

PEOPLE OF THE SEA



A Novel of The Promised Land

by

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I



A wind of the sea ...

1

—Are you gone mad? Burn Knossos Labyrinth? Your own family's house!

—Criminal, said another. —Talking slaughter, like some king. Then what?

—Oh, Sweet Wine didn't mean those things, said the gray goat-bearded priest on one knee over me—flat on my back in a heap of old bed-skins, my head a mountain coming out of mist. It was Makris, gazing down with a new-moon smile

—Please, you two, he said. —Your visit-blessings waked him. But the man was struck by lightning, good as dead three days. Let a brother get his breath!

Makris pulled off the hides and worked his hands like a midwife's up and down my limbs and chest. And that first full draw of air, cold as black water from a spring, swirled through me. My body shook. I thought I heard hissing pipes, and gibbering: it was an ecstasy of waking up, and a deep of sorrow time could not change

–Go on now, men, cry the town Deucalion lives. We dance and festival while the new year sun stands still. Find the women, and his sons!

The two incensed cousin-townsmen grunted, and turned for the dolmen door. One of them thumped his boots on the portal-stone

–Hey, priest. Ask him why Griffin’s own tongue blew him off the sanctuary, the moment he swore blood. Not with our sons, you don’t!

–Out!

Where? Karfi: a colossal gray crag-faced spike of granite rising straight up from the shoulders of a mountain, hammered like a nail in the heart of our island Mother Kriti. Whoever sailed or stole up into this country, Karfi saw them first. Old times of our mothers and fathers, it was a high place of dance, feast and healing, between the stars and the horned mountains of our families’ sleep. Now, in a world torn off its wheel, a rebel’s refuge. A stronghold only self-exiles would choose: a hostile crag as far as possible from home, for those who could not leave it

Below this Nail to the north, miles of rocky upland valleys thick with cypress, oak and pine, and streams silver in the sun descending through them to the coast, where white shores stretched away in both directions. From there, wide-open ocean with its bright blue melting up into the horizon: eagles, vultures, hawks, kites, swallows flew even with your eye. Westward, the crown and shoulders of Dikte Mountain in her snows, where the first people crawled from her belly to the light; and behind us a maze of wild hills, with secret flatlands where we farmed our food

and flocks. The air was medicine, sage, gorse, thyme, artemisia, and the mountain held you up to the turning circles of the sky

But Karfi living was a goat on a ledge with feet always jammed tight together. The cypress-logs over our two heads roofed a house that was one room more than a boulder stock-pen. Every wall a common wall in a honeycomb of lanes and shelters built into The Nail's back slope. A pitched camp of wanderers, frozen in stone

There was sting-fire up and down my arms out of deep red slashes, for it was only blood that awakened family in the mountain, that they speak. But the wounds were clean and crusted, smelled of diktamos poultices Makris had laid on. Now he raised me up to ladle water, icy and mineral-sweet

—*Come to your house, Sweet Wine, Dionysos, true of speech*, he chanted gently, out of funerary song. And then, —What do you remember, Deucalion?

I remembered that remembering had made me want to die. It twisted my lips to see myself near thirty years ago, turning my back on the figurehead throne of conquered Knossos and dragging my first son up this break-neck mountain, to keep him from the mainland's Achaian squanderers at arms. The wind and cold we found up here, the work for every morsel of comfort—and the harvest for a sand-blasted wine god, a king of things other than war? An outlaw inheritance for two sons and a girl we called my daughter. Futility, while a violent handful of red-beards and blue-eyes kept on bleeding the ancient household of our land

Son, brother, husband and father, a Keeper of Days I had been. The sun was dying that white midwinter, the moon a fading sickle of its own last days. These

were the crossing signs of their eight-year dance: the harmony of their circles was come round again. But to show themselves newborn, first these greatest of the powers surrendered through the dark. The blistering sun, for whom each dawn we sang in gratitude. The moon with her shine so cold, but soft and strong, a help and comfort any night. These powers themselves knew endings, changes, limits. It was dying into Mother Night revived them: weak, but new, and high summer coming. Son of my father, then, meant going with them

I climbed our tiny stone-built house of offerings on the edge of Karfi's cliffs, a thousand feet up in the world's wild winter air. First sunrise I slashed my arms with a broken seashell, let people look as they cared to, and started any foolish way I could. Tire, get careless and fall, I swore it out, dead or dancing when sun and moon extinguished. It was to be like them doubling back upon the greatest wheel there was

Such the words, when the day began with the luck of a midwinter crack in our worst cold, called Little Summer. Then the light to see your feet died out. Enormities of stars gazed down with eyes, and I was afraid

The moving kept me warm. But time had come to push past every limit of trust I had. The thing weeping to be done was sounding out of tombs. There was one right way to get free of our dead—to become them. Six moons on, sun and moon would be monsters in their crowns. So I let go of what might come, if I should blaze alive again like them. A shiver down my bones shook off the night wind. Hollow and happy, roistering with some other body's feet

Day and night I sang the solstice crossings, and doubled that to call the shadows, bleeding, remembering family, never stopping if I could up and down the

icy edges of the sanctuary roof. Palesus, Minos, Pasiphae, Glaucus, Ariadne, so many people, gone, into dream. I hissed, coiled and writhed a Snake in slough, pranced and ramped a Bull with tossing horns; bellowed, sprang a Lioness, shrieked and swooped a Griffin open-winged. Turn, wheel, break the last tyrant's stony grip! As I had seen my father and the woman of my soul push and change themselves, when the crucial thing was that people lift up their hearts. I saw them stopping, staring

But there in the house I must have given Makris a dead face. He had waved his bony hand and it turned into a griffin vulture swooping out of nowhere, just as it happened in that dance between Dikte and the sea. Plunging in she banked so close that her feathers snapped wind across my face—and as I gaped at the bolt of her and the one beat of her black wings climbing the far cliffs, she stretched out her hideous gut-pink neck and flexed her ripping-talons. A voice among the watching people screamed, and she vanished with her prey through a gray wall of mist

Outside a rebel yell broke morning twilight: *Hai-ee! Hai-ee!* And a shrill chorus trilled up out of the town, *O-lo-lo-lo-lo-lo*

In my left hand the hem of Makris' deerskin wrap, with a tiny stitched-in row of running spirals. The back of my skull still felt a clout of thunder, and limbs and looks moved slow, as if enormous. Things buzzed, a mountain alive with summer bees

—Better say what *you* remember, brother

—Ho! Makris laughed with a wag of his chin-bristles. —Why, it was everything expected out of a Minotavros—and in all three camps of cousins up here, who love

you. May I? Son of She Who Shines For All, and of Moon Bull, Keepers of Days. Blood and rightful husband of the queen of queens, and no man and woman ever will be closer: Ariadne, Wanassa, Panagia. The last son of Labrys Clan of Knossos. Last to hold the Great Year throne in family honor, and he left it so

—Makris, what happened?

—You just breathe, he chided back. —It was you, grown so black and quiet everywhere, down with the men guarding trail, or pruning trees, or ripping out wood for somebody's broken loom. I saw you, listening, looking. And then, talking straight out with people, here at a table, there at the spring, or a grave. Saying plain what I see also in their faces—that it's no life to hand on to children. We are dying on the vine up here, the goodness of our seed. We, a pack of highland outlaws—there's a backwards bone to choke on. Well, *I* knew, Makris laughed, —that you were the fellow to make something of it. Knossos spectacle man. You to pull the nail out of people's smiles

—Yes, yes. Five days ago. Come the dying of the moon just ahead of winter solstice, you climbed up onto the sanctuary roof. From there on the edge of this world you called out the mountain to the rooftops. They came in from hunting, climbed their ways over from the other hills' houses—we crammed the lanes and roofs to see you up there on The Nail's last point. I remember, you began to move and I was thinking you were like old Kret, from the songs sailors fetched out of Ugarit. A well-born man, a loving man, homesick for his house, his family, his mate. Not a straggler up here who couldn't feel that, with a big grave and a burned-out farm behind them

—Remember what you said? I felt the breath go through my body, Makris sighed, —and every other body in the press. You said you climbed up there to die with sun and moon. You were going into the dark with them and coming out, or you were going to jump—but for you, The Nail was finished. Keeper of Days, it was a Minos speaking

—And?

—Why, wonders, that's all! I know you saw your sons, and daughter, and how many people kept vigil for you up there. Prayers, torches, pipes came out, a systrum, a daouli-drum, the githa-bag wailing to make your nape stand up. On you went, and no moon in the morning sky. Look at these slashes. Second night with no moon and still you were dancing, arms up and out at stretch, your head between them like a snake's. Then! Down from Dikte came a thunderhead over the mountain, so big and louring-black that it made people hide bunched together in their houses, and the dogs in too. When the rain cracked open out of it with thunder, you were still up there, turning and howling like the world. Well, I guess you took those booms and flashes for your answer. You climbed down inside the sanctuary, and came back out with Labrys—the last big bronze double axe we had, with the doubled-pair blades and spirals

—Ho! said Makris. —Griffin's-tongue lightning snapping and booming around us in the rain. Back you climbed up onto the sanctuary roof. The last altar of the world, it looked like, because it is—and you turned in place and doubled back to face us. You lifted the monster both hands high, and your face, Deucalion, the eyes—

I don't want to see that again, till Griffin take me home to Snake. The waters pouring off you. You bellowed out: *Knossos Labyrinth will burn! And, Crack!*

—That bolt was so close and blinding-blue I see it now. *Crack!* Down you went a dead man right through your knees, and Labrys in blasted pieces. Mercy! I never will know why you didn't pitch back off the mountain

Makris breathed out, and rested, poring still over answers to the offering. I saw our last great Labrys, broken by the hand of light and shadow that had forged it. It was criminal to leave a thing once holy unbroken, unburned, unburied. So then—the House of the Double Axe in funeral flames, a night of the Griffin lit by the last Minotavros. The baffled man I was had turned on himself. Was melting down. Watch the slag drop off the forge's flow of incandescent blood of Earth, and slow, it cools and hardens: that was what I found inside. Morning

—Well, your good sons helped us carry you home, Makris smiled. —And here we are. Back from the other world, and come to your house. Home, Deucalion

—Home. Be careful, I said, —man who just called the dead back *true of speech*

—Oh, you don't want to kill anybody! Makris cajoled

But, that day, that year, I did. Loved brother, comes this answer to your song. With this failing hand I begin to remember, and the last question puts the tail in the serpent's mouth. That hot blue bolt that struck me down—was that the sport of nature turned me into one?

For I never have come to understand what paused, from that time and through so many lives of others, the wheel of changes in my flesh, which walked the name

Deucalion into middle life. I say what I know, that if skin and hair and strength of body speak of age, mine stopped getting older from that time forward, through the lives of many families. It was not a gift asked for: perhaps a curse deserved. I never looked it in the teeth. Late, I fixed it to that waking day when, at last, the sweet wine had turned

There were tales of men burning the world for what fell into my hand. Yet, by the time this came into notice, it was exile or worse anywhere it showed. Where I was going, a man who hoarded blessings was in trouble

I could bleed out of wounds, grow tired, fall sick—but, where less misfortune carried off too many to remember, what held me in my prime through twelve ages of our blood? Fool's luck? Or what was this *for*? This mystery spun my years; and now this hand and flesh begin to falter. Faster than crocus

Friend, find near-five-hundred winter suns between the horns of an altar, beginning to end. This burnt offering the body of a hope, to understand what happened—blessings, crimes, wonders. As a Keeper of Days is a sometime-healer, you may hold the hands of people dying and see how the life in them overflows before the dark. Judge for yourself what a gift so many lifetimes proved, what gifts I made of them for others. The bee gathers nectar as he can, before the hive drives him out

Powers, make it all in vain! But a dram of honey to the honor of three women—who, three times, resurrected many households out of cinders, monstrous ashes

—You don't want to kill anybody, Makris soothed again, grooming back my father's thick black hair as I managed to stand up. When he got no answer Makris loosed his highland whistle toward the door, and ducking in under the lintel came a troop of smiling cousins who had kept vigil with him all this time

A good eight or nine mountain-people of the town arrayed themselves to stand gazing in a group, some with a flute, a drum or censer in their hands. Little ones in black and white wool wraps, hard prime men and women in goat-hair caps, and the haggard buckskin elders lifted their palms up and out to me in welcome's blessing. I doubled theirs and smiled, grateful, but their faces were afraid behind Karfi smiles

Now, three of the women with bright eyes warm and steady piously lifted their wraps to show their breasts, singing out sweetly: *Seam, undo yourself!* Mollifying honeyed voices, luring men back into the world of hope and shipwreck

—See? Home, and this is your family. Some of them, Makris said. —Come now Deucalion, you know every face. Here's Pereko, and Cissia the potter, and Donos and Arge. Look, young Oinops brought us a rabbit

—Otus, I answered. —Otus. *He Pushes Back*. That is the name gets up from this bed. Sisters and brothers, are we finished weeping on this stone? See this cup I make with my hand. The Sweet Wine is turned. I pour it out. Earth Mother, turn it again

They knew me not a man to call for war. To live here was to know our enemies' hope, that we should live according to it. *Blood, yes*

—Say no more, sir, Makris cautioned. —We know, thirty years and your family's house still under the mainland paw. I mean, he shifted, —why make cousins nervous. You like it here. We see you happy at the chores. Festival is the medicine

Good tries, Makris: deflect, stall, show the crazy man normal things and pray his brain came back. He was the man in the room doing right, because I proved wrong. But I looked into every eye

—You saw me taken, soul and body. Family, what we grieve is gone the same. And we cannot leave the core of the mountain-house of our memory as she is. Come spring, I am going to burn Knossos Labyrinth. Or, die where I was born. I will kill every cheese-counting Achaian squatter in the way of that pyre, and take the sunrise after

—Yes, they will still have Mother Kriti. Because their kings pour more children's blood into holding her than we do. So then? Go outside, look at the sea where little Dia looks back on her dame. This is true: good ships are sleeping winter there, in the sheds along Amnisos shore. Five moons from now, we can sail The Great Green. From there, I do not know what wind to ride. But no more this, a land-locked son of law in the hide of an outlaw. Let them see the face of Minotavros they made. I will push back, against wastrels who imagine that what they have done here *works*

—Stop! said Makris with a stamp. —There are Karfi families mainland blood. They won't kill their kind! Why, Melas is your own brother-in-law

—Yes he is. Melas is family. But say it out, this once, and take it in your body: our end was their beginning. They had no word for *ocean*, coming here. The best of our houses bent backwards making Achaians at home, and we lost ours

—Say it! What made Achaian Melas your family? He turned his back on the kinsmen still, this day, at pillage here. You do not hear *war* from me. But where stealing begins, family ends. Karfi we love. And Griffin tells me, it is not enough

I ceased, and on the instant had to stifle a black laugh, because people gently started to ease themselves right back out of the house, some with the half-smiling wink of any morning, and some with nervous formal hails of old time, fist-to-brow. Bluntly cordial as could be, scared: Cissia, with the black-haired almond-eyes touch of Egypt, Oinops my rugged nephew with the north islands' twinkling smile. In each and all the gardens of Crete had mixed proud Aegean shoulders, the locks and olive-bronze skins of Canaan, Libya and Asia. Off to put it off they went, in little joys of morning

—I ask not a man of you along. But where to, cousins?hovels, not home. Are we not sick of telling it, how an island blew into the sky, and it rained white bulls?

—That's alright! See you at celebrations! Makris called after the last ones backing out. —He loves us all three households! The women are coming!

But Makris stopped short, with a clutch of his amber-bead necklace. Our dear gray half-bent billy out of old Malia clergy, grieving his home since it burned, and pretending we did not see him wasting, too, before our eyes. *Anybody*, I tried after

them, *a way to start again, with any honor*. No answer showed its face: only a young girl's voice

—Keeper of Days, keep us in the circles of the sun!

I might have said, *No more, nor less*—but running in past them through the door came my girl-child, Little Zoe. She vaulted up into my arms

—Papou! —Sweet girl! —There, you two, that's the medicine!

Zoe, eight, happy, gangly and lithe, with strong hair and eyes dark brown as ripe carob. The monkey clung to me laughing and the sound and feel of her drove a sword of gratitude. We whirled, kissed, bumped the table and the ache of life came back

The greased-skin window, the portal-stone were glowing new-moon orange. New sun, bearing days and crimes back into the world. Nothing in that light concerned forgetting. Makris smiled at our tears, but they turned fast against him. A man can know that joy alone kills the killers, and the killer in himself, and yet go on

For you see, Knossos fell, and Ariadne died, and then the first order of Achaian business was to murder Crete's elders in their houses of the mountain horns. Me they spared as a useful effeminate figurehead, and things in reach I twisted back Crete's way, while they took down the land. In five years or so, my son Prax was born. Four years more and I, twenty-five, walked out with him, his mother of her own will keeping to the house; and Prax was ten on the mountain when Podargos came into the world, Bright Foot my second son. Then, last spring, Little Zoe straggled up these trails like the rest of us. People called her my daughter because I chanced to see her first

She was singing out to Earth and sky, moving one foot at a time toward a sure-

death fall. When I showed myself, she turned me a seven-year-old face with the nose cut off. In its place was the blue-black failure of four years' healing, an open crime

Achaians had ruled the house fifteen years when she was born. Since the end of easy plunder, they had little to show except land that needed toil. So, the spider who replaced me on the throne—an old baron of Mykenai's, styled Koreter, the man—was running short on what the mainland called loyalty. He sent his clanking-bronze Companions out into the villages, where the trees and fields and kine were still half-choked with the ash of a mountain. As part of their new-style ceremonies to engender Cretan fruitfulness, they snatched up a two-year-old and cut her nose off. So that Zoe's life, each day, would rub her kind's long noses in the dirt

Zoe was going to jump, the day I chanced on her. A child simply never born to tolerate a hide, she came alive as pain in the faces of most people when they looked. Her blink of years convinced her it was best to make herself forgotten. I tried the pauper's things I had, some drinking-rail and clowning along my end of the precipice, never looking away. She said *That was stupid*, backed up awhile, and then felt hungry

In Little Zoe's shadow I learned to want the sun again. It was she pulling out the nail: we were mistaken to oblige and disappear. So, right there and many times, I should have heeded her powers. But Zoe's coming was the end of Makris' hope. She laid on kisses, and snatched up my tiny silver Labrys hung with rawhide

—Look, Papou! she cried with a sprig of ivy up to see: between its jagged leaves, one twice-born shoot had lifted out sharp green. Her fingers fumbled to fix it to me, tiny tongue half-out. —Poor arms! There, now don't you die! she said. —I have a *dance* today. The *sun* is starting back. Come see, Papou?

She said rains had washed snow off the mountain, and since my sleep, more

Little Summer on the land. I craved bright air, but knew what was coming, along with five days' new year duties. So I asked Makris for a shave and dressage and he took out the few best things which, good, would conjure another man. Zoe dangled her feet on a creaky chair, but then ran out to look for the mothers who called me house-bond

Trews of the mountain's red deerskin, tall boots of double hide: a mainland-style leather corselet lined with fleece that was cause for thanks to Melas' house again, and this inside a short wool cape with a sash to the knee, vermilion. Last, a green sariki-headband. Gone the days of spotted trouser-skirts, silk codpieces, thigh-high kilts with snakeskin weaves of colors: my sword of rare iron, gift of a good man gone, one left sleeping for these days. But Labrys walked round my neck, and its sprig of green

Outside, wheeled-X wreaths of ivy and pine-cones hung here and there, and you felt people like mice in the walls waking up and getting ready. But the little cobble-lane that dog-legged up through The Nail's honeycomb of houses was bright, wet, warm and still this moment with the spell. My door was round a corner from where the way widened up into half a courtyard, and right away Donos a cousin from the vigil happened to stray down from a few men talking up there. He whooped with black eyes happy to the others, and here they came with this and that touch of festival to their leathers—a pack of growls and laughs for this moon's best cheat of sudden death. Norax and Melas were the oldest two, with Donos and Kinuwa, Pereko, Winato

—Holy smoke! —Clever fellow! —Priest-chief, you're late! —Disgraceful!

We kissed all around except for Melas, who never did such, and their hands thrust a carry-skin of moonshine into mine. Mountain-milk! First, a poured-out

thanks, and then the raki burned down in, the spirits in it bracing head to boots. White lightning! Every swallow was a lick of Griffin's tongue, and Snake's blood of resurrection in. Mother and Father of ramping Bull, those two! While the skin doubled round, the four young fellows kept an eye on the second-story roofs, for this was pushing festival proper. *Bunch of midwives*, Norax laughed at them, and he the mountain-man of us stepped up eye to eye, solemn hands on my shoulders

—Steady me, I said, leaning my forehead to his chest

—There is nothing to worry in answering what we owe, Norax said in his low slow voice. He doubled his kisses both cheeks, and it bent my knees dropping half my fear and solitude. Norax's clan came of Phaestos. There was a priest-chief in him, tall with the south's touch of Libya, his hazel eyes a lion's in a tangled mane of fierce-red furze. We were house-bonds and brothers-in-law through Honeybee, had bled together pushing thieves back down these trails—always trading straight-shaves, and boasts of wounds or pedigree. Norax! Born to the dance, a prickly-pear a banquet; and who troubled this man's household, he opened like fish. Now, Melas jostled in

—Let me view the body. Praise Poseidon Lord of Seas and Mountains! Here, another drink. One is good, two is medicine!

Hello, Melas—stocky, stolid, and strangest of my fates, married in with his big blue Achaian eyes through Ninna, mother of Podargos. This, Melas called the Cretan tangle around men's will—although like Norax and myself, Melas did not mind most of women's means, such as making known who were the sons of our blood

Where the hill behind Karfi was Honeybee's household, Ninna's stood just east facing Dikte: Norax and Melas were each *damokouros*, their people's man. Not a council over figs but Melas wore his heavy-bone face a solemn mask. So he stroked

the red and fair brown of his jaw-line beard as I drank

–One more now. Up, down, he said; and, true of speech, his eyes were loving

–Easy, Norax warned. –Three is festival, four is trouble

–And five you say is blood, said Melas. –Good brother, are you well now? I only want to say. Or, that is—ask, he began. But then, Melas halted

–He wants to know if his kinsmen get it, Norax said with a stabbing hand

–Is that a joke? retorted Melas. –My Aktor and our sons will be front of the line

–Stop! said Donos at his left. –It’s mad. We don’t council blood in the street

Seemed Donos was feeling a bigger man’s swallows, youngest and shortest of the four: a mason out of Zakros with a touch of Cyprus blood, now of Honeybee’s house. His was the voice I heard on waking, and now that he spoke, the others burst out too with worries worse than Melas’

I needed to hear this cross-talk, because you weren’t sailing far without craftsmen and folk of metals, weavers and planters, potters, masons, any skill. They had wives, apprentice sons and daughters, wrested Karfi life from broken stone—and I was not going to ask one man to pull knife or oar. Curious, then, right off, to feel them the more under pressure for decisions of their own. Turning their backs had not worked for them either. Blood of Snake inside me listened, warmed. Another of my father’s Labyrinth ways had climbed the mountain

What about it, Pereko? Master hunter and bowman with a sharky jaw, chameleon swivel-eyes: tough island mothers had planted his town Praisos, now of Ninna’s and Melas’ house, and a would-have-been Cretan marine like his father. The lives that Nail-folk felt they missed often doubled these, and Pereko was one. He gave Donos a shove, but what he said pushed at Melas’ spokesman standing. Pereko

for himself was in—but he signed across his mouth to say no more for these five days. It was bad luck with the door between worlds open

Kinuwa drank to that. Long-jawed, with a red deer's keen and gentle face; of Carian stock with eyes and arts for metals. Kinuwa also of Melas' house, but no young family: his mother's and father's Cretan ferocity had pushed him here, the man a grudge-bent smith of a works at Myrtos, who had lived to avoid mainland services

Well, Winato? *No*—and there was plenty more *No* going round the mountain, he declared, and a roll of his shoulder for the lot of us. A likeable lout of Honeybee's table, Winato's head looked misshapen whatever the cap, a farmer's face out of Messara, pocked and weathered. The Nail's man, he, for vine and bee and olive; but, Winato said, his jewel was his wife, and the girls she taught as our mistress of the looms. Winato knew what he had in that tumble of a house, and he meant to keep it

Back around to Donos, listening and flexing his stonemason hands. *Speak*, Norax shrugged. For Donos' woman was Norax's own niece, Arge, fetched up here to safety. Donos a man of obligations, a wound on each arm, but his hands loved Arge and his hammers. Young, he just disliked his chance of coming through

—I can fight, Donos said. —But this is a good green mountain

—Boys who want to live, murder that, or go home!

This rang out laughing round the lower corner of the houses close at our backs, and we turned. It was Abas, dressed sharp but out of festival place with all four of his blades on show: a wiry man of that many winters here, fierce and restless. The group's talk wilted, eyes looking off this four-hilt twist of custom, and I felt the echoes of my cry. Like waves returning to the center of a pool, coming back in shapes of fear

—Only to protect you, Abas shrugged as he strode up and planted himself, then paced and rocked in place. Older than Donos and younger than me, he stood half a head short in the group, including the old-time scavenged boarstooth helmet strapped every day to his head. Sharp face with a jawline-beard like Melas', quick black eyes: when he walked his hard boyish torso jutted forward strangely off his hips. Already The Nail's best blade, Abas took the raki, and his gulps dropped loud. Cold, cold, I felt, at his lizard swallows. Unease slipped a look between Norax and Melas

Abas too had wandered up, but no more a man, people said, than a knife and a mouth; blaming women for what was nothing but pirates' luck. *You women made them at home*, he told Honeybee at table. *You thought ceremony and feasts and gardens of love were going to tame swords*. Charming himself right out of the game. Honeybee dug it up that Abas' mother had run quite a house in the wool trade, Mount Ida country. That was why one of the names behind his back was Little Zeus; for an uppity Cretan imp of mountain-springs, whom Achaians had turned a thunder-hurler

He never stopped talking, but never of his home. We figured his family went down hard, but Abas took no comfort but a bowl and pallet in Pereko's house. Garden, mystery, woman, child and creature he pushed away. It gave him worlds of time to appoint himself inspector of every man's worth and ways of weapons

Abas' show was raki drunk like water. I grabbed up Melas and kissed both his cheeks. Offended, Melas still understood: he never should have worried

—Well and good! Abas said, tossing Kinuwa the skin. —But I say we make everybody drink from each other's hands on this, old-Libyan style, right Norax? So our bite is poison to a snake. Oh, go on all, take offense! Abas laughed. —Without

surprise, we are dead men. There is always some traitor in the house

—And you, Norax inquired, —not here five years, to keep us honest?

—Sir, Abas smiled back, —I only volunteer, to protect our advantage. What are we, five hundred people? Otus—good name. It's a man who makes himself. Now, we'll be lucky to arm up sixty-five men worth the walk down to Knossos. Let Koreter catch wind we're coming, zzzzzt! Abas hissed, with a pull of his finger ear to ear. —Otus, your son Prax says his mother still lives in the house. Good woman? Any whispers our way? How many Companions with Koreter these days?

My son. My son. This meant, put our sons up front, or nothing. Fish-heads, what was I doing! I went a bit sick. Abas took it for the lightning: *You'll look better tomorrow, like the sun*, he said. It was nausea worse than a boat's, stranger, as if the horizon every side were tearing away from my senses. A boat off-anchor pitching down a wave inside the belly, knowing it was yesterday had limits. Could the man not shut up awhile?

Day of days, our eldest woman's voice obliged, from the last big rooftop up the lane. Wheeled around, we saw Mother Zoe come rising forward to the roof's edge between Ninna and Honeybee, the sanctuary peak behind them, eyes bearing down: they had left off morning rites, climbed ladders and were listening

—Shut that skin while the sun comes to, Mother Zoe said. —Or you won't like the spirits who come out

Diminutive and lean in her wraps, her little head crowned in long white locks: she made this all but a showing-forth array, and it pulled our best hailing fist-to-brow. True of speech, the men in us were grateful. It made us feel what made us men

First Houri, Rhea of Dikte with a learning in each finger. The mountain had called Zoe young, and she drank from every spring of the damos of our women,

birth-stone, death-shroud, green fields between. She made three highland generations fruitful in hard years, and hers a medicine-bond I had to make. When pilgrims came to learn, to heal or make their peace, Zoe led them down into the mountain. She was voice of the cave where we began—where Ariadne, lost one, sang to wake the pillars. There, a whisper was a shout, and Dikte's silence walked with her

We were looking at a Keeper never lost, who kept her head when moon and sun themselves strayed off the wheel. She knew the long changes in their dances, she nailed the sky for its impostors—and the difference was, losing track of when to plant or jump a pasture. Where Karfi people ate together, Zoe's name was in the thanks

—New year morning, mothers! Abas boldly hailed. If Zoe's eyes by turns were kind or fit to freeze a dog, she only looked down at the heavy black-wrapped thing in her two hands. So I had seen her bear away luckless births, and tumors out of healings

—You men might want some news, she said

—News? said Abas. —What news? From whom, which trail?

—Pharaoh is dead, Mother Zoe answered

—Who? asked Winato with his noggin looking round: the men of us laughed

Tutmoses, third of his line: a boy who soured waiting his throne, and as soon as he came to it, chiseled his mother's name Hatshepsut from their stones. To make her pay, our grandmothers said, for years of humiliating trade and peace. Seventeen years his armies took heads, grain, gold and slaves from Syria to Nubia, palmed them out to priests who tendered blessings; and still a boy he stuck a knife in my father's back to hand his trade the mainland's way. A man to chop off old relation and

pretend no one could see his cheap advantage. When Achaians holding Knossos died, Pharaoh's name went into the hole with their choice swords, his thanks in alabaster gifting-jars. His bloviating cartouched sun-king words to feed their wishes, and the worms

We still had medicine-kinsmen on The Nile, at Pharos, Abydos. But even there Achaians now, Mykenai's eye gazing from the prows of black ships, hulling up the river: their roving sons casing cities tacked with gold, fragrant of date-palm

—Dung-beetles, do what you can for a man, I said. —Anything of interest?

Ninna laughed, with the others, but then she closed another door behind my life

—For you, perhaps, she answered. —Theseus is dead. Theseus of Athens

—Who? Norax mocked this time. But Karfi knew. I had to look away. The hero of our masters and their pride, who marveled at our bathtubs

*Mothers' boys, who dance, not wield
the long ash spear and heavy shield,
I cast in a thrice on your marrow-bones
to call me king
and lord*

—Surely, Ariadne's house-bond, something to say, Honeybee invited; and I might have sighed, dry as grass when the sun goes under, except for the way she took my eyes. The festival touches of her dress were enough to green dead wood

—You look so beautiful, Fourogata

—Well! she lit with surprise. —What a pleasant funeral-speech

Karfi people liked their nicknames: young Arge, Donos' partner, was Kri-Kri

for her curves and garden charms. Honeybee was Fourogata, for the highlands' big fierce ring-tailed cat. When you heard those warning-yowls, you backed away. Today her black curls were to the wind, bangles, silver sickle earrings, and scarred muscled arms with fists akimbo at her tight-cinched waist. Anywhere in Honeybee's almond eyes and kohl-black lashes, between her naked heavy tear-drop breasts, a man looked for a place to lay his life down. Norax was the only man she named a son, his Oinops

Old times when The Great Year turned, Bull chose out priests and priestesses: Honeybee at seven saw Palaikastro devour itself, around a boy-god there turning king away from calendar. The more this Honeybee bloomed, the more she lived out of sight, and keeping off the beaches robbed her of the sea. Born to ride the world, she married these cliffs, black-eyed blood of old Europa's Byblos: her kin had been in silver, she built her own life to the bronze pins, and nobody drove her bargains. Kourai like Honeybee were born to grace our queens, and she blamed herself she never would serve one. Here, at least, she stopped cutting cruel futile slashes down her arms and hands. Honeybee still had ways to cut herself, to say she was no Ariadne. But she was

—Halloo, old man of the sea! Ninna called again. —Do you hear? Theseus is dead. Let a little thing make you grateful, for the sun on your face

—Go on, give a shout then, Melas nudged and smiled. —He was nobody I call kinsman. You won! Come to think, why *is* everything so weird about you, even for Cretans? You know what I mean. You won, in a way, without trying

—Melas, Ninna chided. —What I said was for all of you

Even Abas went quiet wanting words about the Shepherd. I looked for some. But instead I went pondering where my sons might be, Prax, Podargos. They and

Aktor, Ninna's battle-age son by Melas, were some of the young she favored

I liked the dust-brown locks Ninna wore combed to her little shoulders, round like a sparrow's, and the high lift of her chin. Ninna's middle years could have made her Zoe's child and Honeybee's mother. But true of speech, she walked her sadness more than anyone; had changed not a thing for new days, but stood next to Zoe in the same sun-paling saffron shawl in which she climbed this stronghold

Ninna never left it off, in her daughter's memory. And no matter where, even picking her way over rocks sharp as wind, Ninna's hands bore along a little round house of painted clay. When the door in it was open under twin pairs of horns, Earth Mother showed herself inside, arms wide as the world. That was for Ninna's great house gone. She said the little face pinched and painted into Goddess looked, by luck, just like her girl

Theseus! She knew his like. A mainland baron she called Botcher came storming up into the olive hills of Vathypetrou, with the Achaian vanguard. He killed or shipped off anybody seeming to dislike him, and then went looking for help to make the wrecked presses flow again. It took work, botching a trade for which the world had no substitute: he made the potters of his jars build in thicker feet, as if The Great Green might not notice weight of oil. At hand he wore out every chance with nicknames, Slope and Dingus. Drowning in the land, Botcher saw Ninna gift her daughter with that shawl in the year of her moon-blood. And figured a one-wheel mainland marriage to a child would bring the place to heel

Instead, Ninna's daughter shed her gift for a walk to the sea, and jumped a cliff. Ninna staggered into the mountains, and Botcher flamed out after her chariot and spear. Luckily, he ran into farmers, who beat him to death with olive poles. They ate his horse, scrapped his bronze and dumped him chariot and all down some ravine

That was the end of Melas' older brother. Botcher never had trifled to answer when Melas, landing with the second wave, asked him why the heavy hand. Melas that day to his honor followed Ninna. And close as we had grown as family, neither of them ever told how they really came together

Not even Aktor their grown son knew the tale, because I squirreled to find out through Prax. Me, Ninna gave Podargos, bond of our houses. But Ninna never broken had begun to bend. Poppy-shadows in her eyes, the finger-stains it left when people took it for more than pain of body, or a medicine dream. She was falling in with artisans who, as usual, dared to push Mother Zoe's provenance

Chafing on The Nail, they called these poppy-stupors helpful to their crafts. Zoe understood their hunting ways out of pain and dark, their guild-masters slaves or slain. I was not sure they or Ninna wanted out. Either their eyes for life were going weak, or life was too alive: settling for such drab stick-people, boxy bulls and birds on pots and coffins. Fish among flowers indeed, in tamed-down perfect pairs

So there we were. These people I loved, like Makris, letting go of a world going dark. —Ninna, I managed to begin. —This day, many things are dead

—Wrong speech, she replied. And there to the man of us, we started. For Mother Zoe's hands rose up with a snap of that black cloth, and out tumbled two blasted lobes of Labrys' head. They dropped and clanged wet cobbles with a spark

—Watch out! Zoe said, and her finger pointing me unfolded talons. —Come spring, young Bull, south wind carries desert over the sea. The Breath of the Ass, with claws of sand and flies that make men mad. Watch what follows your back! A man can wonder which he husbands—garden, or a rage to make it desert

—Mother, I said, when she had finished. —You are my eyes. If mainlanders wondered, we would not be hanging on The Nail. Tell me how to make us heard

Loving, cold as well-water, Zoe ended: —*She licks up heroes like dust*

—Oh, these impossible foggy sayings! Abas exclaimed. As I stood there chastened, Melas gave Abas a smirk of fellowship, and it spread into grins on Pereko and Kinuwa. Under the rose, they were medicine-sons of Poseidon, another old imp of springs proclaimed omnipotent. Such were the tides to keep pulling, if we made it to the ships. And something else came of Abas' outburst

Ninna missed no looks from Melas or their house. Indignation took her a step to the edge of the roof. Whether it was care with her foot, her words, or both, the moment she lashed out at Abas and Melas, the little clay shrine fell through her hands. It dropped and shattered where Labrys fell, and there would be no other the same

Ninna's face went as wide as a man's run-through, but her body collapsed before the curse. Honeybee was quickest to the catch. The three of them turned away from us, and helped each other out of sight. Honeybee looked back and hissed through fangs. It might not be too bad, we had to join up soon, in festival

—That cat pulls my prick like a wand to water, Abas said. Norax's back-hand struck across his teeth. The one thing to freeze that scuffle was Honeybee, storming back with her teeth on show and a sizeable knife in hand

—Now she wants to burn her shawl besides, you bloody fools! Well, heroes, look at this, she snarled. —Convince us. Is it worth one boy? Convince us. Till then, you move unsanctioned, taste *this!* and Fourogata vanished. Into the pitching void, Norax

—Happy new year, life. Whatever you do, you're going to be sorry

—Wonder how they got outside news, Melas brooded. —Argh! Bet your knuckle-bones, they'll play it into more. So, friends. It seems we are resolved not to

resolve

—Wait, Theseus, Abas said against dispersal. I shrugged that we had wind enough. He gave a Little Zeus chin-strap pout, but it was good to go our laughing ways

Snake came first in the first day's rise, turning new time's wheel in the wheel. Still no sign of sons, and once I had a basket to collect the broken things, I found Makris gone ahead from the house with our best old painted vase of offering and pouring. I was angry, running rocks and fat cushions of spiny-spurge, till I pitied the sight of him trying to climb and lift the vase up where it first belonged. Age up here meant more than birth or names, but late years Makris had grown too feeble for the part

There were beings in three stones standing near our houses, cut only by rain and wind: the head of a mountain-man, long-nosed and bearded, his hair in a bunched top-knot; a woman in a crested diadem, round and smiling, singing out; and between, the shape of a round-headed child, with one high-hailing arm. When you climbed their crag, and held that vase to that child's hand, you placed it in the horns of a mountain far off to the west, shining white these winter days. It was to tell the whole world of our families we remembered. This made it fit to hold water of memory from our spring

I got under Makris' butt and pushed to help him do it, and he went happy the long climb downward after, rock by thicket along Karfi's west fall. That was where people had gathered, quietly, smudging diktamos, near the well-kept graves and tombs along the mountain. A fine full Little Summer was opening wraps. Makris smiled and passed the vase: *Here boy, draw the water, take the poison.* A pleasure to hold, slender and ancient with a birdy neck, painted with five-bough palms.

Clambering down I took the folk-medicine, as people of every age and grudge dogged me to the spring

—Yah mule! —Yah! —Don't drop it, stupid! —Kill my boy, big Keeper man, chop your legs off! —Where's your mother's gold, you soft sneak? —Some king, slower than last year! —*Op-op-op*, he's coming! —So is Bull, and his sons are dragging him!

So that was where! I scoured the spring's old basin with grit, then laid in the vessel and it drank. At the tombs, each person to the child was anointed, and set to work with kinsmen clearing brush and moss away. Scarcely a sound in the mountains' good silence, till drums and clatter stirred our dogs. My sons came up near the head of that hundred. Elders had arranged them special places, sure that their father had died

—*Whoom, whoom, whoo-oom!* It was Bull-roarer, thunder and love-call: Podargos, stronger than I thought, swinging a rope and oaken board that wrought the sound. As usual fierce and happy, showing the cold his bony chest, he snapped the roarer back once neat to his hand and grinned my way. Then Prax walking between Bull's horns in his best buckskins, tall as a sunflower. Indeed he tranced right past his father-alive—a hurt that turned me proud. Girls like Zoe and crones with willow who had beaten the slopes all around The Nail were singing now to daouli-drums, rattling things, swinging hips, their brown and gray heads tossing in wild unison

Melas was shining on his fair-headed Aktor at the head of the young men jostling and jumping. The day asked: was Prax, with his curls and his Knossos-speech, their better anymore? Prax meant to make a poet. He sang out now, holding nothing back, and with all but the lost one's voice I craved for thirty years. I heard her, in him:

*—Leap, leap at the head of your daemons, Kouros of things newborn, gleaming,
and all mankind be held about by wealthy peace! And leap for us, too, leap
for full jars and fleecy flocks. Leap to bless every tree. Make hives drip honey*

Aktor's face was twenty years of Karfi granite, hair stronger than Honeybee's: a hunter cool at arms, that boy, and one day with his arm around Prax he said how they were equals. *First, free men*, he said it. *Then, poets; and no blood but the mountain speaks its mind.* Blast, to see my sons was mad medicine! They gave me life, and now their lives hung off a phrase in every plan—*If he lives, If he lives*

This moon's Bull wanted flowers, but his thanks were strong. The woolly githa-bag came out and its high crazy pipes made people writhe. I coaxed out the shiver and the nod of his horns: this year, Arge had honor of the mace. She struck a good stun, then gripped his mane and knifed in under. Bull heaved, and went down. His steaming spring of blood we mixed with the waters, and Arge marked an X in red on every grave, and brow. Mothers taught girls to chop and portion, men shouldered up Bull's head; and gathering now around the palm I hefted high, full of memory and life, this spattered holy ruckus helped each other up the mountain. Sanctuary-bound

—Mother of nourishment! —Teacher, Mountain! —She will be there in the door!

There was no room for people to be crowding up near the cliff's peak. They pressed in on the cobbles and roofs and across the whole saddle of The Nail to wait, to see. My last this day until the moon was to climb up there and pour: this, when the sun cast no shadow, to open the little niche-in-the-mountain door with its double-S spirals. These hours' waiting turned to the people's pouring to each other: one sat in

the place of family-gone, the other poured and spoke their mind: some said nothing. This was another home way not for Melas. We tried to understand Achaians' bone-deep dread of playing gods, and he could never say where else he hoped to meet them

Midday! The spirals swung in, people breathed and hailed and wept, and out walked Mother Zoe, Honeybee, and Ninna with bare shoulders, fierce of face. Each showed forth a little clay horned Earth Mother high, the arms up and out to bless; and all of us now without a Labrys lifted our palms out high in answer. True of speech, the last bird on the mountain went still, and a breath passed through the world

Now it was drink and food and double-spiral dances, waiting moon: the high-sun hours of summer's Lioness, devourer, whom we loved for the young she nourished. I ate with my sons and Mother Zoe, and the worst of a nausea came back. The cure they said was to go lie down, but the rooms were a grave. I walked, and walked as if chasing horizon. And there, *tock! tock!* in an oak grove by a pool was Abas, teaching knife. I heard him call a good throw a Griffin, sudden death out of the air

—You boys belong at feast, I told the eight of his companions

—Not really, Abas shrugged. Then, aside, he asked me. —Why burn Knossos? Shame to waste a house so useful—old king of the hill! he nudged

And who would be the new one—you, Little Zeus? Look out. This lion with no young to feed would feed the young to lions: all to gain, little to lose. This mountain, this Theseus, I was not going to wait for harm. I sickened, murder in my hands—but he might talk me into it. The same wounded deranged cunning. The blather, leagues out in front of secret wants: an appetite endowed with skill to poison and mislead

There was no sanctuary where I spent the night, at the niche beside Bull's head. New moon, a little girl and a yellow Griffin's talon, rose up out of the mountain, and a shattering cry blessed the sight of her

—Father of my body! Crown of law! Moon King who stepped forward, whom no weapon saved, what is the way! Let them use me like a shield!

Laughter, crashes, reels and whoops. *Come to your house*, Makris sang. Well, we were coming. I envied Ariadne's sleep—fighting, just to get born. I even turned the wrong cobbled way going home in the first crack of light, my legs a clumsy calf's

Beside the door a woman at the full of life, dark eyes, high-cheeked slender face: a kindness not quite smiling in her lips, red as fig off the tree. An evergreen cloak of many folds held her shapely body, a great white-beaded headdress crowned her hair, and round her charming chin a lowered veil with spiral-chase. In the bend of her arm a red jar nestled, and I saw its painted bird

—Deucalion?

—Oh, lost one

—I am not lost, she smiled. —Don't be afraid. My name is Pyrrha.

2

A dozen daemons forgot me to look for strangers with outside news. So there and aloud to this woman, I wondered why Karfi had delayed her welcome. But my ears remembered Melas' complaint: more than chance had likely placed her here

—Sir, this Pyrrha smiled, —your rites of sun and moon. You were still indisposed when my company arrived. First we came to Dikte, and Mother Zoe's web brought us here. You know me, sir, she promised. —And I bring good things to explain

I had not seen wealth of trade and travel since merchants had mingled on The Labyrinth's west court. She showed no disdain for The Nail's hive of hovels, although from her headdress to her rings and her purple curled shoes, she was living what families here remembered. The scents from her were palm and ocean

—First, I was going to the tombs with this wine of offering from home. Alright then, a clue, Pyrrha answered to my look: I was already thriving in her quickness, the peaceful ease from which it seemed to pour

—See what this remembers, she began. —Once, there was an unthinkable red-black Bull. He lived on a mountain with lovely groves of trees, above a tiny town. Bull was crazy, flick a whisker and Earth shook: he liked his fun, though it never made him cruel. He loved the tiny town below, the sweet noises it made; how the

people, afraid when he moved, sang songs to soothe his blood. He would have been glad to kill anybody who troubled them, but he was too big and crazy to live there. So, the more he loved his groves of trees. If Bull could not come into the town, he let nobody walk his mountainsides; and all the girls and boys were told never to stray up there

—But, in the town, there lived a certain girl; and somehow, only she knew it was alright. There always is a girl born wise, to fear no thunder. And, although this one had been told not to stray up that mountain, ever, she was a bit of mischief. She slipped away, and she found herself climbing through glorious groves of oranges, lemons, big fat figs and olive trees

—Old Bull, he heard somebody, and he mosied down to see who was so foolish or so brave. And there on the mountainside he saw the girl, sauntering along, singing, her hair tied up in back with little stray strands of it on the breeze: she had a gay summer-shawl across her breasts and shoulders, and he liked how her tiny bare feet kicked out the hems of her sunny skirt. The girl was only half-looking for him, really: she met his eye, and went right by him. What! Bull couldn't think how annoyed he was. He galloped out ahead of this girl, who didn't spook even when he turned and lowered his shoulder. Boom! He rammied into a fig tree, just to teach this one a lesson

—Poor Bull! He must have hit his head too hard. He knocked a lot of figs down, and the girl picked one up. Now all he did was watch her sit, and eat, and the crazy in him melted. How the girl marveled at the taste. She ate it like her first one, or her last, with bright eyes, and smiled with teeth white as lily, as if it were naughty to enjoy a fig so much. She swung her pearly thighs, munching, and sucked her fingers

—Well, good thing nobody else came up that mountain. Bull tossed his horns, to say he'd be twice-glad now to kill them, any or all. Zoop! And the girl hopped up, grabbed his horns, and nestled her bottom in the wooly curls between. Bull laughed, his greatest-ever thunder—and that won't hurt a fly. He said, *Sweet Thing, I was born for you!* So, since that day then, yonder, love? He curls himself the world around her sleeps

—My mother's mothers' tale, I marveled. —Bull and his great tree, at The Labyrinth's north door

—You told that to me, Pyrrha smiled. —And a little girl forgot to thank you

—What? When? Pyrrha, I said, hoping already for years to say her name: I heard Cyprus in her grace. —Let me fetch a meal, you fed me one. We have a sitting-place

—Good, Pyrrha said, with a pat to her painted bird; a long-necked crane-hen, totem of her clan, and wine inside to pour Mother Kriti

So we parted on the cobbles, though I watched her go stately down. Woman, traveler for family, trained and trusted—How many house-bonds, how many kids?

—Now there's a man hit by lightning, Honeybee teased from her table: her house fed me most days, and that was all she let on, busy toward the rites. Sleepy Little Zoe was there, Podargos gnawing mutton, Oinops, and Prax. After kisses and gathering things, I took him outside

—I am coming with you, Prax began. —Not lightly. I don't forget, you told me of so many men who rushed to fight for things, and got poison for it. But, father, I want to bring my mother out of Knossos. Where do you think we'll go? he finished

This in the spell of second-morning twilight on the mountain: it was yet Little Summer warm, but clouds were climbing out of the south hills. Look at my son! I

blessed my blessings like a farmer, and should have styled him Sunflower, bigger than himself and full of seed. No sleep, but I felt eager again, ahead of the game

—We may know soon. Prax, this turns me gray, and proud

—Mother Zoe swears to see me through, he told me. —Underneath, she wants me to stay. She worries things lost, if I take her learning with me. But Zoe won't hold me, if the house leaves. Do I have to let her go? Why can't I have both mothers?

—That is Zoe's pain, Prax. Things coming apart, and no way to teach enough. But listen, I said with a palm to his shoulder. —In training, you stick close to Norax, and men his tribe like Donos. Let Abas teach you the close-in, but put wax in your ears. And more, Prax. We count on you with Bright Foot. He is not of age for this. We'll be short of hunters soon. So, tell him no man can fight without his rabbits. Put him in charge of boys cutting arrow-branch, but keep him out of this

—Thank you for your faith in me, Prax replied, and I let him go with praise of yesterday: my son, another in our line of priests with different lives forced on. Aktor, watch his back!

Down the mountain I bore a skin of raki, raisins, rare cakes of honeyed wheat from fields we managed off The Nail. Pyrrha finished at the tombs, and I took her to a bench-stone near our spring. She filled her jar, then sat with legs tucked under her, hands in her lap. Her slender back and bosom reared up from folds of the green cloak made her pillow: she'd dropped the under-veil from her white headdress too, a different flower now, the wind rippling a full-length cotton robe of lightest lavender. Canaan-colors: one ounce of that dye cost her weight in bronze. I yearned for the world in her. We ate and watched the hawks circling level with our eyes. One had a murder of crows nipping at his tail, and he gyred up and up as blithe as life till they fell away. The whole land answering the sun. With a rock I cracked almonds like a

cave-man, and Pyrrha relished their fresh oil. I could not remember

—It was only thirty years ago, Pyrrha laughed. —I was born down there, old Amnisos, she pointed across the plain, where clouds cast shadows. —We saw you at your mother's rites sometimes. Then one morning, after the island yonder blew into the sky, people put me a little girl on one of seven boats. They were Crete's last, boats you and Ariadne found. This was after the waves. One, your men pulled down from a tree. People called this just a visit-ride, but we knew. The mainlanders were coming

—Excuse me that I spoke the name you buried. But you were a sweet wine, we were all in tears that day for leaving; or at least because our elders were. You and Ariadne looked torn open, and you told that story to our boat of spoiled children. So, today, I have this circle's honor. We made it in three days to Cyprus, because of Ariadne's house. My grandmother five-back was Cyprian. Paphos made us family. So, sir, your pardon; but this once, I may say it. Look at me now, Pyrrha beamed

Glorious, and something was coming. She straightened up, waist, spine and shoulders, raised one palm and lifted her chin to speak as embassy. Achaians said a woman made good hostage in affairs, but from Labyrinth days such daughters had borne things of moment. Trained and seasoned queens of their kind, they understood each other, and midwived standards for a fractious Great Green. Pyrrha asked leave with my name once more

—Minos, Double Axe Man of mountain, moon, sun, shadow and pole-star: Deucalion Minotavros, Otus who Pushes Back. We come back for you. We want you and yours to come to Cyprus. Our home is a garden

Pyrrha was looking out with peace of heart on country her own mother. These decades of days had burned my eyes on the gentle shape of Dia sleeping off the coast, where nothing needful killed Ariadne. Now, overwhelmed, I wondered could I

grow a soul her size. Could I let go, leave, and keep her grace

—Home out east, the ships with eyes dare only trade. We let them think we do not know the crimes behind them. You understand, then, sir, I am our family's message. I don't dress quite like this every day, Pyrrha smiled, palm returning to its mate

So this was how a mountain felt when it sloughed off a slide of little stones! I couldn't be gone true-mad, feeling only grateful Mother Zoe's way for this. But true of speech, I blurted back, asking Pyrrha how many house-bonds lived with her

—Well, she answered with a slow-music tilt of her chin, —none of them ever sat enthroned a Keeper of Great Year Days

Beginning, that, to say what we might do for them: bring Labrys Clan's good name in trade with Ugarit and Canaan, and skills that built the suns and moons into public binding-rites. I had sailed my father's fleet for war with three thousand different creatures, and wondered the mix of them in Cyprus. Her mothers sorting seed, weaving up the fragments of our web—busy creatures, when the lions were at bay!

—We never forgot our queen, Pyrrha said, —and you beside her, standing on those hills with your arms up, a doubled pair of palms out high to bless. We cried, and our mothers looked Ariadne in the eye till the sea took our sight of her

—In time, at Paphos, when we heard what happened, we built a house in her honor. Traders can tell you that. But, those same years, they said that you still lived at Knossos; and then, not. We got a new Achaian story. You were killed when the first of them broke The Labyrinth's doors. It told us something, to pray for you, because they were devouring even yesterday

—Now, I have a sister, named Kai, a midwife, and keen as mortals get with

dreams. At harvest-last, Kai dreamed Ariadne dying in childbirth. We realized what we owed. What we the saved might save. But her dream said, *Quickly*. So, when Little Summer came this year, we trusted that: we chose lots, and off I sailed, to see if Dikte knew your fate. And now, if I know clouds, Little Summer is closing, till The Sisters take Double Axe down from the sky

—A daring ship is welcome home, I managed. Now, clear as a dream I saw that morning and her boat, the waves rising and falling in fire and honey of the mountain-blasted sky. Queen of my spirit's hand in my hand. Seaborne children taking to waters that had borne our first clans here. Now returned, to sail again, falling and rising

A woman's dream oceans away, a blink of weather; and here was help to save us worlds of trouble. Abas. If I could see him try to learn before he led—Bah! Today I felt a child lifted up in family arms, death and loss mirages to their building. Help unlooked-for on the air, if I could just keep waking up

Palm, and ocean: Pyrrha basked, watched the sky, and lifted both arms to settle her necklace of white cowrie, her breasts full-round as ostrich-eggs. How to say what still demanded doing?

—So, they killed me at the door. Poor work, Koreter! I laughed down the mountain. —Poor man can never sleep. Words, reasons, rules and knives, because life lives wild around the lies. Our governor's dry canals fed them into our ears: *You Cretans lie. Zeus is no boy, no moonstruck man who dies for mother's green. He is king of gods, of thunder, and of men: he rules, and lives forever in the sky. Take fear of Zeus' pelekus, Cretans: you are all liars.* Labrys this fraud's battle-axe! Well, Pyrrha, this changes talks. Who can stew any longer, burn his own life talking back to the breath of an ass

–Listen now, she said. –Kai gave me this for you:

–*All hair will fall from your horned head
when you tell all, you'll fly, be dead
and borne these ways on silver wings
fulfill your written part in things.*

–Listen again, she said. –Take it in your body. And that was the moment of Pyrrha's first touch. Soothing my brow like a plough-weary brother's, a fragrant palm along my jaw, she gathered my hands then in hers, and finished. I trembled. *Fulfill, Fulfill: worlds of worry crumbling, fresh strength cutting loose*

–Three feasts we owe already, yours, your crews' and sister's, I told her

–As your house considers, Pyrrha said, –I boast not Cyprus copper. But, with the right smiths, we begin to work iron. For myself like any woman, *ar-yan* is dark. It pulls warmth out of bodies any way you touch it. But some things need to change. Out there, Otus, iron gives a house two edges: breaking bronze, if we have to fight, and careful trade of it with houses first in trade. Some Noisy Boy grafted us good vines, so now we trade the wine I carried here; fiery-red, like my name. And island-veil, like this: many Cyclades mothers with us. Not two sets of loom-weights the same, and the daughters of Canaan's kings fight over shipments for their gowns

–If I may, the best for last. You were born a priest-chief. Torn from that, like your father. I see pain in most of Karfi's eyes, and no one person heals all. But see ahead then. Gardens of love. The Mysteries, and more. In Cyprus, Pyrrha said lighting up in the sun, –gardens of love are queen of life. Out of festival, holy communion, and healers. Out of funerals, marriage beds. She is more than natural ceremony. The listening on her benches tills the soil for council. She finds good ties

for trade. You never know whom you'll meet. She makes wild kourai men and women, answers pain with simples, comforts death. Many people came to Cyprus injured by the mountain, and see the world return before their eyes. What can you not grow there, seed of Dikte?

—My brothers and I will need a place like that. Because in doing what I tell you now, Pyrrha, we may go mad for awhile. What? Why are you laughing? Should I save my breath, did Zoe tell you everything?

—No, no, she answered settling down. —I was feeling—a kind of light inside. Like a girl glad for fire in the mountains. I promise to listen, not forgetting you are crazy to most Cretans

I did not want to lose Pyrrha's hands, so I waited for words. But that echo from below did sting: we, crazy, while the lowlands worked their way out of ash paying Koreter protection with their best. Good as it was to hear them mending, it gave me ground to speak. She did not withdraw her hands at the rise in my blood

—Idiot Koreter, I finished. —Spider, he only looks a harmless little old man. His priests salt our memory, tell us if we had a way, it was doomed as rot; and first and last, that Earthling-dirt owe kings their lives. Protection—from themselves! *Work, pay, or burn.* They march up here all weapons to count the last sheep. Houri, we cannot leave The Labyrinth his. Of course I won't always be poison-mad, I tried to laugh. —I know how much is finished. Lady, help a stranded sailor

—Otus, she answered. —Cyprus will understand

Pyrrha's face was grave and still, with her eyelids down: her fine hands moved in feeling mine, her grief all sides for what was coming. Now she looked up, barely smiling. I turned as cordial as I could, and she quick as water began to chat

—You know, Kia is right more times than wrong. But for me at least,

sometimes she looks too far. She said once: *All things of substance pass away—gone where? Into dream. So dream is the last real thing: the only substance.* Now, I ask you!

Pyrrha laughed with a weird look sidelong, and one fine eyebrow up askew

—So much to do today! I said, wagging a boggled bull's head over it; and then we sat together quiet as the wind, but not too long. She asked me to cloak her shoulders, and it breathed up the garden of her hair

—Shall we? she adjourned. —First the babe is born to hand. No cutting till we lay him on the Earth and look him over

This second day of moon's and sun's saw blessings of the trees and herds, and sanctuary offerings of little beasts in clay, pinched out in prayers for plenty. The pilgrims gave Pyrrha and her people a fine welcome, but I wasn't much good to the rites from there. At once, the four full moons before we moved felt short, and the same shadow shamed me that a duty of a day now seemed interminable

I fought that for the pull of poison that it was. But Makris, and Abas, pulling opposite ways, demanded a muster that night. Honeybee, too: *Convince us.* This fear already I had launched: people wanted to know things, now and plain. So there we were in open talk of killing in the face of festival

—You know me, I began when the sun touched the mountains: with Pyrrha at my side, I was facing ten times the people who saw me dance, spread out in the twilight down and up the back-saddle of The Nail. —I ask no war. One night, one fight: a funeral-fire that will take us in honor through the door to a new life. This day's feast and pouring, you met this great lady. Cyprus remembers, and reaches out with help. Ask Pyrrha and the people of her ships about tomorrow. Bottom-land and pasture, peace, trade—and, interesting evenings, I said to the men's light lusty laugh. —This is true, and worth pushing back for. Stand up now, sisters, brothers, speak!

—Get to the bones of it! called Donos: weighing his chances still

—Alright, I said. —The worst thing first. Do you understand, we whisper Griffin here? And the whisper that passes down this mountain is our death. Well then, every traitor, tell the world! I found coming out my mouth. —I am going come what may, alone, or with the last of you!

That came out like a touch of my mother unlooked-for, her give-it-all outrageous will. Hide nothing, dare, old Pasiphae, and shine. The ranks of heads in the torch-light turned this way and that with their whispers: murmurs traveled to and fro, as if the new moon sickle were a listening ear. The next thing out surprised me. Two plain words: *How many?*

—This comes from Prax's mother, inside The Labyrinth, I began. —She stayed because, there, her hands help Crete the most: Klawiphoros, they style her, Key-Bearer. She counts fifty red-beard men at arms around Koreter, Companions. And, she says, the blue stallions stitched to their tunics look like brood-mares, fat with feed. A second troop, about forty Libyans, hoof their sentry-work for pay. Long spears they carry, for the fearsome show. But let one man or two step forward for a family, and sixty will do. In we go, with Key-Bearer's help as quiet as Grandfather Snake. Then we spread Earth Mother's Griffin-wings, and burn our way out to the ships. Understand, we will be *inside them*. I know those turning halls, and Abas knows that this close, long spears lose. Last—behind all this, of course—our families slip down-country. We meet on Malia shore. And, in Pyrrha, you can see the good place waiting

—Sir! It was Abas standing up. —We don't have the weapons, or the metal

Yes, we did; and we had Kinuwa's skills to work them. I told about a country house that burned thirty years ago: it burned in such Achaian rage that it collapsed

before they sacked it. Inside was a lion's share of ingots, a trading-hoard of bronze in Labrys-shape. Hilarious: their chieftain raging at the hasty fire, at the fools whom he had nursed on rage; and so, with a plan to double back and dig those ingots out, they raged on forward to the next big house with horns. There, they found a troop of quicker kinsmen raging. Easy as ice, they fell into fighting for that prize, and the red-beards who remembered anything happened to get killed. *The end*, I said, and the mountain listening all but laughed away the question

An easy hoard of solid tin-mix bronze, and now our turn for the taking; thanks to a witness, a highland crone who let me hold her hand going through the door. Me she asked to plough her hatred under, and time had turned it green, like rusty bronze. Her gift, I told Abas, was his own first mission, if he'd take it. And he sat down, satisfied for now. A few men touched his shoulder, his first volunteers

—Are there kings in Cyprus? asked the wary young Arge

—No, Pyrrha answered her. —Have we missed anything?

Pereko was looking restless in the laughter, but he kept his vow through festival days. Instead, up stood Winato, with a roll of his shoulder. —The linchpin, Otus, is a whim of wind. Poseidon will not help men steal mainland boats. What if we come bleeding through, and the sea is wild? Their chariots will run us down

Cause to doubt Poseidon any stickler, I choked back. Dark was falling, and dread was moving through the bodies

—This fight, I said, —is in The Labyrinth. Bleed them, Winato, and bows like Pereko's will serve until we sail. I only say again, I shrugged, —that I am going

—Well then, Winato answered, and he took a redoubtable pause: it looked sure that his yesterday's *No* was final, and might carry. Most people here were like him, wild enough to live isolate and cold, but keeping their hard-earned heads down

out of lightning. I failed to count on Pyrrha's presence feasting people's eyes

—Well then, Winato finished. —You good men of arms, and you, brother Abas, will teach us more. Much more. Teach us till we know we will come through

—Teach that to *me!* Norax joked; and Karfi went on talking, through the starlight. At the first pale of sky people turned home for the central day, and nothing was resolved. Except for Abas, who was at the door before the sun

I bade him choose his men, and to remember The Nail had not decided. Abas laughed, *Why, Otus, they're lining up to go!* Nor could he wait to get back and start what he was going to call blade practice. *We'll do with wooden weapons first,* he said. *You, while I'm gone, have Kinuwa carve his pouring-moulds, and build the forge we should have raised already. We'll want a good hot furnace roaring for those talents*

Off he went and I was glad, until we were twenty men short for that third day's double-spiral dances. More, the men young and old who danced wore their mountain-knives on show. Blast! Mother Zoe understood what they were saying. Ninna, who had shed her shawl, raised fists instead of palms in our weaving lines. This was my doing. I had opened the door. Solstice festival was light and shadow, and now nobody could look for spring without fear of unnatural blood

With the last two days we danced new movings of the sun against our mountains. Icy wind and blind gray walls of mist took turns again around Karfi. Pyrrha's people shivered, till even she broke down and pitied us aloud. We talked and talked when I wasn't chopping wood or helping Kinuwa hunt good stone. Nights, I envied the Cyprus men who piled with her for warmth

Abas came back before the last of that moon. They had the bronze, and by then, he had Pereko and Donos seeing to his orders with the rest. *Bright and early!* *Bright and early on the barrens!* they kept on, while Abas pushed his lamb away and

drank

—More men will show, once practice builds a few, he told me; and blast again, we were going to have to leave him to it. Norax, Melas and I needed fresh looks at Knossos. —What about your Prax, and Aktor, are they in?

—Drink up, Abas, rest. Ask them, I answered

—I will. And, by the way, Otus, he began again. —Just to be clear, and proper, with a business I know you dislike. Now, I respect that you will not change your mind about the burning. But we just dug out a king's treasure missed by fools

—You want pillage of the house, before we burn it

—No, no! Not pillage, Abas said, with the first hurt look he'd ever shown. —What do you think me, less Cretan than you? Look at it this way. Knossos will have more than rusty bronze. Bind these men together, take that gold, and gold brings a man more men. Then, more gold. Do you follow? This is good for everybody

—Try to keep your head, while we're gone, was all I told him

The three of us slipped down off Karfi at twilight, goat-trail over path, woods over road. We slept the day in maquis thicket, and made Knossos valley the second night. It was crucial to stay clear until the last house-lamps along the slopes went dark. But when I saw our house again—the knoll of her alabaster wings and stories, the red-pillar colonnades decked with smashed-down horns, her closed-up doors and overgrown walks—well, manly Melas be damned. I took my purge, and knew it was Karfi iron coming back. *Otus, look!* laughed Norax on point. Their dogs, the imbeciles short-chained outside porches: they felt us off in the darkness, too, and barked, but nobody answered. As if every other night it was fox and pheasant

We watched the hours from three facing hills under olive trees, picked out guard posts. The blue stars of winter Labrys falling from the sky, we crept down to

wade the stream that crossed The Labyrinth's southern foot and gardens. The cat-tail reeds both sides made cover. Then, deep-in under the pilings of her causeway, we found my door to the great water-tunnels underneath

Our masters had blocked all of these they found. To them indoor toilets were womanish, so the precinct smelled like one. Our door was a narrow downspout fed off the tunnels, well in under Labyrinth's hill. We pulled back a tangled bank of dry creeper, and then the rocks and mud of a spiteful priest-chief. I stepped forward in alone, to see the way clear to Key-Bearer's part; and then slipped sideways between wet walls in under the southwest wing. Stones had slanted, silt sucked my boots, but I knew those floors above to the corners. Hall by hall I felt along cobwebby joists, and found overhead the very slab intended. I pressed my upraised palms against it, trying to feel Key-Bearer sleeping somewhere. Behind my eyes her shade gave way to spider Koreter's. *Go on snoring, king*, I had to whisper

We went in scared, came out relieved, and covered every sign. Now, the ships. We could run this road in half a morning, but we hid up instead, and took another night slipping field by hill down to Amnisos. Melas thought I was crying again, but it was joy of the sea, the night-black pounding pulses of her waves, the strong salt air. *She wants us to live, the ocean*, sang a voice out of memory here. Norax picked up a white chunk of pumice for Fourogata

Three new stone-built quays, we saw: the fishing pinks slept high, the big Achaian vessels in long low sheds near the shingle. Inside was exemplary order, masts and spars, the sails dry-wrapped and oars in bundles, stacks of rolling-logs: six beasts, six oarloops to a side, and a Lion's eye each prow. Crews, guards? We followed late-hour skirls of Cretan music, and found some eating and splashing wine on the terrace of a big house, lit up near the water. Doubtless, more men who might

fight for their boats had charmed ways into other houses near. *Fast, and ferocious*, Norax mused, *or we will not win*. And still, the smoke of those braziers made our mountain-bellies weep. Roasted mullet, sea-bass, octopus, and roe of urchin fresh in the spiny shell

—I like The Great Green, but not at my back, Melas worried in our hide. —Say we do raise sixty men. How many get this far? Wind wrong, we won't have the oarsmen. Otus, who listens to the dead! Blast you, keep them where they are, hungry, jealous, vicious. I will not have Aktor down here dodging sailor blades and Libu javelins. Poseidon help my brain, but I want this! Talk, Norax! Your Libu blackguard-blood

—Lower your voice. Calm down, Norax told him. —Brothers, look. Family used to say that if Libu have a house, it's dug into the ground. Their life is circles, oasis to pasture, with their animals and rains. So, these Knossos Libu will go far, to live like townsmen. Otus, said Norax lifting up a closing fist. —Griffin first take Koreter's Companions, man and mother's son. A stranded Libu, then, might come to terms

—Terms! What terms? Melas scoffed

—Pulling oars, for a stake in Cyprus, you bush-faced blowhard. What would you do, mainland sailor? Bleed for a boat, and then answer to a hungry Lion? And meanwhile, no more honey of the fish-girls of Amnisos

—Well! What can go wrong, Melas ended, his head down like a man at funeral

So it went—every part of this a clutch of fear, work and problems. So little like the dreams of sleeping bones and waking hope. Half-way back, before we faced Karfi, we hid up another day to do nothing but talk. What night, Keeper of Days, would be The Labyrinth's last? Key-Bearer chose it: the fourth month's second night with no moon, before the fifth one's new little horns showed in the sky. The dead

were said to walk those crossing-over hours, and wise Achaian murderers kept indoors

Till then, we had three moons. Melas, the gnat, had to know how Prax's mother talked with her mountain-man. I asked him how many ya-yas muled their tribute down to Koreter. *Women! Dreamers who never sleep*, he grumbled

—Watch now, Norax told us. He picked a pine-cone for each ship and one green needle for a man. If we had to row six boats, every two Karfi men would need a third. More, sixty men could take only two family each, plus a dozen-odd spaces—because it was fifteen riders to a ship, and a Great Green full of people who pushed their luck

So, to our shock, it was two of five family on The Nail going anywhere come spring. The pains of that were sharp. But better than dreaming only to swamp, or leave people to the Lion. In time we could pluck more family off southern beaches. But not until the first of us opened the door

—Mountain, lift me up! Norax shouted when we sighted Karfi home. He'd used to say The Nail on her ridge was a beaten man's last tooth. Now I felt the granite of his son alive in him, and shouted likewise: I saw the prow of a great stone ship abreast a wave. Melas sang *Oh, peace, and rest!* We got almost none from the first climb back

The women who built ovens had plastered Kinuwa's forge, and its stack as tall as a man was roaring. Kinuwa's old father oversaw the work, and he who had grudged every day up here was strutting his young days' rooster. We saw the moulds of wicked blades and points those two had cut, and the forge's molten bronze poured in: below The Nail's back hills, a smoky spreading barren of chopped trees kept feeding charcoal to the beast. The clouds about us hid the smokes like help. And

there, as if on cursed ground, good Abas ran blade practice. Makris told me the twenty men who with him fetched that bronze were turning out, and some few more. Others wanted in, but Fourogata's knife and Mother Zoe's words were in the way

What words? He said that Zoe walked into their first dawn practice. *So!* she said with fists on hips. *This is on? You break our way of council to protect it?* Zoe would have done more, said Makris. Now it was Ninna who had turned to the dark moon, and she was pulling Mother to let be, to let Abas run

—Speak of the man, Makris said before he let me sleep. —You need to know when you see Prax. Abas beat him to a pulp. Yes, I mean Prax was first man on the barren that first morning. Zoe gone, Abas used Prax first to show the stakes of any weakness. Well, Prax just kept on getting up, be proud, till Abas finished him. Otus, please don't put your sword to his neck. Aktor did that, and it's getting bad blood about. Blast the truth! I'd see Little Zeus bleed Prax again, if it helps a poet stay alive

I listened. Together we helped Prax to know the same, and from that night my iron slept beside me; that I might wake each day the more like Norax. Hard, and none more loving with his house. As it turned out, this time Norax told The Nail what we learned. Melas laid his gravity over his worries, and Norax made the mountain feel this could and should be done. From there, it was simply one thing unfolding to another. Curious again, how *No* and wise reluctance turned another way, when people heard how few and strong the first travelers had to be. Families argued in and out. Maybe some only wanted a share of good bronze. By the dark of that first moon, men were bringing more men to the barren

Pyrrha delighted in dignified Prax, and our bull-calf Bright Foot: Little Zoe's touch of the sun healed her fast of awkward pity. One evening, with a crowd of us keeping warm with wine and music in Honeybee's house, the young head-man of

Pyrrha's fifteen Cyprians came to find her. His style was Squiddy, a long gangly man with merry bug-eyes either side of a raw tuber nose: Podargos showed his men good hunting. Squiddy knocked and ducked inside to us, stepped forward and took off his cropped-feather headband. He looked so grave that we asked him who had died

—Friends, he answered. —The lot of us up here have talked this well. I speak for ten of Pyrrha's crew like me, who are for this fight. Excuse the other five of us: in Ya, our home, we never shame the choice. So, understand, Squiddy went on. —The world is circles. Someday, you Cretans will help Ya. Take us on, ten Squiddies, yes? Good, good! he reveled with a gangly hug around the table

—More! Squiddy put in. —Pyrrha's three good ships, with thirty crew, sleep south of here at Myrtos. This moon I will make the trek myself, and spring, they can bring our boats around to Malia. See? They can beach and wait for us, hiding in plain sight, just season's visitors, he laughed

—Squiddy, Pyrrha said, —let me show your crown. See? A wheel of crane-feathers, red, white, black. Cranes taught Crete her farmers' times, before anybody kept the days, she nudged me. —Cranes fly higher than eagles, far: they never lose their way, and they carry counsel from the dead. Here, then, I pour for you: lift your cups and wings to brothers of our family. To Mother Ya! Weave us interesting nests!

The wheel of days kept turning, dark and light, light and shadow. When Squiddy announced for the ten Cyprians, that was the day we raised our sixty from Karfi: more, we had to choose the last few out. No mountain-milk doubled our strength as fast as Squiddy's ten, with their jaw-hook blades and axes and big bows. All in, with half the mountain watching, we were tossing stones like medicine-balls when Winato asked Squiddy who, back home, was worth a fight. Good man, good man

—We feud. Men will, Squiddy shrugged. —The worst are foreign men with kings. Times, not too often—when they feel big—kings' sons in boats pay Ya some visits worth revenge. So we understand yours

No more talking! If every man had a trick to teach, Abas worked us for our lives. Blade-practice day by night, no matter how cold or preposterous it was to be out there in windy snow, wrestling, drilling, sparring, scrambling up and down and up the mountainsides again. His pair-off drills for blocks and close work turned arms black. And black we went inside, like the moon in front of Ninna's naked eyes now. She barked away weak friends. Once in seven days we cleared the lanes and houses on The Nail, and Ninna watched us learn to hack and push our way to clear a corridor, or turn a spear with back against a wall

My years had loved her, Zoe, Honeybee: the rising thing in me rose toward Pyrrha, with the second moon's going. When all four each had counseled keeping Abas close, I poured raki one night for only him and Norax in my house. Once in our cups he even took the helmet off. I got Norax to tell his own days before this place, and then told mine. —What about you, Abas? Mount Ida, wasn't it? Norax said

—It ended, he replied, and he took more glottal gulps

So it went on. Each sun, first strength went into strength, with speed and evil tricks aimed for the nose. We had big men to beat, and boats to row. But Abas came our way as soon as the third hooked moon got him worried about Amnisos, and that turned into drills very queer on a mountain. Teams of us relayed rolling-logs back to front of an invisible ship. Men six to a side on chairs rowed grooves into the snow: as one, and under fire of rocks and sticks. More trees cut off the mountain made us masts and yards, and full moon watched us hoist and brail patched-together skins. Taking turns, doubling, alternating, each man was learning every part, and when to

jump. Donos, and Winato too, began to like our chances

The day of equal dark and light fed hope. The crown of this, men said, came with the going of third moon. Mother Zoe, with Ninna and Honeybee, walked out toward us across the night-black field of stumps. We saw their shapes coming against the sky's great Labrys. And out came three faces white as corpses with the blood gone. It took their skills to call the bolting men back. Abas was one. And Mother Zoe laughed, with us, and without anger

—These, my sons, are the faces *you* will show, come Griffin down from Dikte! she promised, and the man of us loosed her a shrieking roaring sound

We knew ourselves the fear around us, and loved our women's medicines. The winter jars were hollowing out, but Ninna made a point of feasting men at arms: her house we liked for wild goat melting in your mouth, hot soothing teas, and music of her friends. We were there with the final fourth moon swelling in the sky, and Melas Damokouros the jovial lord of court. I was troubled that Prax had stopped his singing, and out of the far corner a little thing broke worse between Abas and Norax. It never came to knives, except the words drunk Abas cast behind him storming out

—Which man tells a man his limits? You? You? I make men weapons, I keep you safe. I want first claim! he told the house. —Wake up, Otus, what do you think made lords of Melas' brothers. Blast old blood, I want what I deserve!

And now I feared Abas' real skill. But it was Melas' turn. Men were leaving, sour, and Melas took me outside the house in moonlight, facing snowy Dikte

—Weather is going to break, he said. —I wonder when Abas will. First time we talked this, I said there is your traitor. A man with the will to shill for Lions. Now I think him simply mad, or poison-sick: too selfish to be any kind of vassal. Otus, this is good we talk. You know me for nothing like that. But what are we going to do

—With the Companions' women and children, I finished for him: I had drunk a surly share. —You mean, with Koreter's people not under arms. I have asked Mother Zoe. Not even she can find that answer. She says it has to come from—things inside us blind to words. From living things in us too smart for thinking

—But, Melas broke in, —I think I have a right to some, for this house. You know the sweat begins for us in Cyprus. I don't like it, Otus, but we will need slaves

I stilled my feet and only looked away. Ugly jokes were going round about the men we meant to kill. *Why is Koreter a spider? Because Achaians only build where they can suck good traffic on the fly.* When they talked Poseidon, they had no word to say was he a *lord*, or a *husband*? Cretans knew what that was hiding. And the man I thought I knew was quite in earnest

—What kind of house—wait. Melas. Ninna would say, make them cousins

—Fine, cousins. That is not what Koreter's disappointed nobles will call us, when we cut up their men. Better they go to my house, than Abas'

—Really! Did you cut shares? Which is Abas' lady's house?

—He has nothing, exactly! Melas said. —You or I, or Norax can make something from this. Abas is—dust

I wished for more raki, and having none, I thought of slapping him. —You know, I said, —we have no sailing-space for such. Melas, of all preposterous things

—Nonsense! he said with his own half-turn away. —Norax counts a dozen in after each man brings his pair. Otus, Otus, you know why there will be room

—This builds in blood!

—Well! Hail brother! Melas breezed. —Who, they say, goes harder than Crete's crazy Boy on people who reject him? Fine. We'll see what happens, he declared with a waggle of his beard. —At least we know we spoke to this. Good night then, Melas

said; and he left me standing, looking at the monster in the moonlight

I refuged in our way. With the pourings at the center of our rites came offering-meals that fed our sleeping families, and the fourth moon coming full crowded people in for the high two nights of them. Raw goat and bull of sacrifice we passed in bowls across our benches, our facing pairs of Karfi stones, with bloody lips and fingers. Some ate and uttered nothing; others tore aloud into this or that anger of our life, and both worlds listened. These days, most rites and chores besides were binding ones. Zoe and Makris gifted Ninna with the sanctuary's best Earth Mother, smiling, arms up high and her birdy tiara doubling them in horns, with moon and sun and star between the peaks. Ninna was Honeybee's elder, now to walk new mother of our lines. It gave her life as fast and strong as what Ya gave us men

Final things were passing every way: Donos and his son Butes leaving Arge, all hoping for Malia; Kinuwa choosing his two fierce parents for his pair, and they had eyes for seeing into earth. Pereko, taking Cissia the potter who could row and his son at arms, Oka—smashing down together our straw-men targets, sick with the leaving of their girl-child Eos. The more it meant when Mother Zoe called me out one last day: a gift was here on behalf of the mountain. It was Little Zoe's coming with my sons

—Because this is all your fault, Mother Zoe cracked. —You listen now. The girl is luck for everyone. So, we give her your thirteenth place. And Zoe, ride and guide the monster! Say your nickname now, girl—Europa backwards, if you can!

The weather warmed the mountain. Our legs and grips had doubled, bodies quicker with half our clothes, and surer feet. Everybody bound their hair for luck of wind and sea, and when the crimson poppies opened to the sun, we were leaving. We brought up one last bull from the meadows of Lasithi. The last and first rite was

going to be a night walk, westward to the feet of Dikte, and the cave

Once more, days before our going, our gardens of love in the houses of Karfi. Winter made my hands two hammers, and they marveled the softness and the curves, the tenderness and heat. So small, women felt in my arms, that only in them did I worry death; them without the bull that feared no dying, that they live. My treasure-jewels, my figs, I poured out roaring and heard the bellows of my brothers, house and mountain: women trilled and danced upon our tongues, fingers spiraling their nipples

Pyrrha, door between worlds, opened to me. Her first touch had come with words from a dream, and her love was another. Bull-leaper, sweet rider, eyes of thirteen daemons, glorious grove delicious. In the half-light of beeswax candles in my house we rocked and ploughed, I carried off her women-folk and she rode the rocking sea at mast. Eyes dark within black tresses of her hair, the locks down over her bird-soft breasts and the serpent-sway of her back arching as she rode. She liked to lay me out and crouch beside me on my fingers, moaning serpent in her mouth. We laughed, because from the first our feet made love, like a double pair of long-lost mates

She fed me a Syrian story of a temple in the deep, the house of Ea. A god of sweet waters, Pyrrha winked, who loved the arts of men. Not so all the gods of Syrians. Some, annoyed with the noise men made, resolved upon a flood to wipe them out. So, Ea found a man, Utnapishtim, the son of a king, first priest of a city before this flood: a maker of peace, a trickster not always kind, a man named to see life and to find it. *Tear down your house*, Ea warned this man, *and build of it a boat*. Then, seven days and nights poured down a killing-flood. Alone, Utnapishtim found land, and life unlooked-for

—Otus, trust your guides! I am here to put real things of hope into your hands

—Makris called me Kret, if you know that tale, I said, caressing her

—I do, Pyrrha said. —The difference is that Kret was bluffing, when he swore to burn the city holding his beloved, lost in darkness. And still I think of you in his tale's end: *He shall live at the mouths of rivers*

Pyrrha, Pyrrha, so much arising since I fell down, and you climbed up: bright answer to the blackest thing inside me. *Dapuritojo*

Sunset of our going, spur of the green, Makris drummed us down to the tombs. We offered Bull there, sang, slashed our arms and shook them hard to leave our thanks, and raise men's wrath. *Oh-lo-lo-lo, Oh-lo-lo-lo-lo-lo* the women trilled us from above, and the din of cries filled every lane, the homes we built, the tombs our bones had longed for. Had we not all died, and risen? Then, down the mountain's western trail: Mother Zoe raised and waved one torch beneath the sky, lit from our Nail's last fire

I was walking toward the sun setting into the mountains, people gathering to follow as birds of every kind sang loud with twilight. Mother Zoe, cowed in black below, herald of a dream watched to see what gesture. I turned to The Nail and laid my brow to stone and dust. Then, eye to eye she gave me a torch, and lit it from her own: each person coming on took one the same. So we walked, Little Zoe's hand in mine: ahead no light but ours and the vast red sky

The trail descended between dark hills, and into the plateau. Before us swung the great open circle of Lasithi ringed with mountains, as level as liquid in a cup, and Dikte watched in her white spring crown. Pyrrha too had dreaming in her face as she took Mother Zoe out into the grass: they stood a parting-point, and left by right Zoe cast a circle of us, five hundred torches bright. For a long time we stood there

breathing, drums gone silent, waiting the stars

Makris looked warm in the fleece I gave: it seemed beyond belief to never meet again. I never said goodbye at Ariadne's grave. She was with me tonight between the worlds. In the voices singing on this raw blind edge of things, in each face weeping terrified fierce hope. A sight, this night-green burning circle ringed with mountains and the stars, that my spirit eased beyond itself. Alive was pain and joy with equal peace

Prax had come through, his hard ease said it, the grace of his hand to his blade-hilt, torch high. His sun had turned again inside, and he had a making song

Gold is the home of Sun's reflection

Silver is what Moon cries

Family is resurrection

—Need the last line, he said, and I smiled him a Maybe-tomorrow

—Finish, and begin! Mother Zoe cried, with her torch high at the center of us, free hand beckoning closer. —Yonder our mother, sisters and brothers. Take the mountain with you, kourai, and Dikte will always have children. Want to tell you something, though. Do you see this garden, in our midst? Always, you are in it: so, act like it. Now I'm going to tell you, plain, the way we did old times, secrets to help lost children find a way. Sisters and brothers, whatever becomes of you, remember this place our spirit was born. There will come times you want to die: All-Giver is a monster, too. But Dikte is touchstone. Core of our ways back to the light

—One way is, to love someone, Mother Zoe said. —Love them till your dead skin drops like Snake's. You can choose to be grateful, over all you lose. And, you can consent: consent to know this monstrous dream your own. To love, to be grateful,

to consent: remember! Alright, that's all I have to say, goodbye, Zoe finished with a shrug and a flippant cast of one hand, turning her back. –Farewell

Zoe broke the circle and disappeared away through the combing grass, going up to the cave. Nobody moved, at first. Yet I saw not even Ninna quite in tears, for the plateau's air ran upon our skin, every stone and star and peep of creature seemed perfect and in place, like jewels set into the veil of things

The waning moon came up yellow-silver, like a magic boat's curved yard: come the last sickle, we would go. My place was first with Zoe in the cave, and I climbed the twisted trail to the torch-lit precinct, unchanged to the stone since my father taught me here. Overhead, a mossy shear of limestone bigger than a ship, dripping out of niches, hairy with lichen and nests of fork-tail swifts; and under this, a mouth into the Earth, green and wet as you worked down in along the boulders

Down, and torchlight showed the ceilings growing fangs every color, livid like the things inside a body. Down, and in the first grotto, pillars big as oaks, man-shapes, pregnant crones oozing water, mock-faced hunchbacks, guardians to pass: your own sounds loud and louder the deeper underground. I went past some monstrous multicolor thing growing off the wall like liquid rock, with a thousand labial grooves across its jaw; and tucked in almost every groove, some rusting prayer, a tiny Labrys of green bronze, little animals in votive clay or people's limbs that needed healing. Sealstones cut with signs of their visions

The thing was to breathe as the caverns took you down, one upon the other, and closed dark silence round your crackling torch. There was icy water to wade now, but dittany-incense rising past me for the world. Where the floor rose up again, the walls turned, and beyond was a massive crevice leaking light

She was seated at the cross-legged feet of a shape five times her size coming

out of the wall: wings outspread but ragged, older than time, and a face of molten rock half-crone, half-insect like a mantis. I froze, like prey. When I managed to move before her, fist-to-brow, she kissed Labrys at my neck and hung a leather pouch: white gypsum powder. I saw she had the same for each man's face before the door

In this place, a year's cares and questions melted in your hands. I wet my palms on icy stone, pressed them to my face, and turned without goodbye. Then Mother's whisper struck my back. *Theseus*, she said, as if it were my name

—Know his end. A strong man, big dreams. But all Zeus, and Poseidon: mostly words, and nothing to bind people. So, his dreams for the city that loves Athena turned on him. Banished, Theseus jumped a cliff. His body did: his heart was long dead

—You know how, high times after Knossos, he sent for Phaedra, to bind us broken to his dreams. Phaedra he did not fear, as he had Ariadne. So, he never saw Crete coming from inside her, what we owed him. Take it with you, Otus, in your body. Phaedra ripped his house down through his son. Husband, then! Cranes' wings take you far, and weave good nest. But look up now. Swear, to remember. Farewell

I took her gifts of pain and power, and sorrowing to lose her, climbed away. Down were come Podargos with his roarer, his last gift; Prax with our best vase to pour. Little Zoe cupped three corn-poppies: Ninna held the saffron shawl we thought she burned, and Honeybee's hair was a big strong knot behind her neck. The flow of men down in with torches flickered the cave's spikey hollows overhead: Norax and Oinops, Squiddy's men, Winato and Phitios, Donos and his son Butes. Aktor steadying Melas down the turns, his father in a cold sweat worse than the undulating walls

Night air sweet with water and artemisia, and music in the soft-sway rhythms of our camp below. Halfway down the cave's path, Abas stepped out of the brush and stood there facing me, ten steps off, his smirking face death-white already. No cave nonsense for the man. Well? Was this to see if I would spook, or draw? A *Could-have-had-you* warning?

A deep inside me smiled, and asked him how he got ready to die

—I get ready to win, Abas smiled right back

—Strong man. Enjoy, I said

I walked down past him, wanting nothing, into this medicine night and the keening bodies' sway beneath blue stars. Pyrrha waited with her hands out, like a bull-leap catcher face-on in a fresco

—You may feel a sharp pain, she said.

3

At our descent the wind, behold, turned out of the south, gusting relentless down the mountains hot and dry, and shoving at our backs as we reached Knossos. Spring night tasted of the sea's salt cool there, gardenia and jasmine along the valley's riverbanks. But this was heat off a desert, squalls of sand that rattled trees and drove waves backward from the shore. We laughed to call ourselves first Cretans to revel in its curse, because the same was going to push our boats out. Cicadas hatched too this year, and the valley's cypress and tamarisks rang the loud grindings of their wings

We moved unseen and sharp as weapons, slipped to the west before Knossos-valley opened toward the sea: away from the town and up behind the long dark hill overlooking it. These were burial-grounds, with Labrys-shapes sunk into the Earth, and round tombs of overgrown stone. We lay there hours to make the best watch drowse, and I stole up and down our squads, hammering plans. Somebody showed me a tomb torn open, its portal a scatter of shards, rags and bones. I did my best, then filled my fists with soil. —Thirty years we let this pass, I finished. —Not tonight

When the last Cretan servant had gone home and the lights of their houses

guttered out, we came downhill and into the ravine where the stream's west leg ran spring-high over rocks. For all we knew they ate their dogs, because we heard none. We crossed the waist-high icy water, moved in under the southwest wing and gardens, then crowded ourselves in shadows of the causeway pilings. Most of us wore little more than kilts and boots and small round shields on our arms: our way to turn the naked body's terror on our foes. The dark, the wind and grinding trees, the waters got us in: unless our eyes missed something, we saw no guard at post or corner. Not even Libu liked these nights, and most of The Labyrinth's porches wore their shutters. What lights we saw were drowsy flickers. *The contempt!* Norax whispered. I had always known Achaians men to leave the boat unmoored, for their glee at the steering-oar

At our entrance we softly pulled back creeper and cleared stones. All began to white their faces. I saw Prax tremble at my own. I turned him and pointed Kephala and the house. Still luminous her white facades three levels up the hill, the clusters of her shrines and shops, her crypts and living-quarters. Far side of her central court up there, the whole upper east wing was the same great slide of rubble made by Earthbull, under patches of roof askew with broken horns. Still, from here we saw one inside-wall of a portico over the causeway, and proud young men of our inland houses bearing up vessels and first-fruits

—Every pillar remembers things, Prax whispered

—Look at me. Do not think, and do not drop your guard, until we sail

My son and I breathed deep, and I turned for the open black door. Nothing waited but fulfillment of a part, and sooner or later, sleep

—Mountain, speak your mind—and Mother Night, be pleased!

I squeezed in again side-on between wet walls, Norax behind me, then Melas.

The tunnel's dark was absolute. One scrape of a shield or metal on stone behind me, a curse or a whimper, and I stopped to make them sweat till silent. First turn; then deeper-in, my eyes reaching up to find and finger-count the joists, where solid blocks became the halls above. Having given, being taken up: second turn, full in under the west wing now. Blind, counting, remembering feet and faces at a thousand walks up there, pouring blood around great pillars in the offering-crypts: communion-meals with kinsmen on the benches. I groped one more turn of walls, and we had made it

There was now no slab of floor to hand above: Key Bearer had pulled it. I took hold on the edges of the portal, got my head up through, and found myself inside a big curve-bellied storage jar for grain, the bottom tapped out, its foot just big enough around to hide our door. It was tall as a man, the lid was on, but under the jar she had tucked one shim for a crack of light. I eased back down, and listened. Then, to my nod, Norax squinted and made a brutal pout, and looped his hands. I was going if the hall held a hundred ready swords

I drew my iron, put my foot in his hands and Norax launched me—twice-hard as expected. It drove my blade up too and the lid flew off. I had to clamber up and hop free off the wobbling rim as the lid smashed loud across the floor

Three things hit with my feet. Wrestling the jar to roll it off the hole. Where we were—in a square ceremonial audience-hall with pairs of pillars to each side, now shocking blue to the painted posts—and the old man's instant scream. A priest alone at the hall's far end had startled from his napping-bench, his robe pale-blue from silver hair to sandals. He jumped up, saw my face and sword, and in this half-light of four little lamps his look flashed from disbelief to rage to a kind of wide-eyed swoon. He wilted, turned and ran for the corridor rightward: the central courtyard was fifty feet too far. Norax had Melas on his feet as I caught the club of silver hair. I

was no more. I dragged him back and he screamed not curses, not for mercy, gods or guards, but to himself. *It cannot be! It cannot be!*

For his life he could have been Makris: I had nothing to say and his blue eyes astonished watched a death-white daemon from someplace called the world drive sword through his plexus. He sucked air till it struck his spine and his face blanched, he withered, and went down. Foot to his chest, I pulled, and blood bubbled through the white stallion on his robe. Karfi men were pouring up into the hall and I left him there, a mask of disbelief

Norax, Abas, Melas kept the men in order of their parts, and I prowled up that mouth of corridor leading out to the central court. The house felt so quiet that I heard swoops of wind: not a houseboy had answered the crash. Thirty-six, thirty-seven men and more with white faces of nightmare up from the underworld, the highland underground, afraid, swords out, nocking arrows. Melas was turning in place, the blue walls a dazzling surround of country hills, and pairs of stallions rampant, roaming

My blooded blade pointed the inside corridor : Norax, Melas, Kinuwa and Donos took twenty swords that way. *Brothers, nothing stop us but our families' eyes!* Their part, to take the whole west wing's long hall of storage, and then reverse direction, turning right round that corridor's end. That led through the northwest precinct's tightest turn, where the Libu guards had quarters in old storerooms. Kill as they would, Norax meant to trap and talk the Libu out of fight—or drive them out the corridor's far door, and onto the central court. By then, I'd have my dozen swarming out from this end, and the Libu's backs in front of us, with bows like Pereko's

Prax at my back. Now came Abas up beside me at the central court threshold. Twenty-six men cat-crouched behind him, poised to cross and strike straight into

what remained of The Labyrinth's east wing. Down off the great turning stairway descending that side, Koreter's Companions and their families had fixed up our home, Ariadne's rooms, her breezy birdy lightwells, her dog-leg stair to mother's halls facing gardens, the river and the sun. We meant to make the house jam them up and now we heard the first screams and blades and smashing-sounds out of Norax's corridor. Abas sprang out into the open and his twenty-six crossed after him. No sound but a blast of wind: they dropped in pairs down into the great stairwell, and Squiddy last looked back our way with some foolish gangly gesture

Melee of murder, like a sound of snapping metal trees out of Norax's corridor: we thirteen fought our feet to wait, but it was not long till bloody clatter came bursting backwards out that door. As hoped: Norax and Melas were driving the Libu. They came out to regroup more than twenty-strong, set their wounded down behind them on the stones and shouldered tall man-covering shields, to get a foothold

We let them deploy their backs to us: another ten backed their way out, to a man large and burly, sleek legs like horses' under blue gold-belted kilts, and many in round bronze helmets we had never seen, with little horns and a disc between. Cold well-drilled professionals like their fathers on ships of the line; and all at once these men made a sound like lions with empty bellies. I let Prax go and screamed our battle-name. Arrows, javelins loosed and sang and struck like Griffin-wings

—*Meee-nohhh-taaa-vvvrohhh*

We charged them where three men fell down screaming, hurling ourselves up-court with our left the west wing's porticoes, crypts and the great pillar-shrine. The Libu folded smoothly back into the northwest corner as their shields took second volley past our heads. Our faces made some of them cry aloud, but nowhere to go: inside them, we had shut their masters' fortified north gate on their own backs

There ahead too, the four doorways down into the crimson chamber of the throne. I knew he was in there, spider Koreter. Its sunken anteroom threw light of lamps across the Libu, thrust-and-shoving hard to hold back Norax. Just as we closed the one sure Libu officer spilled out from the inside slaughter. He was tallest though he had lost his helm, a sword-sling of zebra down his side, blood-splashed: in a thrice the man dodged two arrows, his eyes took in the house, and when he shouted, half his men again moved back to brace for us, long spearpoints waiting and behind them hook-blade knives. Hot wind raked the courtyard night and we gave ourselves to death to see them face more this night than hungry mobs. Shields and bodies smashed together

I lost everything but the Libu two heads over me who took my blow and shoved my shield-arm back with his wall of zebra. Caught as he was without spear or helmet, I was overmatched, and his feathered fighting-arm with the hook looked thick as an oarsman's coming down. Instead of shield, I parried, and iron broke his bronze. He howled and tried to bull me over. I hooked my sword down over the top of his shield and felt it stab. He went down shrieking clutching the hole where nose met eye: I turned low and swung to clear about me, and turned again

Men hacked and grappled, stabbed and fell. Whoever killed turned to stab another man hacking at a brother. Pereko's bows shot for necks or knees, but all was savage tangle between the last Libu still backing out of the corridor and our second push hard into them. I killed another man who took his eye off me when an arrow came through his shield: we knew only them from us and I lost track of Prax. They were too many men for my dozen to finish, but they started making sounds as if they saw the right weapons in wrong hands. We heard the beast coming, Norax fighting his way out, but Melas I saw first of those men. Our eyes met like closing Griffin-

jaws and his face of murderous abandon shrieked black joy to see me. I whipped my head around for the east wing at our backs

Kinuwa lay closer, screaming through the red coming out his mouth. The horn-headed Libu over him jerked out his spear with eyes for me: an arrow sang past my ear through his neck. Other side that instant a Libu stabbed Donos full-through. Him I opened sideways through the liver because his blade was stuck in Donos, and when he fell I managed to drag Donos back with his plexus pumping blood. A tall broad-nosed man came over corpses and flung me down his shield: an arrow burst through his arm. Shocked, he staggered, grimaced and tore it through, still wanting me for his friend. A second arrow to his heart rolled up his eyes

There was Norax, his shoulder stabbed but driving his last men out into this fight. I twisted the flesh of my arm to keep my senses. The Libu officer at their core raised his spear high and level, and began to sing. His voice came rich to resurrect their best, and I signaled Norax

—Sons of Libu! Norax shouted as he pulled a man back from landing blows. —In the name of your Mountain of the Horns of the Earth! Fight no more your brothers *Keftiu! Keftiu!* he said, pounding his palm to his chest. —See that man? Minos, Minos! *Keftiu*, in the speech of a dog called Pharaoh! May his tiny root drop off!

The packed-together Libu heard, saw their captain stop to listen; and Norax's last made him grin with all his yellow teeth. His cool in such a corner helped to snap our brothers from their rage, and I knew I needed this man, house and heart. But that moment in the falling-off let savage noises sound up out of the east wing: screams, blows, smashes and blade-clatter were coming up the stairs this way. It had to be that Companions were beating back Abas' men. If so, we had no hold on east wing doors,

and somebody surely got out to rouse the rest of Knossos valley. We might get trapped

—Hold! Back off! Let them choose! I screamed pulling men back all I could: Melas helped Norax's Oinops break off, with sounds for soothing horses. —Pereko! I cried, and he brought his men up sharp into half a ring, bows at stretch. Next volley, their captain looked to lose a third of Libu standing

—Your fathers, good sailors, Moon King ships! *There* our enemies, not you!

—*Na-bacchh!* the captain shouted, and before our eyes these Libu pulled back in kind, though brothers lay bleeding with our own. The word again: this time they snapped their spears point-up, and thumped once the bottoms of their shields. Mouths hard, their captain gazing through my eyes. Hot night-wind swooped around us and I was sick with how fast this had to be decided. Their captain lifted his chin

—You, the last, they tell killed? What is your name

—Otus. Yesterday, Deucalion. Labrys. Minos of Ariadne. Wanassa of this house

—We wanted houses. The Achaians sleep us in closets

—Tell me your name, I said, glad for the news

—Merire: meh-*reer*-ray. So, you come for your house back

—To burn it, Merire, I said: he seemed to understand faster than any on Karfi. I also saw his shame, as we had caught them dodging duty for a bit of wind and wine

—If we do not die, we must disappear

—Come, I answered. —Sail with us. You can build good houses

—What? demanded Melas coming up. —The wind is with us! You know the space is better-spent

—Shut up, I told him. —The east wing, man, do you hear that?

—Now, Merire! Norax shouted; and Merire, though he took his own moment to weigh things, told his men to sit. With shakes of head and eyes calming down into shame, his young men did so, Merire last. He moved again only to start tending wounds. Pereko's six best bows we stood around them, and an order that nobody in or out of that lamp-lit chamber of the throne till I came back. The instant we turned to gather, we saw a kind of human whirlwind rising out of the east stair and onto the court: a savage tangle of death-faced Karfi men, Cyprians and white-robed Companions rage against rage, the Achaians thrusting and boxing with spears and Cretans hacking back across the shafts, grappling to get inside their swings of long sharp sword

Surely Abas caught most Achaians in bed, and here they came up turning stairs right into us. I saw no Squiddy or Abas and it looked that they had cut those men in half: big-built charioteers, even some of them laughing as they swung for little Earthlings. One of them screamed for Merire, making Pereko's bows bear down. I screamed our battle-name again, and forty of us slammed in through their nightmare

We hit them just short of the great stair's broken portico. Melee tore me off against a big blond beard with no shield who had managed to get a bronze helmet on, no corselet nor greaves round his legs, but arms like legs. He was bloody, not wounded: we circled in hot blasts of wind, his spear jabbed my sword and shield-arm and the white plume on his helmet danced to spoil my eye. I wanted to end him, that cursed Achaian grinning down. I thrust hard-in below my shield. He was good working point and butt alike because his blunt end slammed my shield down on my sword. If training had not snapped me back he had his spear through my face, but the head deflected up to rake my temple. I cried out and he pulled back to stab.

When it came I stole his trick, whacked it down and drew back through his front knee. When it folded I stabbed through his plexus. He went down disbelieving, like his priest

About me our swarms were working, wrestling down Companions one by one, hacking, cursing. I dropped another with a duck and swing back upward through his groin. This one's head I lifted by the white plume and cut his throat. For every person who had danced these stones and harmed him not, I poured his blood

The night's mad din was dying, though our men were running back down into the east wing now, and up came screams of women and children. Norax caught up to my side taking ferocious breaths and cursing me to let his shoulder be. He pointed Melas over there helping to guard the Libu, rather than fight his own at last: he did not know if Abas was alive, but saw Prax and Aktor head down that stair in the northeast corner for the artisans' shops. The decent quarters where Key-Bearer had a room

We had to get out of here, burn and go before the town could muster. I told Norax to start for the ships, but he refused till we were all together

—Otus, watch your lucky back. Now, go and finish this. Quick and no talk. That corridor must have ten ships' store of oil. I'll put men to the fires

I walked through blood and weapons, corpses, writhing forms: Donos was dead with Butes lowering young son's locks down over him, Kinuwa dead, his old folks orphans. They helped me to eat my heart at the four doors of the throne's sunken anteroom. Down four steps inside, the alabaster benches empty round a floor of good black ironstone, set in pink schist: naked wall where once a turquoise tapestry of isles

My arm let go the shield. Four doors behind became two before me: in old

days, the more to see nothing but The One beyond enthroned. Now this magic doubled rage like molten iron, incandescent, moving slow. For Koreter sat there still as an idol in the chamber's crimson flickerings. Here where seated elders of our clans had faced down every would-be Cretan king, nobody faced him. Waiting his turn; but the great palm-painted jar at his feet, the bowls on the inner-chamber benches at his sides said he had prayed. He gave me nothing as I came in, his gray hands fixed to the knees of his white gold-belted gown, his silver-pointed chin and brow high, eyes straight across the chamber. Gold his wristbands, a yoke of eight gold necklaces; goldfoil holding white locks from his brow with two winged horses, lapis-blue

He was trying to master me and flinched not an eye when I kicked over the great jar and it smashed, pooling chrism and horsemint. Same instant I read the wall at his back: gone the great green palm of Tamar that had shaded our throne's white alabaster, gone our green hills, waters, lively quietude. Either side of Koreter's blank face, a sharp-beaked Griffin, creatures once the reach of our law. Now they were monsters come for him, beaks high and their necks craned up to swallow. What! Wingless, too! What a joke by old-blood painters! No wings to carry this one up the sky, or through life's door

I put the tip of my iron to him: Koreter's breath came big, but his eyes stayed fixed on looking past me for the wall

—Very Egyptian. Too bad you're Achaian, and in Crete, I said. —I thought you people held it blasphemy, impersonating gods. You know who I am, don't you, Koreter

He blinked as if at mountain-wind. Then he deigned to meet my eyes

—You made fools of yourselves speaking Libu out there, daemon, cursed monster. Those are Meshwesh—dogs, but smarter than you, who came in out of the

rain. I wish I lived to see their knife in your back

Norax was shouting. I reached to pull Koreter off the throne

—Have your day, dog. *You will never be free of us*

My free hand ripped him up and threw him across the chamber: he hit the stone bench there hard and his body cried out, but not his will. He got half-up, and clutched the arm worst-hurt. In the front facing of the throne's shapely seat I saw our ancient emblem, moon and sun: I the first and last to do a thing like this in that eye's sight. I ate the curse, to break us from the death that fed him

—Does it hurt, when somebody hurts you? I said. —Welcome to the world.

Too bad you can't stay, spider

Koreter was still bent, half-up where he fell: a nice clean little old man-sire. I thought of his Lion and their sons' deeds sanctified, hard-built towns in ash. Burly browbeaten yokels whose life-hope was jewelry, who shipped our mouthy women to their flax-farms. Black rose inside me, and I no longer really knew who spoke

—A thousand names built this house. Koreter, for them, I give you something. A living chance. I swear it, by our family. *Look at me!* Answer one question. An easy one you should know. Answer, and solemnly, you live

—What is it then! he sneered, holding hard to the bench

—Tell about one good thing you have done for Crete, in coming here. There must be one good thing. Tell us about it

He tried. —Ohh, gods, *gods!*

I jerked his head back and drove iron down the root of his neck till the hilt struck his collarbones. His eyes were boiling and the throat in his open mouth, and I twisted it hard, and then ripped out and his lungs' blood fountained purple from the hole. When the spray of it failed, I threw him on his face at the dais. And stood over

him delivered soaked with blood before the throne. Before the sun-disc in its face; before the new moon cradling new sun; between the mountain-horns below them both. My shade moved in the polished stone of its backrest, between the waves like seas and mountains. Where its peak, the ninth wave, had crowned the face of the woman of my soul, a spatter of blood let two drops fall. The throne was dead, not Great Year or its way. I raised the palms I had to the ones who had raised it. People were waiting

At the door a man of Cyprus offered to drag out Koreter, and I woke to stink of iron in the pooling blood. Going out the two doors doubled into four as if the world now spread before me, and it was gone mad. Rocks and Achaian arrows were coming down: there might be a dozen Achaians outside, men caught bunking in the town and now hoping to hold us without coming in, until they scared up who knew what, and horses for their chariots. Smoke of our burning-begun was flowing in gray plumes out of doors and stairways, and blasts of south wind dragged it over the court. There was Melas, his back to a huddle of women and children, all fair, sobbing in their night-clothes. Why not kill them, on the same spot Achaians killed ours. It was now that I found Koreter's corpse dragging from my hand, and I dragged it out between Merire's Libu and the captives. In front of all I chopped the head off, and held it up draining, diadem and all: the women and children hid their eyes, the poor blind locusts. Here came Melas through smoke and bouncing stones

—Where in blazes Aktor and Abas! It's time to settle and get out!

But now we saw the blood that draped Winato, stumbling into us: Melas swung and brother-slapped him half-way back from a dazed shock

—What? Abas must be dead, the way he fought below. Squiddy is. Oh, Goddess, my stomach! We caught them flat in bed down there. To come in on a

family like that, just swarming in—they killed us back with table-knives and fingers through the eye. I think we stabbed twenty down by their beds. Abas—He doesn't want to burn the house, Winato finished with a crook-headed laugh. —Who's that in your hand? Looking round, Winato turned aghast again. Bodies, battle-wrack, smokes, red-yellow flickers

—Our sons went after Key-Bearer. I'll bring them, Melas. Let captives lie till you see us. Get the men ready to fight us out the north gate. Burn! We go, we go!

Nearest way down was the great eastern stairway. In the smoke of Norax's work below I took a shield from a man of The Nail named Idas, tangled hard with stuck-through Achaian corpses. Stair by stair dead bodies I had danced with. I touched Squiddy and the first few, till fear of the stairwell going down took over

Where the lower level turned, there was a court among the pillars where no water ran anymore, and doors to many corridors. Shields hung crooked on the walls: the great wells for light and air were moving smoke this way with the wind, and darkness thickened with an acrid oily cloud. Now? I worked down another flight and turn: not one body still alive, and smoke on the landing

I knew he was here and I moved left, into a near-black corridor for the shops' wing. Along in front of my right hand was a series of recessed, high-roofed storage bays, walled up each with darkness thick as a cave's. They were too good, and I meant to run by them fast and low, screaming to startle anybody out and, maybe, gain a fight's chance. I took a moment, and crouched below the smoke for better breath. The instant I bent down I heard a man land his lead-foot, and a *whoosh* right over my back

I shot straight for the darkness because he had four. Wheeled around and there was Abas twenty paces back with a Griffin coming over his shoulder. Flat-foot now, I

knew he could nail a shield's boss moving and put it where he pleased—and Prax rushed screaming out of the first black recess facing Abas. I heard the knife hit him and the hilt, twice as hard that close. Prax fell running backward straight into my grasp. His legs fought to get up, and then his neck stretched backward and he died

It was all one moment with Aktor too charging out. As I caught Prax we saw Abas fling out his arms and a spear burst out his stomach. He fell and curled up hard with one long breath between his teeth. Norax pulled the spear, and kept stabbing

I was down with my son's weight, mouth open. Aktor tore at his own skull

—He lived to watch your back! No, no

—Otus, Norax said

— Are these my hands? He's dead. All these. Draw the water, take the poison

—Otus, Norax said beside me on a knee. —Let me carry him. Find your wife now, fast. People count on us. Do that. Come on. He wants you to

—Fine life I gave him, I muttered, and then we heard the first thunder and collapse from the southeast wing, and smoky heat breathing desert through. Norax broke my hold. It was only remembering that fetched me back, on the way to the small neat room where I last saw Key-Bearer. Her name when our love made Prax had been Tallay, Girl of Rain. She was hanging from a spiderwebbed rafter, her arms out like a priestess soothing Earth. My brain was molten, searing in its juices, but it saw the stool she might have stepped from

She weighed no more than Ariadne. Bird's bones, partridge eyes, never see them again in Prax: a delicate jaw grown sharp where only a woman could hold on. In her I saw old Diamat, too, the last of Ariadne's priestesses, who died the only friend I had but two years after her queen. Tallay, next but last of the line. I set my teeth and prayed her strength between the worlds

I carried her up turning flights of bodies. Her dunned-wool gown a little Cretan's rag, to point the clothes of ladies of new proper. You will see!

Merire and his Meshwesh watched our men strip Achaian corpses on the court. Open pyres of flames every side threw slants of cinders up into black wind. Now an even worse caterwaul went up from the women and children under guard as men pointed my coming out the portico, and I showed them my eyes. I let them quake and vomit. Tallay's body I wrapped for journey, as Norax and Aktor did my son

—We see your hate, sweet ladies, I said. —Do you see ours? Where do you come from? Whose home is this? Looks-away won't do the trick anymore

—You killed Abas? said Melas running over to the lot of us, stones and a few arrows still falling out of the night. —Blood of Poseidon, he exclaimed. —I'm sorry. Oh, no. Oh, no. But we have to go, Otus. Pereko says we took nine dead, and—this is ten. Plus Squiddy and a Cyprian. I just thought, well, there are only nineteen Libu left to come along, so now we can handle

—Dog! My son's eyes on you! I cried: his father's words I saw make Aktor gape. I could have killed him, and it showed. Then Pereko was next to me, his sharky white face bright, blood-exhilarated; and his bow was at half-stretch with arrow, looking right at Melas once lord of his house

—Sir? Pereko asked me: this the man who would not talk war in festival? Why my side, with all my cracks about Poseidon? Now, Aktor turned his back, and it threw Melas full into shock

—Go ahead! Melas roared. —This is your night to murder and steal

—Lower that bow, you blood-drunk. Take them, Melas! My revenge is you! I wonder which will knife you come a chance. At last! Achaians slaves of Achaians

—You give nothing, Melas scoffed. —Minos is finished this night. I take. And what is more, back with family, I and mine make our own way. Without you, Pereko

—Good riddance! I told him. —Now, see if you can do what you trained for, and go put the rear guard together. Ask somebody the way to the ocean!

Melas weighed it for a moment, the hilt near his hand. And the man who had turned his back on blood turned again

We gathered up for going in smoke, flame and cinder, rain of stone and arrow, the wind's hot blasts bending smoke northward over the court. Spring night, the end of things, the end of my fathers and my son

I wiped blood from my eyes, and clung to one shard of mind, our others. Aktor I began to notice helping every way. Some of our brothers came out of the stair and from Norax's corridor with bodies of friends across their backs: the Meshwesh had wounded to carry, but Merire saw them earn their sail. *I found this sack*, Aktor told me. *Show me the heads you want*

Merire swung back the great oaken door to The Labyrinth's north entranceway, and poured ten men down the ramp with their shields, under the colonnades and out into seaward precincts. We swarmed out behind them and the last thing I saw in my house was above my shield-arm, the great red ramping Bull with his shoulder down, ramming himself against a green tree, the muscles and the leaves aflicker like his tongue, flames behind us windy roar. Something boomed, and balled up a plume of livid fire: one of the big jars catching, and sounds of toppling wood and stone

Sure enough a dozen Companions, some with bows lay waiting round the customs-house, but the Meshwesh shields took the arrows and we were on them. The same, just not so much without their chariots and armor: out here there was a huge

white-gypsum pair of Bull's horns and I hacked a man backward till he stumbled against them. Achaians had knocked them over on their side, a trophy thirty years, and he died splayed over them. I'd have left him so, but in the north bastion I caught Poseidon's trident scratched in, the work of it like some savage child's. I threw his body down the north town's well

We were running the black road now under tall and spreading cypress, the trees rattling and grinding in the wind. Merire kept with Melas' rear guard, and his men strung hemp across the road for hooves and heads. We passed Cretan houses three-stories dark, brothers' voices mocking: *Slaves, go back to bed! Minotavros will eat you*

It took more than an hour for men who could run. Night turned from black to blue, and The Great Green smell was strength. For all we heard, the Companions left around Knossos thought us sure to hold the house or head for the mountains, and played their strength that way: others stood gaping through the night as The Labyrinth lit up the valley of their dreams

The ships were ours because dread had gone ahead of us. Only two mainland sailors showed their faces, and they came running out of a house with more fear behind than in front of them: an older man named Pamo with big arms, wild eyes and dragging a younger like a nephew by the arm, Nektarios. Cretans around Amnisos hid themselves for the good nights roasting master's fish. The south wind and cicadas were so maddening now that I tasted the first wine of getting out of here, but every thought came back to stone: my son. Rolling the black beasts from their sheds went fast, and putting up the masts: for ballast with the stones we packed the hulls with eleven Achaian women and young. Melas paraded up and down, soiling not a hand except to point rowing-benches for the nineteen Meshwesh Libu coming

with us

Dawn twilight lit the isle of Dia three miles off, Earth Mother sleeping on Her side. Men's eyes drank their last. Crete was Dikte snow beyond green hills, mouths of rivers, and Ida's broad white slopes high westward, rosy in the sunlight: between them, Juktas the mountain with our sleeping fathers' face, and a black tree of smoke. There was moon's first crescent, silver-sharp. My skull still bled, and I dreaded duties done

Ships near-ready. Little waves ran backward in hot gusts. I took the sack from Aktor, and bade him wash, not to wait me. He waited. Melas saw, and Aktor let him see

I climbed a half-mile back up the sea-road, then traversed a hill of old survivor tamarisks. Their roots clung like death where the waves had gouged the hillside, with green younglings crowding for the sun where it speared their shade. Up there it was not hard to find three dead branches fit for stakes

Dewy grass, crimson poppies, ice-daisies purple as wine. Swifts and swallows overhead, and helices of butterflies. In sight of the sea, a writhing olive marked the grotto of a cave, where deep inside, mothering women wanting luck touched their bellies to a pair of gravid pillars. A different beast piked Koreter's head there, goldfoil, lapis horses and all, between his priest and a fair man at arms. All gazing out on Dia Isle. Last, from my back beneath my shirts I pulled and posted one thing more: a flat of Karfi-oak into which I had cut signs. So. An idol of words and violence

She licks up heroes like dust

And then Knossos Road no longer led home. Ships below in the blue-green shallows, wailing for Squiddy, cries of all kinds on the air. It was time to lift my foot.

It would not, like my body on the morning I awoke

—Panagia, what have you done!

A grandmother's cry, and I turned to a white-haired tiny woman of the harbor's fishermen, half-stooped and warding off evil with bared dugs. Next to her by the olive tree her grown daughter stood likewise, aghast, a baby on her hip

—Morning, I said. —We burned a house no longer serves. Saw you here for ceremonies, Ya-Ya, in my mother's time. You won't disturb the governor?

—They'll kill us for it, she replied

—Then come, cram in. But right now. Cyprus

—Pasiphae's youngest? grandmother gaped. —You look dead, if you're not. Alright, but let me fetch a bag. This my daughter wants to go. She has a good house-bond, too, around here somewhere. Can't spare the good ones anymore

—Mother! the young woman said. —Mother, I never *meant* it

—Come on, child, believe me, it's better this way! I'd have hanged myself if I knew I had to leave

Off they ran. All went still. The mountains had no more to say. Alone, I would have lain down in the soil. Aktor found me and wiped some blood. He brought Merire's thanks for his men's lives; and said Merire was beating them now, for drinking Key-Bearer's unmixed wine. He said they called us *Lightning-sons*

I needed his help to get washed a little there on the shingle, to climb aboard a big-eyed vessel, and nestle awhile, exhausted

Gold is the home of Sun's reflection

Silver is what Moon cries

Family is resurrection

Earth the grave of lies

We pushed out. I gave my son's words poor finish, letting go his body and his mother's, with more, as the waters deepened under us. Better The Great Green to soothe them, than land no longer home

All we had done, to watch Mother Kriti slip away; and here was the sea.

II

