More than six thousand flames were burning now and perhaps from the Rock of Athens it looked as if a pair of flaming crescent horns had come out of the sea, out of the void of night, a roaring promise of an arrogant city in flames

We kept it up as long as we could, and that was till the first colors showed us the shape of their mountain Hymettus against the sky. Orders now were to move in and take a beach-head, and as this was done we saw smokes of sacrifice and oracle from Athens' high places beyond these hills. Good: they were turning shaken to their gods. Before *Talos'* prow we piled the torches for a council summons fire: Perides sent vanguard squads of Cretan marines, Libyans, Trojans and Alxiona's women inland to set us a line, and dispersed another dozen ships' people to secure the harborworks, crude as they were. As warriors passed us and tossed their torches on the fire I saw smiles, people did seem to feel safer for so much strength in the tight order the Admiral's purples represented: by the time we had a council-place set up under an awning on the beach, and had looked over their shacks and wooden piers, Alxiona and Itiri came back to report that they'd gone a mile either side of the service-road and seen no one, sheep roaming without a boy. We arrayed the giants like armored towers in a double-rank flanking the mouth of that road as islanders and mercenaries kept pouring ashore: at last Perides decided to keep half our numbers on their ships in case of attempts to flank us, and he had the vanguard move farther inland to maxi-

mize warning of massed attack. Glaucus he asked to remain with the ships so there might be a Cretan to command, should the very worst come

Even though this was still the place where we could die this day, for the moment we were *in control* and I was amazed to feel no numbness now, just a glorious confidence. Yet as I thought to make some joke about the sheep in their front ranks, an eagle came over the shore-hills and soared the beach southward. I watched him till he turned inland again: no omen seemed apparent; but the reward of intoxication for so much pounding against myself was already gone, my blood was not singing anymore. Where was our mainland friend Orneus, still on ship, drinking his measure of the exile's triumphal return? I cursed the smokes with which they called their gods. Cleite summoned me from the ranks and daubed vermilion round my eyes as she had her own and my father's already. *To bring us vision as we treat*, she said; and *I hope I look pretty*, I grumbled

It was near noon when finches fled from the pine and cypress inland, our troops' warnings reached us, and a chariot drawn by two of the biggest white horses I'd ever seen emerged from the mouth of their road. A young driver and an old bearded man in a blue robe were in the car and eight bronzeclad swordsmen trotted behind, several bearing objects: my heart thumped within my bare chest as I thought I saw *him* for the first time, but no, that was only an emissary's driver and he stayed put as the graybeard dismounted and walked down beach to us, looking carefully around from the giants to the host still on the waves. He gave a stiff but civil gesture of hail to Minos and my father returned it, grim-faced in his diadem, his dark red-painted eyes holding graybeard's blue

ones: no gesture to me, nor to Cleite. Their soldiers looked seasoned but the faces between their helmets' cheek-pieces wore the strain of masked intimidation

— My lord King Aegeus of Athens commands me to guide you into his presence, this man began (never straying from his stare at Minos, but giving neither his name nor addressing father's titles—we took it as we could for respect). — He offers you first the comfort of his baths, his table and his court if you so wish before the council he desires. And he has made blood-oath to all the gods that your person

— Go back, and tell him to come down, and to bring his son Theseus, my father said and I saw the man's lips part between his whiskers at the heir's name. — Tell him there is not a god in his realm whose oath means anything to me now. Tell them both to come down here. By The Power that dimmed the sun, I will not allow harm to either, though the soul of my own son cries for revenge. Will his power run out through his feet if he touches earth? Ask him that for me. And tell him that this host behind us itches to pull his house down. There will be no council except on these terms, and I cannot hold these warriors long. I want the remains of my son, the living flesh of the man who killed him, and your king and your Theseus here. Now go.

Graybeard turned and snapped his fingers to the squad. Three came forward with the cloth-wrapped objects and I could feel what they were as their hands revealed them: an urn of gold, my brother's ashes; his wrist-seal, iron knife and necklace, a Labrys of silver; and, held up by the hair in a soldier's fist, the severed drooling head of a bearded young man with eyes rolled up

— Blast you, blast you! my father shouted. — Get that

out of my sight! How am I to know this was the man, or your village dolt? Cleite, take his things for us. Blast you all! Now go with my message and see that they come down *now*, or I swear these thousands will wreak destruction your gods do not dream. Get out of my sight, man.

When they'd gone, we wept a little. If they'd cared for our custom the urn would've been silver. Goddess knew they had the silver now. I held it. My brother. Never see you again. *Fathers*. You give them young men, they give you ashes. And that head—certainly no aristocratic features, a slave who'd drawn the black pill? Old practical Aegeus could not have seen sense in killing a useful spearman. My father shook with cheated anger as he sobbed and, as I wondered if he'd meant to kill the killer himself, he tore off the boarstooth helmet he'd been wearing these defiant weeks and threw it into the sea. That was to be his peace, but I unlaced my scabbard and put my brother's knife in its place and Cleite said nothing about spoil. I'd not have cared. We waited. Our thousands shouted encouragements between ships and shore, passed their sharpening-stones. The sun cleared Hymettus mountain. The torch-fire crumbled. Our vanguard asked to move farther inland, smelling treachery, remembering the words of Echion.

As we sipped honeyed wine in lieu of a meal, they came. Eight soldiers again (Poseidon's number, Cleite said) ahead of the chariot this time, and I stood up before Minos did because as I glimpsed our man beside the old one in the car my hackles went up. A *charge* on the air like the wind amid thunder in the mountains, my weird had come, sun to my moon

—Ease off, my father said touching me. —We have them, come what may.

Like ourselves, they were both in battle-dress, except that while they wore greaves and leather corselets and plumed bronze helmets, we were naked as wolves except for our paint and wristbands, kilts and boots. And they were bearded just alike, the old man gray, the hero (nearly twice his father's bulk and much taller) a tawny light brown. Their soldiers split into ranks of four and saluted as their white horses passed between: at the head of the beach the two dismounted and rigidly ignored the giants, the armed women, the Trojans who broke discipline and made jibing comments as they strode by—a moment more and we were face to face

I was closer to Aegeus in size: he had the drawn pallor of a man who'd worried and suffered behind a wall most of his life, and that fit, for what we'd heard of his politics. But Theseus: maybe twenty, a strong beard for his age, it was clear he too had been at drill (or more likely, battle) from the girth of his arms and legs; and the eyes, light blue and steady, were those of a thinking man despite the heavy brow. Outdoor living, grim experience, boldness and the cunning to guide it, that was what I saw right away in him and I was surprised that I could not grasp my hate: *a man, just a foreign young man*, I thought. What more was I to learn that Crete had left out? And how womanish even my brother must've looked to them: *becoming* my brother would not have been enough to trouble those steady blue eyes, now sizing me up as he kept his gloved hands at his sides, well-below his sword-hilt. The purpose and meaning of the slashes on my arms became irrelevant here to naked competition; and as I sensed that he'd kill me if it came to blows, I burned back at him, Ariadne in my heart

— We are come, little Aegeus finally said to my father:

his voice was an old man's rasp, quiet but used to being heard. And while he was far past the age of any king within Goddess' service, his stance looked as spry as his heir's, both of them here in honor to treat for their city

—What do you want to say, Minotauros.

—That I am here, my father answered, —to die with you, Aegeus.

—What do you mean, Aegeus responded thickly and I saw this Theseus' lips twist a little

—I mean that I bring you an offer, to keep the peace between us. Even to strengthen it, I believe. And that if you refuse, neither of you will see the sun set

—Cretan dogs! said Theseus with a swift glance behind to see our ranks closing up there, then back to us: he had the sense not to draw instantly but the hand was at knife's and sword's hilts now

—I told you they lie, not to trust them! he said to his father whose face was red and gray; and Ariadne's very plan paled in my blood for his force and presence, he was too old already, hardened against us—perhaps even *smart*

—Be quiet, Shepherd of the People, Aegeus told him and he fumed

—We will hear the offer, Aegeus said. —As you see, I am old for these things I wear. If the offer is unacceptable, then an old man could do worse than to die here, with you, he told my father. —Yet life is sweet still. It may not need come to that. I see you have a sitting-place. Come, Theseus. But Minotauros, he added with a thick voice again as we turned, —you may kill me, my son, and many more with your—friends, here. But you will never take The Rock of Athens. It is full of warriors. They are well over last night and your women's—magic, he said

with some deference to Cleite. —The Rock has never fallen

—Not since you took it from the Earthlings, as you call them, yes we know, Minos said. —But I do not want to take it, Aegeus. I came to treat with you for peace despite my son's murder in your charge, or to kill you and waste this land. *Whose Face is a burning wind*, do you remember the ancient prayers? Those are my last orders to this host. Let us choose otherwise. Come

—You gave word for our safety, Aegeus objected

—And among civil people the guest is sacred, my father cut him off again. —My son died at the foot of your house. Now the scales hang even, though not quite, as your son looks alive to me, he said and he turned away for our awning

For a moment the two shared a look: then, as I stood there bidding them down-beach with my arm, Aegeus followed my father. Theseus held off, perhaps unwilling to turn his back on a man with a knife

—We'd have your life already if we wanted it, I said.

—Oh no! he answered immediately with seeming-surprise. —Here the custom is ladies first.

I wanted to draw! It'd be sweet just to smash his face once or cut him before the end—but I choked myself back and left him there with his lip-service, walked toward the seats. And when I saw Glaucus at the prow of the nearest ship, and all those faces behind him, I turned once more

—All this, for *you*?

—I'm honored, Theseus said with half a mock-bow.

Yes, too late already

We sat with our backs to the ships' prows and the sea, Cleite standing behind us, Aegeus and his son facing out that way. Both of them seemed to be counting our num-

bers as my father began to speak, but they lost track more than once in staying with his words, and this itself seemed a help to our cause

—So you see, my father told Aegeus, —we know of your fine son’s service of the law along your Isthmus Road. Now Cretan shipping will suffer thereabouts, but what is that beside these larger affairs? I ask you to consider what might grow between us, Athens on the land, Crete on the sea. We can only grow rich if we put our mistakes aside now.

—Our mistakes would be no affair of yours, had we made any, Aegeus said. —I wait to hear this offer. And will she hang by while we discuss the fate of kingdoms?

—It is only the fate of *your* kingdom we discuss here, Cleite said, her immediate energy startling the two. —If Goddess had Her way through me, there would only be the reinstatement of Pelasgian blood on Athene’s throne, and the shipment of your heads to Delphi. Horse-lovers, are you? Fight us, then, and we’ll show you a Mare. You and your *brothers* across the Isthmus!

Phew! A burning wind, alright—Their faces suffered her speech until my father (when sure Cleite had done) began anew. But then Theseus broke in, saying *Father, look!* and pointing behind us as a sea eagle dove from the sun and swooped to glide just over the sea before the ships, wheeled and climbed into the south again

—He came down the way of good fortune and right past them all, what are we *talking* for?

—Be still! Aegeus rasped at him and color flushed the rough skin above the Shepherd’s beard. —There are signs and such, and then there is reality. Must I tell you again, and here? Count them out there, if you can. If it comes to fighting, the gods be pleased with the sport. But

I do not mean to die for impatience. He is young and seeks the god's sign everywhere, though he is my pride, Aegeus told my father almost affably now. —Go on, Minotauros. The King of Athens listens.

The not-yet king shifted on his seat. I wondered was he circumcised, had his teachers been men like Echion: it was said their priests took learning from Eastern fathers. Puh! Where tutors beat the lessons into you: where that lumbering dullard Herakles was the man to emulate and women were valued at so many kine: this bearded light-skinned bull, a brightness of the sun in his hairs, for his kind my mother had changed so much? Ariadne might have a chance with him after all. I sat up a bit to let my proudflesh show

Minos spelled out what we wanted—Theseus, and twelve others—for as long as it took for them to understand who we really were, despite mainland tales. Theseus made no effort to hide his shocked scorn but Aegeus held him off with a hand's touch, bade Minos continue. My father took care not to stipulate any length of time for their stay but stressed that there were interests beyond our own being spoken for here. Not hostages, students: not Cretan puppets, but coequal allies like these with us: a chance to open Athens itself to the world one could see in these ships, *to give both these sons a world a father should wish them*, Minos said.

—And the girls must be virgins? said Theseus

—Do you mean, physically? This is irrelevant, my father said

—Indeed, Theseus nodded

—And I assume you will send us thirteen of your high-born youth, Aegeus argued. —If learning is what this is for. Otherwise, I cannot see my barons at all agreeing to

send their children to be—especially their daughters to a place where

—They can agree, or see their houses burn, said Minos with finality. —Your seizure of Laurium and the murder began this, Aegeus. We will finish it together, today. I daresay you have enough Cretan artisans scattered among your barons' houses, if as it seems you want hostages

—Artisans, Theseus said. —Trees and goats, girls dancing round plants

—Once more, be quiet, young man! said Aegeus. —His taste is all in his fists, Minotauros. But hear me now. Let me make a counter-offer. I think it a noble one. A marriage, he said with some light of vision coming into his eyes. —You say that life is our concern here. If The Gods and The Mother cannot.

—Stop there, Minos told him. —I know what you mean to say. And I answer you: Perhaps, Aegeus. Our Great Year is still on trial, and this would—change must come slowly. First he must come.

My heart was pounding

—If The Aridela finds it fitting, then perhaps, my father went on. —It is not for me to decide. Perhaps something will take between them. But she is a child of wild mothers, and I am not a Baal of the East, I won't have a cold bed at the heart of our House. Here, he said with a gesture my way, —is her rightful husband. They are betrothed already, for next year I pass through The Door

Theseus had been looking me up and down, no doubt finding me light for the office (a fool's office, too) by the smirk in his eyes; and now at Minos' mention of next year I saw his head tilt, as if to catch a counselor's whisper—he almost smiled

—And he will be king, Minos concluded. —So I give you a perhaps, Aegeus. It will be up to her and him. And now we have done. Whether we see this sun go down is in your hands, but doubt it not, we are determined

Oh, I knew, I knew—that tilt of the head! They asked leave to confer out of earshot and it was given. Theseus with furious gestures and shifting stance, Aegeus pointing to the sea, firmly patting his pride's high shoulder, both voices straining as they whispered. It was hard to see them as father and son. Cordax had given us what he'd heard about the old man's plan to poison Theseus when he'd come to Athens for his birth-right. What had stopped Aegeus, hatred of Athene's women's circles, dark-headed Pelasgian heirs just waiting to undo so much change in the fathers' favor? Something—and then the old man lay abed three days in groaning couvade and got himself a right-minded scion. But look out for this Aegeus. He could not have stayed alive after that without cunning. The son's vigor nudging him toward death already so long refused: why else would he have offered to send his son to the bride's bed?

Sleepless faces, they both had. A house of intrigues serviced by foreign captives. I wouldn't sleep either if some girl I'd taken in a raid was weighing her impulse to knife me for family murdered before her eyes. How could they live like that? And that tilt of the head, always thinking

—We gave him nothing but a sweet to draw him in, my father confided when he'd looked into my eyes. —Look at them. The old man wants him to go. Sad, isn't it. I was counting on that.

Finally they came back down to us. New life seemed to be flowing up into Aegeus: Theseus, parried successor, simply glared

—How. And when, Aegeus said. —The other twelve
—I will need time

—There are fourteen days before the Thunder Moon is full, said Minos. —Let your Shepherd camp here in Cretan company, seven days at most, to wait the others. Then let them arrive together at Amnisos on the day before we light Midsummer's fires. Agreed?

A man, just a young foreign man: I saw his hopeless anger

But we'd won, had we not? And still, my bones knew bad things as my father, impatient, moving slowly, slid half his black iron from the sheath

—This can be shared with you, he said, —however you wish. Again, the day before Midsummer's fires. Do you consent?

Somewhat morosely, Aegeus nodded; but in this Shepherd's eyes I thought they burned already.