

ARIADNE'S BROTHER

A NOVEL
ON THE FALL
OF BRONZE AGE CRETE

by
JOHN DEMPSEY



KALENDIS

This is a vivid tale of action and the love of life, of conflict and passionate vision and political change at the dawn of Western civilization. Ariadne –the Queen, sister, and beloved of the narrator, prince Deucalion– struggles to uphold her family’s and her people’s ways against a world of new threats and challenges, at home and abroad, in the final days of Minoan Crete.

Through its powerful characters and plot, through the natural beauties and spirituality of Aegean civilization, its eroticism, battles and catastrophes, **Ariadne’s Brother** brings together myth and four decades of fresh evidence to create new understanding of “the first major cultural turn” in Western history.

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Author's Note

Originally 1300 pages, this novel synthesizes 15 years' research in "Minoan" and other sources ranging from myth to archaeology to anthropology of religion, from Sir Arthur Evans to Dr. Nanno Marinatos, and it reflects total agreement with none of them. While its setting is Crete circa 1450 B.C.E., I've included certain events from around that year, as well, in the interest of a fuller portrait of Cretan hegemony. (The town of Akrotiri on present-day Santorini, for example, had been buried volcanically about a generation before this story, and the shrine at Anemospilia, Crete, even earlier: the Cretan trade-station in Rhodes, on the other hand, was destroyed probably after the fall of Cnossos.)

The early West reached a crucial turning-point in its culture during the 15th century B.C.E., and *Ariadne's Brother* constructs a "Cretan point of view" on those events, in order to bring the widely accepted traditional image of the early West (as seen for example in Mary Renault's 1958 *The King Must Die*) into closer agreement with nearly 40 more recent years of physical and cultural analysis. The text's open-ended paragraphing is simply an attempt to mimic with language certain stylistic effects of ancient Cretan art, especially a fluid interplay among subjectivities and surroundings. And while I think it a writer's trade to take chances and, inevitably, to fill gaps in the "facts" with intuitions and biases (especially as a modern man writing of women in ancient culture!), I hope the story will suggest how much human world did exist, for millennia, before the beginnings of "his-story". Whatever is good here is not mine, but Crete's.

Stoneham, Massachusetts

May 1995

most
gratefully,
to
(1a)
Donna

and in memory of Eve Helene Wilkowitz

1960-1980

l'antica fiamma...mi fu rapita...vali

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Cover Illustration: Detail from Agia Triada Sarcophagus, Crete 1425 B.C.

..but if any far-off state there be
dearer to Life than mortality,
the hand of the Dark hath hold thereof,
and mist is under the mist above—
So we are sick for Life, and cling
on Earth to this nameless and shining thing,
for other Life is a fountain sealed,
and the Deeps below are unrevealed
and we drift on legends forever.

—Euripides, *Hippolytos*

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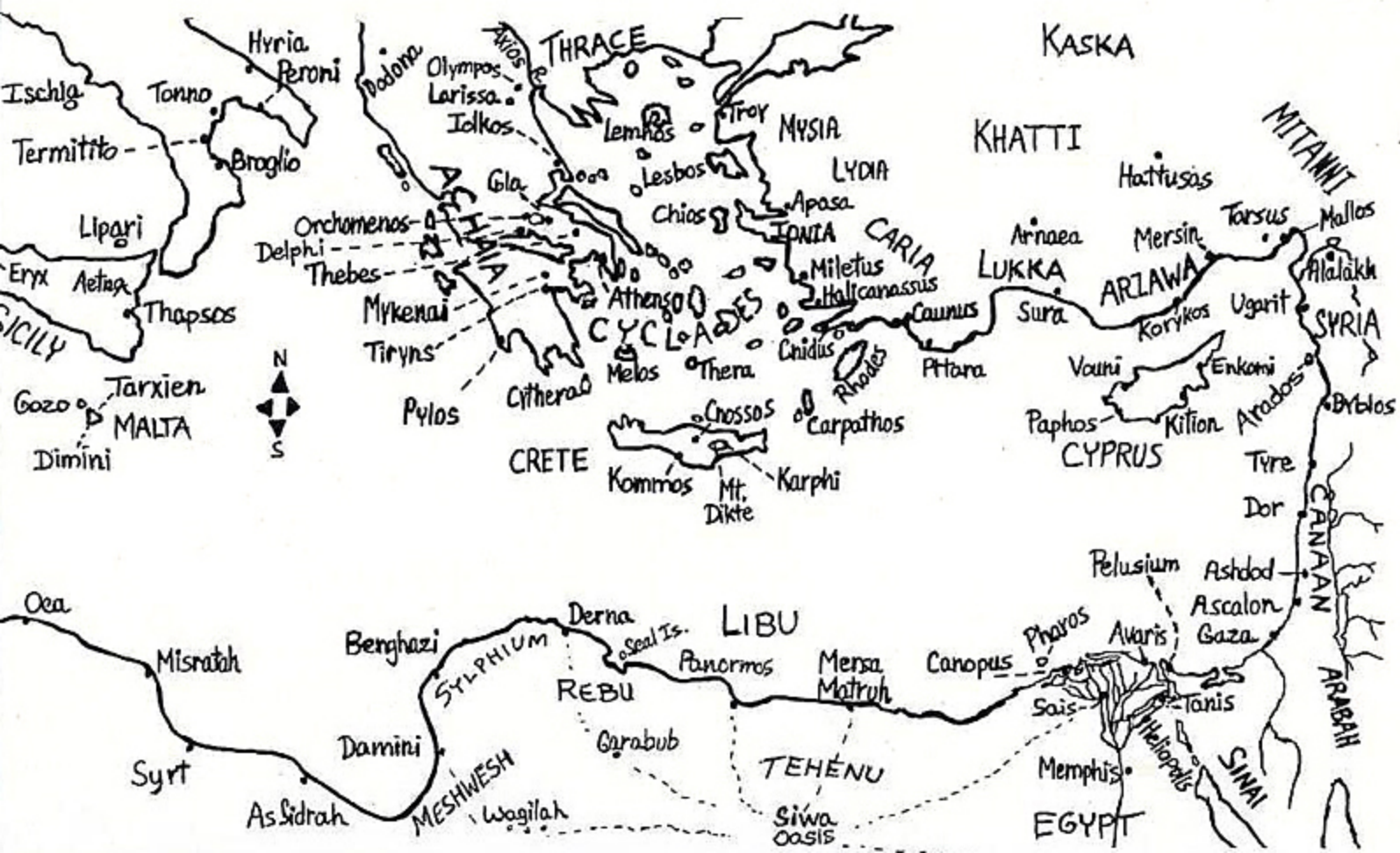
5 End Game

III

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ARIADNE'S
BROTHER

I

In the Lair of the Minotaur

1

The Wounding of the Beast

She was coming...

The high headland east of the harbor Amnisos stood black against a sky of rosy gold. Down here on the beach, where we of the Labyrinth waited in ceremonial array before the waking waters of the sea, the light was visibly rising now, and it was just that moment of the day when the shore-trees rouse themselves and the first birds appear from no one knows where. Our eldest priestess Perdix moved only her eyes as she took a prearranged signal from the watchers of our coast, a single lamp unveiled atop the headland, to let us know that Ariadne's ritual boat had embarked toward us; and then Perdix lifted up into the dawn the tall burnished double-axe she held, and the six other sisters along our crescent-formation raised theirs with her till their strong and braceleted arms locked out high. The sea felt calm as a pond before us, the spring morning air all but still; and scarcely a leaf stirred along the shafts of the splendid double-axes, wrapped with spirals of planetree leaf and white hyacinth.

I watched the Queen, Pasiphae, my mother, for the sign she was to give me to come forward before the people. In her short openbreasted jacket and great belted bellskirt of saffron that glowed in the dawn, she stepped

to the center of our crescent and slowly lifted her arms out toward the sea and the isle of Dia, three miles opposite the harbor. Somewhere between her lifted palms and the slopes of the isle out there, a shape on the sea like a big-hipped woman sleeping on her side, Ariadne's priestesses were plying her boat toward this shore: our mother's prayerful pause would time just right so that ritual here would peak with her daughter's arrival. Ariadne, The Very Manifest One, my sister: if it had always been both power and burden to stand as family with her before the people, this was a day for me to learn more of bearing them both; and everybody in the crowd strung along the beach had a manner of quiet excitement for her this morning, as this rite brought her one more public step toward our throne.

Under my short plain cloak the touch of the dew and the sea's cool brought a kind of memory out of my bones, an ache from just below my bottom-left rib, where a strip of proudflesh marked a wound from a raider's javelin. My whole body still felt the violence of what had happened, and its own luck, since people often died of half such a scratch. Yet I was sorry to have it today, for I still wished to see my brother Palesus as the man I'd known before the sea-battle: he stood with our father, the Minotauros, to Pasiphae's right at the head of their white-robed priests the Kouretes. To the people in the crowd around us, father and brother in their bright embroidered kilts and diadems of goldfoil looked like daemon-eyed, russet-skinned, old and young forms of the same man still. But—especially given the terrible sanctity of our father's ritual fate, not so far ahead of him now—it angered me to see my brother borrowing Minos' tempered smile, that of a man who lived in The Pres-

ence, but grafting onto it his own martial stance. He was standing there feet apart as on a ship's deck, thick arms akimbo

It was like Palesus to put forward all his nineteen years' grave intent, making sure everybody saw the strength he meant to serve them with. At the sea's edge one beheld the world of sudden indiscriminating death which he was mastering ahead of myself: he always had gone before me, from our first hunts together to the Bull Dance, and from there to the throne, which would be mine in turn. Palesus had always honored me, and lost no chance these days to recount how younger brother Deucalion had saved that island-boy Icarus from a burning merchant ship amid the battle. What was it between us, then? Fear, at what was happening to our people and the realm; my own fear, and anger about Palesus' intended solutions to these problems when the title Minotauros was wholly his. I hoped that nobody noticed the glare I suddenly felt upon my face, and spoke to the pain in my side, that surely our mothers and custom and Ariadne herself would rein him in; but it was my prayer that from The Powers I might learn more how to suffer and to shine, like these people around me

Mother turned back to me and gestured *Come, Deucalion*, and I gave myself fully to the privilege, stepping forward with the palm-decorated jar I'd borne in our procession, down from the valley of Cnossos and the Labyrinth. To the crowds of clanspeople attendant behind us I might've looked like one of the gift-bearing ancient youths painted on our walls, except that I'd been asked to dress down today for Palesus' benefit and had not even painted my eyes. When I reached her Pasiphae laid hands upon the jar and paused again, then removed

its lid; and the sick zinc smell floated up to me of blood of sacrifice, mixed with wine.

Up close I could see the laugh-lines that crinkled mother's eyes' black kohl, the golden faces of the bulls on her earrings: there was always a calm warmth to her nearness though she was quite impersonal now, and it was pleasure for the three of us to be led by her through progressively public roles. My boy's mind saw her kneading and shaping the dough of ritual barleybread and could smell the warmth of home ovens, the scent of crusts her hands had shaped: with Palesus and clergy I'd been allowed to make first offerings of the bread to Ariadne before it was shared out at our shrines, to The Dead and to our people gathered in Cnossos courtyards. But now as I entered manhood there were other things to learn and I breathed slow and deep of the heavy liquid between us, and gazed on the heads of the bulls beneath mother's hanging black curls, and my spine still bristled with the heat of those animals' lives. So much did their palpable vigor remain in this blood that it all but drowned my questions of shining and the pain at my rib. What a brother of Bull's brood had come tossing his garlanded horns before our altars in that first blue hour of this dawn, a monster of pure rippling power and stately sanctity; yet you felt the trust and even a gentleness in the bottomless calm of his body and his wild black eye

—The Dance gives Bull His chance back at us, Ariadne once confided to me, —but isn't it ludicrous somehow, a beast like that's submission to *anything*? Yes: just striding near us in processions these monsters of our mountains all but gave up Cnossian pomp for what it was. She loved the gold-work of our more brazen artisans that showed Bull bursting free of our nets and tossing His

trappers. Yet she'd never shied, either, from what our parents had called Necessity. Our mother's and her strokes with the stunning-mace and Labrys exemplified resolve before the people—evoking their consent to how The Powers had made the world by holding firm as the animal bawled and staggered and its life gushed, scalding and potent. No, there was just nothing to balm the memory of those sentient, dimming eyes, except to raise oneself up straighter upon the spine like our parents and clergy (and like my brother, after all); and to walk the world with something like Ariadne's proud pliant posture, a scion of the House of the Double Axe. The very taste of this sea air and this blood swelled my body with a wonder that all these harborworks, the ancient stone moles jutting into the waves and the lovely pink stone of the portmistress' villa, the ship-shelters and Amnisos-town climbing the shore hills had come into being through our family's migrations, and mixtures with other bloods; and surely, whatever we'd become, it had been born through these women with their grasp of Necessity and their appetite for beauty. And just as dolphins long ago had led one of our great grandmothers, Europa, here to Crete, so now before my eyes did The Powers cooperate; for Ariadne was coming, and the sea lay flat and quiet like Bull nodding down its head before the Queen

Mother now hefted the jar to her body and, keeping its painted palmtrees' power and promise of rebirth in plain sight, began to circle leftwards round our whole formation, and poured the life entrusted her. This was to call upon The Dead and The Ones To Come to do as she did, for Ariadne's sake this spring morning, and complete the greater Circle; for if there was no life for The Dead without our rites of Their memory and sustenance, neither

could there be grain or strength of children for us without Them. The Dead were (mostly) our friends among the ultimate Initiates, we were taught: learn from Them to play with those Powers in the world which we called Goddess

Almost done: as mother slowly worked one could now hear Their lips slopping greedily the spattered sand, my father Minos striking grave triple-beats upon a Kourete's bullhide drum. I watched the dawn give rising brightness to the myriad jewels and silver and richly patterned robes of our people, backed by the sea's own brightness and this gift of mild weather: mother's heavy breasts and bellskirt swayed just a little with her steps back toward me, and the priestesses honored her with a concerted lowering-and-lifting of the axes as she passed. Poor mother! As resolved as Minos to meet the end of her reign with grace. My rib had stopped throbbing and I took the jar back, raised my right hand fist-to-brow for her: we paused together, and heard the crowd take up my gesture, and then I backed away reflecting Pasiphae's quiet pleasure. I was glad to have pleased her, and glad for an ancillary role right now that left me free

Actually I had further priestly duties back at the Labyrinth before these rites were even done, but like everybody else I wanted to see Ariadne come ashore. I set the jar aside for our priests and found myself a vantage among many greetings: next I knew I was eyeing a local daughter at the crowd's eastern edge, about my age with brown curls piled up off bare shoulders, big eyes, twirling a sprig of willow on her necklace as she watched the Queen. Mmm: just to bite her a little, right where those locks hung in spirals at her ears—Phew! The Dead had Their ways of fostering new generations and it thrilled my youth that some of the House's wilder blood ran in my

veins. Still, one had to mind the soberer clans and guests around us. A Queen could marry a candlemaker if he pleased her and threw more light than a palace fop, and I could not let my brother with that stance of his keep me a boy in others' eyes. I was glad I'd not much spoken to him since the battle, glad that many people knew it

Then a hand on my shoulder: it was Glaucus, one of our parents' favored ambassadors to the islands, in his late twenties an impressively tall and traveled gentleman. Very cordial, rugged, not too condescending toward my youth—but I knew he'd been sent to bump into me lately, before his own year of duty began, as a help toward reconciling Palesus and myself. I liked him and envied his stories and his dealings with foreign queens in my father's name, but why had the House sent no one like this toward Palesus? Pasiphae in her iridescent flounces had turned seaward and now held her palms out-and-down, as the priestesses and priests chanted soothing tones. When this concluded, the Kouretes thumped their tall bullhide shields once with javelin-shafts to mark the proceedings with a keener edge; and at last mother took up the House's best white conch, and blew three long, woolly calls. Glaucus pushed back his great tangled mane of black hair: he had our strong native beak-nose, and his necklace of golden seashells rose with his chest as he smiled down at me, nodding his own anticipation.

Ariadne was coming: the salt air teased the lust in one's spirit to behold her, and many eyes searched to sight the small boat bearing her across the strait to us, from the isle's Grove Of The Trees. She was yet invisible against its blossoming dappled-green slopes, but the people along the sea's edge pressed nearer, shushing children and romping dogs and tardy relatives in the wake of the

Queen's three calls. For all the walking-songs and chatter that had followed our House's procession down here at daybreak, they now grew quieter than the sea, than the sparrows in the tamarisk trees along the head of the beach. Retired marines of ours and old matrons curled round their staves, cripples and clubfeet and people with inner ailments sat quietly under the trees behind, as they always did with their perpetual needs at the edges of public ceremony: it was sure Ariadne would call them forward, too, but of course this pious silence would last only till somebody sighted her. Glaucus (fishing again?) remarked a kind of extra apprehension, something more than the season's normal seed-time anxieties along the shore, but I took my own measure of those who'd come—the earringed well-to-do of Cnossos and nearby towns, generations of clan, harbor-hands, foreigners and farmers—to witness this improvised rite.

We'd accomplished already, that is, last moon's traditional early spring customs, broken open the stores of new wine and crop-seed, and loosed The Dead out into the world from Their ancestral burial jars, in which we ourselves would lie one day and receive the honored life we had bestowed. We had feasted Them, and labored to appease Their hungers, soothe Their angers if we could. In rites They had been shown the luminous promise in the accession of Ariadne and Palesus; and then with tar and buckthorn and switches of birch we'd pressed Them back toward Their abodes, from whence They could speak to us, and guide and reprove as intimately as anyone alive. It always needed our clergy's vintage of tact and resolve to keep Them at just the right distance—unlike Egyptians and others I'd heard of, we just shoved the old bones over in the crypts to make room for new ones,

flattering Them the while that more family was on the way. And we could look this year for Their pride and power to feed our own; for They lived through our flesh and, to do so, pushed up the barley that fed us

A good year coming, and this the sweetest time: the grain had a strong golden head to it already, the fire-red of corn poppies was splashed to extravagance on our hills, with goat's beard and thyme and oleander: finches and migrant nightingales and hoopoes roosted in the brilliant trees, the pens were full of clean-licked calves, there were plenty of women's bellies too big for the dancer's kilt and there'd been a wild rainy winter to help prune the olive trees. Not so much as a mildew on a grape-berry. But this year, since the rites, for most everybody you spoke with, there'd been something not quite well, not clear, not balanced in our midst. This year, from the sanctuaries at Cnossos to those of our mountains' peaks and caves, where our people looked for ceremony and oracle to guide them through their lives, there had been too many troubling signs—signs of *like a thunder laying up in the ground*, as someone whispered; a palpable but unintelligible anger in our midst, a malingering unappeasement. Too many rumors of village-youths' initiations and country-house funerals disrupted, let alone simpler rites that kept order in the realm, by queer garbled and sometimes violent words from the oracles, which were supposed to give peace and closure; by problems with vestments and vessels and other tools so carefully stored by our clergy, spontaneous breakages, rusts, foul smells of unknown source. We were taught that our House should never be seen one step behind the opinion of a farmer in such matters and our parents and priestesses grilled the appropriate local people, but all denied knowing the roots of these

disruptions: the worst of this so far, however, was that more than once or twice in a moon this year, the rams and goats and even bulls in some prominent rites had turned suddenly recalcitrant enroute to altar. Why had something in my priest's heart leaped up with a joy to hear such a thing? Not good, not good, our elders said, this made a debacle of authority, the animals felt something wrong and would not speak it, not even to old Perdix or Cratus, our House's Masters of the Herds. Nor were these lives that helped to sustain our world ever to be forced, any more than the Minotauros himself would be. In Crete's mountains, wild Bull was *bolynthos*: it was Bull who made *you* holy, and not otherwise. But was it not a hard place that setting free such a beast could only unbalance everything more?

I will tell you that Pasiphae and Minos did not consider this Crete's worst problem these days. But this out-of-sorts, undercurrent anger or unease was hardly mine alone; and as our clergy just could not articulate the ill, they'd laid requests for prudent measures before the throne. Not healthy at all, to let the Earth grow too uneasy beneath your feet

And this had brought about Ariadne's three-night journey to The Grove Of The Trees with two elder priestesses. A few years ago the radical communion offered by that place—the spot (it was said) where Mother Europa first landed and where all the symbol-trees of our sacred year grew—would have been our mother's to pursue. But in her and our grandmother Paria's eyes, Ariadne at seventeen now was ready for such a task, one precisely grave and small enough for the start of her wholly public service. And as our mothers were proverbial in the skillful management of signs and ceremony, Ariadne's

task was to become new custom as well, one that would help—beginning with her own accession—to smooth the coming transition of power in Crete.

I think I was drawn to begin with this spring day because it was the last time I saw my brother and sister alive and happy together in public. Glaucus had been right, though, that more than planting-time anxiousness had brought so many people to the harbor at sunrise: they were still straggling down the shore hills and pressing the others nearer the water; and I cannot dispense with matters that fed straight into our unease

For one thing, the end of a Great Year, and only our second Great Year at that, was upon us. Four more seasons from this spring, one more turn of The Wheel of the Year, and Minos our father was to make the Offering of his life, while our mother retired, as grandmother had, to a villa adjoining the Labyrinth. Only recently—since our Bull Dance, and the battle at sea—had I realized the enormities behind the dreadful respect which our clans rendered Minotauros' House, and how short the time had to seem to my father, who'd have held power nineteen years in all, longer than any Cretan Consort to the Queen except Paria's. No small thing for our clans to allow so much power for so long in so few hands. This new reckoning of time and highest office, you see, through a fusion of older systems under Moon and Sun, was still on trial since its adoption by our great houses. In many men's eyes the Great Year had balanced (at last) the powers of our throne, had given both sides of the distaff time to use those powers sustainedly for the realm. In earlier generations—less confident in taking from the land, or less pious, depending on whom you spoke with—the Consort had shed his blood every year. Our father was a son in the

line of that Man Who Stepped Forward: in his blood lived on that man who had first given his life as an offering consequential enough to soothe the harvest-ravaged land, and Those beneath it. That the Consort should willingly plough his life under, and do so from the height of wealth and power in our world, was the core of his grandeur, what the harpers called his great heart

But through the generations that had seen our island's powerful families rise, each with their own connections in foreign sea-trade, such a shortlived Consort had made for too much instability among our clans, too many fealties that died with the man and passed with his Queen. Again, our mothers and clergy (like our artisans) never stopped thinking how to make a thing work smoother, and this crowd today was sure sign that their work was under scrutiny. The great frescoes of Cnossos showing the processions of tribute-bearing youths from all over Crete were how we commemorated agreement on where the practical center of our realm should be: it had not been a matter of rivals killing each other over wealth, since there was plenty for all contenders off the sea—rather, the question had been how to get that wealth home and lose as few children of the clans as possible. A more efficient fleet of ships and a juster conscription-system for crewing it was still, even now, close to the matter of anger between Palesus and me, as you'll see. So, if our parents—whose potencies and skills had sustained our fields and our order through a time of near-disaster, and brought our decimated fleet back to nearly full strength—would not lack for praise next Midsummer Day, when the full Oak Moon and Sun-at-his-zenith met together above the Earth, it was for Ariadne and Palesus to prove that things would go on as they ever had, and shine. A realm of keen self-interests

watched through these quiet people along the shore, to see how the Labyrinth would meet such ends and beginnings in the presence of the ages

But you must know that of all these people here I was not the only one who, if asked to spell out the trouble under our skin, would have pointed northward (for a start) out beyond Dia, till you caught that faint white glimmering of snow that sometimes haunted our horizon. It was the sun off the shoulders of a mountain-of-fire called Velkanos, so huge and so close, a day's sail perhaps from Crete, that in good weather like this, snow or not, you could see out there in the blue the brown blotch of its crooked crater. Some people shook their fists no farther than that for their worries, blamed the unwelcome changes of a generation on that mountain's bursting into flame and thunder that long ago. It had hit our wide-open coasts with waves that had killed hundreds, smashed to kindling more than a third of our ships, civilian and military, and then for months had poured gray poison on our fields

In truth, though, this had happened more than once across the twentytwo generations since the raising of the Labyrinth. And as grandmother's conservative circles would boast, we had always rebuilt, and done the job better besides: you could ask Iris or Kudru, as leaders of our artisans the Daedalaë, what opportunity their forebears had made of the first great destruction of our House. A grander staircase there, or here new pipe laid in for household water where there'd been none, a new toilet for convenience near some prominent family's shrines—craftspeople made their life's pride of these cunning things and there were always enough earth-shakings to make this a smiled-at obsession of theirs

The difference these days was that now we had to compete with, and even defend ourselves from, a particularly irritating tribe of foreign pupils of ours: the Achaians by name, descendants of a horde of horse-driving, bearded nomads who had drifted southward a few hundred years ago into mainland, Pelasgian lands beyond the islands. Without even a word for the Great Green of the sea, as I was told. On my honor, you'd be pressed to name things of the good settled life that we had not taught them. No one in Crete would deny that our ancestors' artisans had helped to build great houses up north for these Achaians' leading families; just as we'd helped Pelasgians (first-born of the land) and others up there to build roads, drain marshes, weave cloth, cipher, whatever would bring us their trade or an easement to metals in their ground

But once these wanderers had really begun to forcibly displace, rather than settle for mixing blood with, Pelasgian clans up north—burning their great multicolored House of Lerna by the sea, for example, and replacing it with fortified Tiryns, turning villages into coerced dependencies—well, what could we do, get into a land-war up there? Our strength was in the ships crewed by our young men and women, and in the unity of our houses: that was why you could all but walk right into any of Crete's royal precincts and seaside towns. Nor had it helped for long to offer Pelasgians assistance in settling new lands and outposts for trade; for, as grandmother spun us the story, in time the scent of the sea (which is wealth) was in Achaian noses, and in a few generations they'd learned to spell Great Green, and to sail it too. And now, since our last distress beneath Velkanos and the prevailing northerlies after it laced with ash, Achaians had been boldly trailing our merchant-ships everywhere, undercutting very old al-

liances for a season's gain, carrying themselves like something a bit more than our equals: in our halls there were even reports now and then of *raids* carried out against towns of the islands and the east by their kinsmen. Young fools and bored barons looking for that brainless status born of their good-old-wandering-days

This boiled my blood as much as it did my brother's, and the promise of his posture was just what many had come a distance to see again today, especially in the wake of his actions on the sea. I looked around beside Glaucus and I knew that, while some Cretans wished the Minotaurus an even Greater Year, others who knew Egypt and parts of Canaan and the north protested that little good had come of making kings-for-life anyplace else. News, like the fact that the new Pharaoh was chiseling his mother's cartouche off their monuments, traveled fast; and we had Libyan and Canaanite refugees who'd swear to it living here besides, in flight from the glory of his Name.

Old Cratus and the clergy like him said that what it meant to be a man at all was changing and not for the better: I understood their solicitude in Glaucus' haunting me lately, as he was plainly a fellow a strong prince should learn from. He stood lankily taller than most men on this beach, had the nipped waist and powerful thighs that so pleased our painters, and a cordial presence that belied a fierce son of home: he also had gray eyes, and many knew his clan (from our eastern town Praisos) as one of the best of these *graikoi* with whom Crete had ever mixed her blood. He was like a sign of a possible future, like a scion of that group of visiting-elder Achaians also with us this morning who had placed themselves in a rank behind my father's Kouretes, tallish men with beards and hair the color of dry seagrass, or kerm-oak red. They all

wore their usual long chest-and-thigh-covering tunics with stitched-in symbols of mainland lords across the breast, solar signs, lions and white bulls and horses rampant: we'd grown up much in the presence of such men with their coming and going under tutelage agreements. And I should lie if I said there was much love lost between them and Palesus; but Glaucus was a reminder that sometimes, like his own ancestors from Aeolis in the north, such men did assimilate in Crete and found good houses. We were an ancient but decidedly mongrel race here, and even my father's blood (I mean, they *told* me he was my father) had come from the north round the same time as Glaucus', and been adopted by Mother Europa, as our saying was.

Now you can see better how our Great Year came to be, a consummation of an age of change and pressure to change, a hopefully-better balance of The Powers that turned the world. I just hoped my brother wouldn't overdo it and spoil my own reign by losing this watchful trust from our clans: in essence he wanted more ships, and more people to crew them, and to our mothers that was simply too Achaian a response. After all, by their own profession Achaian gods (personal beings in the sky!) made nothing grow, did no work, fostered no constructive skills and, for all that, styled themselves lords of women: even we with the most to gain saw the topheavy risks there. I wanted to keep Palesus' plans from making me an heir to resentment—and thus here everybody stood, to see how certain lines would be drawn

Look at them, bunched up on Minos' side of the crescent like that, standing there studying, one supposed, with arms folded or fingers to their beards. Rufous skulls, like a sun going down some dreary winter evening. Most

of them smelled like goat's butter and affected rough disdain for the pleasures of bed and bath and clean linen; wouldn't think of painting their eyes, and not a few Cretan youth were falling in with them. Very well, I admit we had little proof yet that their houses might be directly involved in these raids. People afraid to walk their own beaches. Circumstantial stuff and biased merchants, as Minos warned my brother. But I'll tell you why he and I were mad in our ways against them: because they were so lost in their own lies that they thought *we* could not discern their real opinion of our father. I won't mince about it. They most of them held the Minotauros a kind of grand fool for his so-called submission to our Queen, which showed right off what they understood of us. He tolerated the ways in which Pasiphae thought it best to instruct them, and as she elevated them, they mocked him in their souls. They no-end admired how the web of his trade (*his* trade) had worked so smoothly time out of mind, but would never say aloud how his Offering was, for them, a relic of a dreamworld, a childish sort of dark-magic game imposed by women. It was in their looks and small remarks everywhere they went here, tight, cautious, critical, as if the cow of their mothersmilk had been stalled in a countinghouse. Game! How could anybody not feel appalled to sickness and fear with the way a field looked after harvesters had ravaged it, by Necessity? And could the act of healing that, for the people's sake, tell a Man Who Stepped Forward anything but the worth of his own life? People came to our rites to learn from my parents how to die and how to live and we had no more honored part of ourselves that we could give back to The Powers, to Crete's fat fields in fearful gratitude

For those of Paria's conservative circles you did not

meet Velkanos' disaster with risk of another: they'd opposed the Great Year from the start of Paria's own reign, which brought them influence. And these signs of restless unappeasement came as no surprise to her now, for so much time without The Offering. To make herself plainer still—she was a bit of a browbeater—she had revived among some women the hanging of corn dollies from the fruit trees of Cnossos and elsewhere, chastening symbols of a legend almost nobody believed anymore, that the first One Who Stepped Forward had been a woman

But Paria and her councils had consented to the change because it was in line, at least, with the unifying changes among our great houses and their assimilative past: most had agreed on the need to keep men pacified in light of the foreign news, too. Now, though, for many, enough was enough: I could remember playing underfoot with brother and sister in the dust and spirally woodshavings as mother had redesigned our whole throne room for grander effects, adding also a substantial pillared shrine in the west wing to Achaian Poseidon. Yet Pasiphae's efforts to make the north's visiting elders and students more at home, by bringing in their blueblooded god, had put conservative clergy less than at ease in their own House. Maybe a rough tough sea-god was good for the men at the oars, but the Labyrinth's sisters and brothers did not enjoy concealing their opinion of a deity whose priests, and new money, could change him from mountaineer to sailor according to trade-winds

Nobody blamed my mother for her effort to keep the clearly dwindling respect of the mainland houses. We all meant to help with Ariadne's and Palesus' coming burdens—find out what was souring in our Egyptian and Eastern alliances, solve trade-territorial problems in

Rhodes and Sicily, keep bringing our fields and fleet back to health. I had a duty coming soon in all this that Glaucus could advise on, too: I'd get him to walk me to the city. But why should I break myself to Palesus' intentions, especially knowing what the *new man's* respect might mean when our father was no longer seen in the world?

—I must say he does look fierce and splendid as the young Bull should before the Dance, Glaucus whispered now, as people squinted into the sea's rising light to spot the boat. —Every bit the man I heard about who shipped those scribes home, eh?

I didn't ask his sources, but the travels of that news told me things. Glaucus meant my brother's first real showing-forth of himself last autumn, when he'd found that several mainland students of our ciphers had substituted nicknames for Cretans on House lists of personnel. Dingus and Barn Owl, Blackhead, and *Earthling*—we hadn't realized that this last was an Achaian pejorative

—And what do you call a man who is more than a merchant and less than a raider? I asked him with one of Palesus' jibes for the Bright Hairs. But we had no word for the answer; and when Glaucus looked at me as if to chasten, I flashed with an anger. Come on, Ariadne! Though I wasn't sure how even she could help. She had danced Bull just as bravely and wildly as her brothers in the indispensable rite that guarded Crete's throne—but she had not fought on the sea. Out there, there were *no rules*; and somehow I had let anger become the answer to the chill in my bones

Glaucus touched me then, threaded his arm along my waist and leaned in with his lanky grace, a good stylish pose for that local daughter and the bearded barons as well, who turned wonderful colors when Cretan men did

such things. Yes, look at Palesus and father, the one with his lovelock forward over the shoulder and the other dressed down like myself for his benefit today, letting the heir wear the emblematic leather codpiece over his kilt, get people used to the new king's person over time. The arm felt good around me; and oddly, just now the whole Achaian assembly raised their fist-ed right hands to their breasts in Minotauros' honor, a gesture that drew many nods from the people around us. Must've been the light that was just beginning to shift its shapes and flash on the ruffled sea, warming bodies and moods and the colors of our gathering, the heads of the double-axes: a morning breeze was astir now too and curled about our feet, like a sunwarmed snake. Pasiphae handed the conch to Palesus, and as he bellowed through it thrice—Ariadne had better get in before the surf woke up—Mother led the crowd to lift its palms out toward the sea. It was pleasure to see and feel so many hands lift that way in unison and to see the muscles of her back still so defined and symmetrical, like runes recalling festival nights when you saw what a powerful dancer she was. Some bold fellow in the crowd, a friend of Palesus' from his Bulldancing team now called out the title my brother had earned—*Leap for us, Megistos Kouros!* (Greatest of Youths!)—and he obliged the man indeed, deigning to smile with a bit of a strutting kicked-up step and his arms out high, then turning to wait Ariadne again with a bristling energy. And the whole bay before him was as blue as the base of a candle's flame and along the shore the trees were lifting and there were swaths of blossom-color climbing the green hills inland, white sea daffodil and yellow anthemis, and those garish purple-yellow ice daisies and sea-squills with tall white stems: you could wade upward into slopes of them and

pick yourself armfuls of anemone and asphodel and corn poppy bright as blood, and on the way down home leave a few bunches scattered before the brooding pillars within the cave up there on the hill, by Amnisos' seaside altars; or if the high air took you you could just keep climbing, clear to the snowline of our mountains east and west of here, whose thick white drifts were tinted luminous-pink with the dawn and looked to be hovering in the sky, like clouds you knew you could walk on if you would. The day was flawless and everything seemed to course with a deep gentle strength, like Bull at our altar this morning: a priest would predict such a day for the month that joined Willow Moon with Sun in the House of the Bull. *Soothe, Soothe*, the sea was saying

Some of the lifted hands were pointing now and others caught on to those: you knew any moment the women would let loose that high trill like a seabird's they loved to ululate together, the *Oh-lo-lo* and *Oh-lo-lo-lo-lo* which their mothers before them had sung for the presence of The Aridela, The Very Manifest One. And just at this instant when the shape of the crowd seemed settled and its outcry near, another large flow of people emerged from the head of Amnisos Road behind us and walked down beach in scattering bunches to join in: it was another procession, organized by one of our upland houses at Archanes—children wearing and holding flowers and riding the backs of horses seven hands high (they raised the bigger breeds on the mainland), these led along by pairs of Archanes' priests and priestesses in their usual bright identical full-length robes, cut low around the shoulders. A pretty company in Ariadne's honor, they all had over them and in their eyes the glow of the dawn they walked toward, and there now came

grandmother's carrying-chair, no less, with the yellow awnings tied back and her small gray head leaning out toward Tukato. He was Archanes' tall factotum and leading priest and even from here his hairless sensitive face looked to be at prayer that Paria close her endless conferencing awhile. Ahh: a slightest lifting and turning of heads now, a palpable shifting in the bodies as in a bank of flowers, a silent consent to join together and seek understandings for the pain. These priests and sisters, you see, and the children of many races in Archanes' charge, occupied the same place in people's sentiments here as the mountains and secret valleys above us, the matrix of our race: these were children born of Communion during our festivals of worship through the year, when all distinctions of class and gender and race dissolved in the heat of the worship of life. And everybody knew that these children *were* the ongoing story by which our own flesh had come to be; and so it was honor from close to the heart of our magic that they'd take this trouble to come down. My parents looked radiant, grandmother magpie-chipper despite her very bad joints in the morning: Tukato must've had them all sing the great lady out from her villa's courtyard of lemon trees, where the corn dollies dangled. The horses and little ones padded and soft-clopped around Paria's set-down chair, the quiet of the children's grins quite impressive for the energy rising off the sea, the bright things of ritual and the flutes and systrums many held

– *Oh-lo-lo-lo!* – *Oh-lo-lo-lo-lo...*

Was it a thousand lifted palms and voices joining that first cry? Suddenly the land was louder than the wakening surf before us as Glaucus showed me the glint of gold off

Ariadne's boat-prow, and we rocked together on our feet while the Kouretes drummed their shields in triple-time with ritual swords and received drummed answers from household instruments in the crowd. Women and daughters and little ones (laughing) kept up the ululations wave after overlapping wave, men rattled systums and stamped their feet, whistling: dogs began to run about barking again as youths blew squalls on wooden pipes, old people clapped or just enjoyed it all and the shoreline's tamarisks seemed to cast their birds aloft. It was a fine contagious cacaphony and, as we now made out the three persons and the green of a small tree aboard the boat out there, it got even wilder: brother and father each had their arms lifted out toward their respective Queens, our Achaian guests looked almost bright with a magnanimous envy and the Archanes children waved their peonies and turban-buttercups like scepters. Near the back of the company I caught sight of that lovely Phaedra, a youth of Archanes most ardent in Ariadne's service, but the boy Icarus, my boy you might say, born of my wound, was not with them today. I'd have to speak with Tukato to see if the little daemon was any more social at all and how those treatments with decoction of valerian were helping his fits. And there went our mother turning a few strong steps herself amid the priestesses' grove of lifted Labryses, clawing at the air, provoking everyone

—*Oh-lo-lo-lo-lo!* —*Oh-lo-lo-lo...*

As I glanced round I asked Glaucus if he thought getting rid of my cloak would be in taste today. He gave me the owl's eye: don't dilute your brother's potencies

—Well, I said, —when a man comes of age he just wants people to see he need not obey the women so strictly anymore.

— Especially the girls! he agreed

— *Oh-lo-lo-lo...*

Now you could see the gilded bull's horns on the boat's small wooden figurehead and the flashes of the wet paddles worked by Cleite and Diamat, and how erectly Ariadne sat in its stern with the tree in its spiral-painted planterbox beside her: her and our brother's older friends among the youth were chanting *Aridela!* and *Megistos Kouros!* clear over everybody else. How it lit my pride that they embodied titles only Bull could bestow, and now these youths' own elders joined in with phrases from earlier spring rites

— *Leap, leap at the head of thy daemons,
Kouros of all that is wet and gleaming,
and all mankind be held about
by wealth-loving Peace!*

— *And leap for us also,
for full jars and fleecy flocks,
and leap for fields of fruit
and for hives to bring increase...*

Our father's eyes shone darkly like rich stones set beneath the gold of his diadem, as he savored these favorite aspirations of his and the uproar made of them: Palesus was still holding back his best. But when Minos joined the voices and pointed at Palesus while calling out those phrases—*And leap for our cities, and leap for our seaborne ships, and leap for our young citizens!*—well, brother was Pasiphae's son for calculation. On the instant he took himself some real space within the blood-circle and the Kouretes seemed to know what to do: they trooped out in a file between Palesus and the incoming boat with rival-

rous javelins and shields raised against him, and when he'd stripped a gold ring from his left hand and displayed it, playing (like others) with minor custom, he hurled it in a confirming gesture of betrothal over their ducking heads into the sea, and the troop of them fell over flat-backwards at the force of it, groaning. The ring splashed just shy of Ariadne's boat and the Archanes little ones squealed. But then—even Glaucus shook his head a bit—why did Palesus mar things as he did? Striding back to his place triumphant, kilt and codpiece showing the muscled tops of his thighs he simply had to shake out his mane of black locks and spread his arms toward the Achaian elders with a By-your-leave, unnecessary gesture, a too-fine obeisance to all *fathers* of a sort. Many smiles; but no laughter, as our guests returned him a fist-to-breast salute.

Meantime the priestesses rowing had begun to help their bull negotiate the just-rising inshore surf: it seemed to me that our gaze returned now to what was needed. And more, as I saw my sister out there today, sitting as graceful as a young palm, left hand lifted to bless and the other holding steady the spiralled planter at her side, a kind of hollow or deep drop I'd never felt before was simply there within my chest, as sudden as a sail's belly emptied of the wind. My body rejoiced with all the others under the morning sun, she was no longer our sister or any young woman but The Aridela—yet how much larger and striking her frank brown eyes today, before all the crazy crowd! We'd been raised to know ourselves in the light of the Image of Power we called Goddess, yet somehow today all formal things were fused in a fire with my sister, and my friend, and the budding woman I knew, and I shivered, as if hearing her fine voice leading chants within

a cave. Cleite and Diamat had dressed her with just the right deference to mother: soft organdy kohl round those eyes, a flat white cap keeping her black tresses up off her neck, an organdy kilt cut as high on the hip as our brother's and chased with silver running spirals. A light tangle of loose hairs at the back of her delicate neck—my strength seemed near to a kind of swoon. I don't know: I pulled free of Glaucus and shoved my own hair back. How her strong pliant posture took the well-bred Cnosian woman's bearing to its almost swaybacked limit; the strength of her chin and her arms besides, a dancer like mother and as resolute with the stunning-mace; the same faint smile at play behind the title, love of her friends and their uproar; and something perhaps The Grove Of The Trees had given her only now, a new gravity, as if the elder sisters had shown her a sadness to be mastered, a bull to be met head-on, and tamed to the power of the tribe. There were tears on my cheeks because for me she centered the beauty of the world and a sorrow I hated was worming its way into my heart—What loss? Would she not always be near? In her I saw what I could not yet bear to live myself, a radiance born of accepting—Everything—I had to get going or there'd be trouble with mother but I longed like a lover to hear whatever she might have to say and I wished we were young and not-responsible enough again to play around a little in bed as we had a time or two, it was all confused, and in that hollow place was knowing how much her accession might well take from me

Cleite and Diamat had stopped paddling to feel out the inshore waves, and suddenly the breeze and water turned the boat broadside to the crowd, and with the rising tide's small waves relentless behind them they started

to sidle toward the sand. It could've happened to anybody, let alone that our two eldest priestesses had to be tired oarsmen, and some people smiled as if hoping this struggle deliberate; but with a few more waves they could well spill completely on the shingle and my bones seemed to leap of themselves to prevent such an omen. I had leaped once before to save that boy and Palesus and father seemed caught up in After-You glances, while the clergy held off in anxious respect. I dropped my cloak and in a moment had waded rib-deep out to them just to help bring round the prow. What did Cleite have on her face, was that a beard? But then I stopped myself from touching the gunwales because, up close now, I saw the dozens of tiny ceramic corn dollies they had hanged along the boat's sides. I could not make myself touch anything because I saw traces of what had to be moonblood streaked over the figurines, any priest knew that power could *kill*, and people were watching: I was close enough to read the paint-patterned signatures of Cretan clans' dedications on the dollies' dangling skirts, tokens of requests to fructify fields and loins all through the realm and this was nothing to trifle or play hero with. I felt I had done so with the eyes so heavy upon my back and, as I fumbled what to do now, Ariadne held her gaze beyond me to the horizons of our hills

—No! Get back! That's alright! Don't touch that! old Diamat quietly screeched down (not my favorite of the sisters, so officious about the messages in public deeds). They brought the boat to, of course, and I demonstrated how hard it was to wade in gracefully over rocks before so many, though there were some smiles and claps. Father and brother nodded along but I felt the mildest curl in my mother's lip as I passed her. Later, she said that one

might well show all the proudflesh one wished, but for the rest, one just didn't do that. *Help, mother? No, Deucalion: panic.*

Well, I went back dripping to Glaucus, who was now flanked by two of the cleaner reliable harbor-hands, Cor-dax and Podes, from whom one could always get the scurvier kinds of foreign news: they'd let Glaucus know that his ship had been moved down-coast to Katsambas for the day, our military port kept separate from merchant-affairs but not too far west of here. These friends kindly clapped my back as the noise died down around us, people gazed on Ariadne or fist-to-brow gave praise with eyes shut, a few dancing manically under the tamarisks: Cleite and Diamat were now lifting the planter from the drawn-up boat, then set the small fig tree in it at the head of the shingle with a space behind for The Aridela to stand. Once she stepped from the boat her stance quite deliberately seemed to rise from the planter and it would not have been far from our truth to say that she was The Tree of The Trees, as winning as the little one before her with its beneficent fivepointed leaves, its tiny green omens of food and medicine. Young Woman. I'd known only the beauty and disciplined richness that had brought her thus far toward office: the radical devotion, the callous cruelty born of it, the dreams—all that was tomorrow. Ariadne crossed the line of blood now, and lifted her palms out to the people, and her face shone forth her wishes for them; and then our mother stepped forward and laid her palms to her daughter's, welcoming, communing, completing the Circle

— Did you say they gave you things to ready for her at Cnossos? Glaucus asked; thinking of me, though he could be intrusive. Following suit the stevedore Podes let me

know that the boat I was trying to build with young Icarus was coming along very nicely, in his opinion. I halfsmiled and lifted my hand to still this, and just then my mother's head bowed deeply, her body visibly sighed, and she turned with remarkable tears on her face to the people

— *Their world—is passed away!* she half-sang in a broken lament, speaking of The Dead, and more, of the soon-to-be-so among the living in every heart, including her own: she looked at Minos as he stood with chin lifted a little too high, and then her upraised hands turned to fists in front of herself, she shook them, and beckoned Palesus forward to his Queen. Glaucus had nodded with an approving comprehension whose fullness eluded me, while a slow wave of disappointment seemed to roll through the crowd, and then its backwash showed in gestures of homage and surrender to One Who might yet help: as Palesus took Ariadne's hand, others took tight hold on hands near them. I do not know how Ariadne gave our mother those words but there they were and I wondered what else would be done to heal the restless unappeasement underneath these days: our priests told me later of the rest of the rites held here this morning. Traditional things, a ceremonial touching of the tree for all who wished it, a pouring of wine between partnered celebrants praising Goddess in each other, healing touches from clergy and Queens as the sick were called forward. Clanspeople of the countryside who'd brought down animals and first-fruits claimed those powerful dollies later, too: I had to go, but at least I'd seen my family's own gestures of resolve. Live, live! Maybe rites were all one had with which to face the oracle Ariadne had brought from The Dead, and our power was just that we produced them better than others

As Glaucus and I headed up Amnisos Road we could only hear the sing which Archanes' children offered up, and I was sorry to miss what I heard later of Cleite's wit. She'd dance-displayed herself in gaily-chosen tokens of all our clans' totem ancestors, from the feather of Maat's Egypt to the goatskin bib of Pelasgian and Libyan dress: wool for our Carian stock in the East, horns in her hair for old Europa's bull from the cities of Canaan, even a horse's mane of teased-up straw to keep Tukato's and Glaucus' northern forebears in the game. This was all to help the clans renew themselves as part of Ariadne's very flesh, as if they themselves comprised her power, which was true: most people had best-liked the beard, worn in remembrance of Pharaoh's passed-away mother Hatshepsut, Paria's contemporary who'd had to wear one to hold their throne (if you can believe that) till her boy had come of age. As a bit of shocking common knowledge here it had served to mock the very inkling that a Cretan Queen should ever let things come to that. Good! And when Cleite had backed away with all these signs, there again had stood young Ariadne, new world, new race present in her womb

— Well, I daresay nobody noticed Velkanos much behind her today, Glaucus mused as we climbed from the shore. — Oh! And who is this boy of yours, Icarus?

* * *

The harbor town fell behind us, and Glaucus, unanswerd, let himself just enjoy the walk awhile, finding us shoots of anis to chew (burst of crickets) and watching the loose play of whitethorn and willow shade over the road ahead. We crested the shore hills, passed the sunny

outdoor altars flanking the entrance to the little cave where mariners and mothers beseeched good fortune of The Powers: then we sloped down between small groves of almond trees and olives, the land either side of us beginning to spread out pleasantly into lowlying meadows of shortgrass. The hillsides were still mapped with pale straw and in these morning-quiet vales stood a few small bright two-story houses with gourd and grape arbors, fig trees and burgeoning sunflowers, most of their common yards deserted for the rites at the shore right down to the loom-frame under the shade-tree: only some sparrows were whipping about as yet but we heard cattle and goats and sheep within these borders of lowland green, and the new grass seemed to glow from beneath pale winter scrub. The sky was bright blue and you could smell black tilth and good water in the sun. Ahead the land flattened out more to a richly green plain with snowy mountains beyond east and westward, with some young barley sown here and there and wooded hillocks like natural sentinels of Cnossos-proper: we scarcely talked until far out ahead there loomed the green and rocky flanks of Mount Juktas, a mile or two beyond the head of the valley of the Labyrinth. If people had cleared and carved that whole ridge it could not have looked more like the profile of a giant gazing at the sky, stretched on his bier but dreaming new life to come: I always thought that, though the land's lush green had all but grown over and forgotten him, he was at peace, since he'd given himself to that which always wins. Priestesses said he was the land's just-right answer to the Image in the shape of Dia Isle. Day was brightening

—Hope I'm home for the Midsummer bonfires up there, Glaucus said. —These days, odds are I'll be

abroad, but I'd like to celebrate your father's reign with him. *Their world is passed away*, he echoed now with a rare sigh. —Excuse me, Prince Deucalion, but will you be speaking any further this morning? I don't think you understand yet. I'm not sure who does.

—Understand?

—Ohh, it's the secretive high-born priest today. But tell me, Glaucus went on undaunted, —when you meditate or dance The Changes up on Juktas' forehead, and groom yourself for your father's honors and powers and service, does it really *strike* you, the way Bull did when you danced Him, that your own displacement as a man is in store?

—All the clergy say I'm young to know what my father really feels, I allowed. —But our example is the heart of the office, the great heart, the Stepping Forward so that

—But whose world is passing now? said Glaucus with a down-cutting gesture. —It's yours, Deucalion, yours and mine. The world is much bigger than our Cretan ways, however many cities and islands borrow our best in everything. Forgive me, but it's not going to be enough for you to sow your life back into this land—I mean, that must be done as always, Glaucus added to be heard by the living forms around him, —but we are in trouble, and denying it is making it worse. Does it ever seem to you that that mountain-of-fire Velkanos isn't really asleep, let alone dead? I know a priestess back home in Praisos who says Velkanos is really a, what's the word, a *brutch*, a sort of embodiment or emanation of all the bad feeling around these days, the things hurting us. She says that if we'd push back, rather than be so high and hospitable in the Name of Goddess

—What else do you and my brother talk about? I said.

— Neither he, nor your parents or clergy said anything, Glaucus answered.

Which left Ariadne; and suddenly many things filled that hollow in my chest, not least of which was a pride, a gratitude that she might hold me as someone who could help in days to come. Had these especially sacral and secretive months among the women before her throne worked more on myself than on anyone, making her the image of our people's health and my soul's growth? All our lives we young men had been warned not to get in her way for anything, she'd grown up much away in the mountains *without any limits*, it was said—What did she want of me, then? And now as we walked I realized the fairly shapeless younger brother I must've been to her

A moment later all this changed to a boyish shame beside Glaucus' worldliness. Goddess, the Mother of Love within all things, and Earthbull, the molten-eyed monster beneath the ground—these understandings had seen us all through childhood, calmed fears and made us family to each other, blood-kin and commons and strangers off the sea. But The Powers which our great houses addressed and worked with—these were deeper than Goddess or Bull or any Form, and They did not care at all whether you were kind, or got killed: Goddess was simply the most complete and passionate way to express how we felt the world and it was this understanding (and the nerve to make use of it) that had given our great families power. Justice, order, duty: not a lie but a kind of universal plasticity lay behind these things and I saw how *obedient* I still was; but at least now I could sense how we were all stuck somehow, wishing neither to harm nor put limits on anybody, but nursing the need to defend ourselves with even a blind lashing-out. If necessary; and to Palesus

it was so. I looked up over the road at the greatness of our land and at the mountain that made us men who could Step Forward, and spoke her name in my heart—yet there was still the old angry sick confusion that made a *brutch* of the wound at my rib

—I just want to belong, Glaucus, I said.

—Belong to what? A dying thing that your silence won't help? My friend, if I thought all things doomed I'd make them shake with my heart's blood.

Glaucus was angry beyond his decorum and that made me trust him, though we'd been taught to beware the choices anyone offered us: I wanted to be useful, and that meant getting full-strength again like field and fleet, and there was yet an hour's walk ahead. Meanwhile too a goodlooking young man jounced down the eastern hillside and crossed the road before us with a string of fishes shiny in the sun, taking the shortcut home from the Kairatos River with the aunt's fresh breakfast. A year or two would find him at an oarsman's bench someplace and it would be his life first to answer for Labyrinth policies

Alright then, I told Glaucus, maybe they called this proudflesh at my rib but I was ashamed of what had happened on the sea and of why it happened. From Ariadne I'd learned early-on that not everything mother did came from perfect wisdom. Songs from boyhood in the House had told how Crete was admired from Troy to Pharos, from Gades to Babylon for putting the first of law on the sealanes—but was that what we'd done? How many mothers of slain marines and oarsmen were really choking back gall when they left offerings at the Labyrinth, and saw the Egyptian gold and the Libyan ostrich eggs and Canaanite perfumed silks? I was not my sister—only a man, and felt there was something wrong with me to

have such thoughts at all. But what I'd seen—I could not be the only one. And yes, these well-born pirates on our tails all across the seacharts, curse them, at least raiders made no pretense

—Just tell me what happened, Glaucus said touching my back again, matching my strides

But before I could speak it the memory of battle made the blood seem to drain from my arms and legs, and I felt cold, felt far from the green and the peace all around and the half-shaded road we were walking up valley: I was only wearing a kilt, boots and shawl and we didn't go into close-quarters fighting with much else on: you feel so vulnerable and that makes you battle-mad; and a living thing seems to drain from your marrow

—Weren't there some pleasantries first, Deucalion?

Yes: like receiving my sword and dagger and sealstone from my mother at the head of a crowd of royal-kindred initiates to manhood: the tension in the House when it was time to make first voyage, and knowing Palesus had been out once already and would help to command a sister-ship on patrol with us; and my father's pompous pride in his two sons and the tactfully plain small jar of blessed and scented oil for my sailor's skin that Ariadne gave. And my hollow share of the crew's courage and devotion as we'd rowed away from the land and seen even the mountains sink away into an endless rolling sea that could swallow any and all without a blink; and when the nausea had passed, beginning to learn, and loving the open dependence we had on each other on that deck of the *Talos*, that had seemed so large in port. Singing call-and-answer at night between the ships when there was no landfall, and recognizing signs in the clouds of storm and distant land in skirts of surf: sharing the pride as passing island-mer-

chanters hailed the ships of Crete, and seeing truly how it was our family that kept the tin and the copper flowing east and west, our clans that midwived this brightness and wealth-loving Peace into the world, as our song said

And on our sixth morning out (I was still counting in terms of home) I woke up and our three ships were suddenly reefing sails and heaving into spring's still-cool southwesterlies. We were out of landsight up north somewhere between Patmos and Myconos, it was a blood and honey sunrise and our prows were lunging toward a single grayblack flower of smoke on the sea ahead. Trouble; and to port I saw my brother on the deck of the Libyan ship the *Swift Queen*, beating oar-stroke time with his sword on the air, while to starboard the *Melanippe*, a ship full of Taurian women-marines was starting to outpace us as their voices took up one of those battle-songs that would curdle Bull's blood. However I'd swaggered on deck for our House's expertise and far-flung connections—these were two of our fiercest allies, purposely getting to know the next Minotauros in my brother—well, battle was about to prove how deep the bonds of blood and shared patrol could run

—Twice lively now, spread out! Follow the *Talos*! shouted Perides, our maternal uncle and commander of Crete's entire military. War had never been the Minotauros' office but I was glad father had entrusted his sons to no less a figure. Short even for a Cretan and built thick and quick, with narrow dark eyes above a well-trimmed beard, Perides strode up and down the center bridge-plank giving signals to both sides as we took the lead slot, our fifty oars beginning to outpace our sister-ships. —Where's that fellow Nyos with the long eyes? Shiny up the mast, man, and count us these carsuckers!

I was up on the high curved afterdeck between the brail-lines with Keta the steersman, afraid, caressed by winds that rumbled in my ears. Nyos called down their strength: three raiders and a burning merchanter, we'd be too late, too much sea. But Perides cursed and the *Talos'* oarsmen beat sea: this ship was old but yare and sleek-beamed and its name was known in the islands, not least for its complement of crack Cretan marines, russet wiry men with boarstooth helmets and the small very manageable shields and swords you needed for ship-to-ship fighting. Their eyes and hands were full of the experienced soldier's tricks of death and as their brothers at the oars hulled us swiftly now toward battle they mostly just sat amidships in a double-grove of planted javelins, playing knifey for their nerves or reminding the younger ones of points of what they called conversation. To port the thirty Libyans (men and women) had started to sing as one to Nut, their war-name for Goddess, putting all their black arms into it while Palesus deferred to their shamaness, who hung forward off their prow in flapping zebra-skins, hurling curses—anyway we might be too late but I knew these raiders would have no chance. You could feel that all these people, schooled to imitate the Mother fighting for Her children, would take it to the death in the honor of it: I could not think yet that transporting commodities was the bottom of our being here at all. And I waved to Palesus on the *Swift Queen*, but he was tying back his mane and his hips were cocked in a pretty stance, he looked calm as a goat on a cliffside

We lunged on, the oarsmen's discipline beautiful to see, and soon the yellow flicker of fired oils was clear and the verminous scurry of the raiders as they gutted the wreck. And then a drift of wrack and bodies passed be-

tween us to starboard. Bobbing corpses of young island men. A woman, face-down, white arms splayed out of her pink shift, bloody graymatter pooling through red hair: I know I saw one man with a huge *bite* gone from his side, the ragged white ribs

—*Miasma!* came a hideous curse-cry from the Taurians. —*Miasma!* and everybody answered their holy anger. Famous fighters now, these priestesses and their followers, in riding-britches on the amber roads or on seaduty wherever they pleased: their captain Alxiona had made a point of bragging that they were the first of us southern peoples to make war in defense of territory. True or not, they did seem never to have conciliated Aryans (whose wanderings southward our Achaian friends had shared), and now that cry, they'd seen the woman, that curse would chase you down if it took a Great Year. I saw even gruff old salty Perides shiver as he pulled off his purples and strode up-bridge to my side

—The fools! he said: he meant the bodies: they must've tried to save the mere tithe of escort by a quick early-season voyage with their goods, gotten caught by raiders with hunger-sharp wits and a bit of luck. Now we could even see them tossing metal talents and jars as they offloaded plunder to the hold of their big cog in the center: surely they'd counted us, too, and would fight it out. Seagulls shrieked on our stern, souls goading *Talos* to vengeance, and circlets of breeze ran the sea before us like steps of a giant as Perides gripped my shoulders

—Deucalion, listen. See what these thieves have done? Your father told me not to engage so many with both his calves here, but I can't let them go, these are clearly no ragtags, they're old hands. See there, how they stow all the loot on the leader's cog and he plays them off,

promising survivors a better share? Well, you watch him feed the other ships to us.

—*Miasma!*

—Hnnnyeeah! Perides shivered at the cry. —Three times seals it. I could use a little knifey too, I declare. But they'll be winded once with the kill, we'll take them sure. Now listen, when we go in, I need you to keep well back here and help Keta steer us dead-on for center. Our sisters will cut inside and isolate them, see? Now you plant your shield in these bracings and hang on. Ears up for arrows, Keta! Good man! Hoy, Palesus! Take the necklace off, you peacock!

—I can fight! I stammered to his back, quite out of myself with fear.

—You'll take orders first! Weapons! Your voices now, my brothers!

It was a joke of the fleet how fond of the bathtub old Perides was: I could also feel his perfect right to kill me if I got in the way now, so I helped brace Keta's big man-shaped shield too. But my whole body was paling at the rattle-sounds of strapped-on helmets, the clinks of weapons and the sick sliding of swords from sheaths. If I believed we were serving the law then the horror would be only the day long and there'd be family to sustain me in the next world if it happened, but my body felt pale, there was no friendly crowd watching you play Bull out here, no rules: perhaps the pale and the cold meant I'd soon be like those first victims of malice I'd seen, with oozing wounds, masted with spears, it was death's violence I feared and the rising rage of these professionals

—How can they call a swordfight conversation? I blurted, and Keta put his hands over mine on the tiller, but his eyes never left Perides at the bow. We closed, and

the raiders' oarsmen were catching all kinds of crabs (as they said) trying to keep the burning wreck between *Talos* and themselves. But the wreck was sinking anyway and as their loaded cog drew back the other two ships huddled No-you-don't nearer to it. We slipped into ragged smoke, smell of pine-char and cloth and rope, and in three tongues Perides shouted for surrender. They answered in a kind of horse-rhythmed curse, as if Poseidon was their god-in-common: a rabble of murderers and graverobbers, Hittite deserters (fleeing Pharaoh, as we'd find) and cattle-thieves, some who already had the brand of Labrys, the double-axe seared into the left shoulder, showing they'd been caught once at this and had had their mercy-portion from Admiralty courts. The Taurian women answered loudest with shrieks and whistles and stamping, a sound like a mare rearing up to crush your skull and the raiders began to bunch up clumsily on their decks. Sallow faces behind all kinds of picked-up shields, some in the feather-crested helmets of slain Carian regulars out of our Eastern alliances, with curved reaping-hook swords or axes or knives only, archers behind them: their arms alone explained many a ship posted missing. We thudded past the wreck

At the snap of bowstrings Keta jerked me down, the first volley intended for us as steersmen, he said, and as arrows struck our shields I looked back at the wallowing merchanter and saw a blackhaired boy through the broken smoke. It was Icarus high up on the tilting stern—perhaps ten, his jaw working spastically but no sound—and with terror's eyes he'd climbed above the fires and death and I saw arrows stuck playfully in the wood all round him. A blindness came over me and I shouted my father's title in rage just as Perides howled

the boarding-order; and we stood together and hauled out the turn to come alongside the cog, and oars were shipped and we collided

And the sick chopping clatter and clang of weapons broke out as they all fell to it. The first deaths were branded raiders' who'd leaped right onto our marines' raised javelins, to pull them awry and embolden the others: these were dumped aside flailing like human fish and a chaos of cries went up, screams and goads over thuds of blades on oxhide, axes cracking helmets, snapping shafts: the Taurian women livid with rage with wrapped hair and breasts just leaped over their rails and hacked their way aboard the starboard enemy. The paired ships started to drift and I looked to port for Palesus but saw only his shield in the wall the Libyans formed to board their prey in one movement: the marines before me shoved and hacked forward and our deck all but emptied except for cowering oarsmen, and there lay the youth Nyos across two benches with an arrow in his left eye. Keta beside me spit, and wiped his eyes with it and clawed my shoulder. But raiders had begun to go down on three roaring clattering sides, hard bellies spilling meat, faces split like oysters, impaled on javelins they dropped all loose into the sea. Men who looked so much alike wrestling madly over the benches, grappling with oarsmen for something to hit with, a stabbed somebody doubled up in the hold—they were being crowded back to their far rails so the arrows let up and I risked a look to see the boy still perched on the swamping stern, pools of yellow fire. The fight was peaking: that vicious *clack! rattle rrinng!* of clashing blades that kept ending in screams, in mothers' names, filled the air; but some raiders with open wounds from their first fight were spent, and the Taurians had all theirs backed

up into their stern. The men against them seemed only to be warding off the scythe-strokes and some at the rear dove into the sea and never surfaced. To port it was desperate now too and some barechested raiders gambled on a leap-and-throw move just to get a blade past the press of Libyan shields; but then with only knives or in scuttling for what had dropped, they were being cut down. And from the butchery next to *Talos* I began to hear marines' voices calling on Rhea Dictynna, a name for Goddess as Judge: at that the raider captain (in a Carian crest) formed up his last defenses and then black fire-pots, weapons of pure spite sailed over the fury onto our deck, they burst and Keta shoved me flat and went down-bridge for a skin to help smother the flames. Marines and oarsmen jumped to help and I rose but they shouted *Stay Put* and Perides' orders were full of rage

—Well what can I do! I yelled and then I saw Keta take a javelin through the neck. It burst out under his locks in back and he died kick-twitching in the hold. I—couldn't believe it—I wavered—Things were bobbing on the bloody water all around our ships. A little fleet of them led to the Taurians and now I saw the last raider's head lop loose from a scythe, two sisters holding back his broken arms. The head splashed and bobbed in ripples of red. The priestess Alxiona stood up and *howled*, her stout tawny chest draped with her own blood from a neck-wound, and they were finished, mancorpses being kicked over the sides while their own crouched over the dead and the bleeding, twisting tourniquets and wailing and swinging their hair down loose over stilled faces. Years, years of grief to come for these few moments and I understood when some of them leaped and swam around behind the cog to grab at heels of the still-fighting raiders

paired with us: this, although more than once floating bodies moved a ways across the surface of themselves, floundered, stopped—sharks' work, an oarsman said later. And now the Libyans had prisoners in a flinching circle over there and I found my breath as I saw Palesus standing over the childish corpse of a Hittite with curly-toed boots. Then I lost sight of him as the Libyans rushed for their benches and turned the *Swift Queen* with its captive back toward *Talos*. I felt for the tiller—where Keta's hands had smoothed the—I wanted to impale these thieves, the way they did man-eating lions in the East

But a gull-cry came from the merchanter behind as the sea's last rush drew the fire in across the entire deck. A flame balled up, and Icarus disappeared, unmoving, down with the stern. They'd fight to the last aboard the cog with so much booty to feed their spite, these sons of Poseidon, so I breathed, and jumped, and with hatred to warm my bones I kicked deep for cover through the sea, winter-cold below the queer flicker, straining to see the ship or the boy through blue haze. Below where all warmth and light failed a gray shape emerged and shot off toward the ships' clanks and splashes: a shark, but he was gone almost before I could fear. Bodies were suspended down here too, arms up like drowsy heralds of the Night Mare

I needed to breathe, gulped air amid wrack and fire and dove again, straight down this time, forcing myself deeper with this last chance, forcing myself against that fear that awakens in the sea's upwelling darkness. My ears hurt and it was so cold that I could not follow these masses of bubbles much farther; but then the black flank of the ship was just beneath, easing down and down like a dream into oblivion and there was the boy, giving up his

last breath yet clinging to the arrowstudded stern. Why? I grabbed his wafted-up hair because my lungs were bursting and he was choking now but he let the ship go: an instant later his clutch was hurting me but he managed to kick upward and we broke through the half-burning surface. I had him, I had him! He vomited water and looked at me wildly like a beast at altar without its consent anymore: I can remember a bad intimation out of that but then the roll of the sea bore some of the fired oils right over us, we dove again and the message was forgotten in amazement and happiness and expectation of honor. We crawled just under the surface toward the grouping hulls. But then I couldn't be sure where to come up, the boats were turning, confused, so I rushed us for the largest one and we broke water near its tiller. Mistake! The last resistance was dying on the cog's afterdeck and one of them with a javelin saw us floundering, just in range—*We are his consolation!* my heart cried, and his blazing eyes smiled, and he threw

The boy's weight felt like a shield to lift but he screamed and I froze: there was not even time to kick backward and the javelin arced out and pierced the water and stuck in my left side, cracking downward against my bottom-left rib. The pain crumpled me in the water and I heaved on the shaft not believing, and then it hurt so much I could no longer move my legs, and I sank.

—Alright Glaucus? I said stopping short at the foot of a wooded rise. —That's how we keep the sea safe for imports. Answer that to the queens you must meet overseas, who tell you their Cretan protectors must be getting lazy! No doubt one of them grieves today for Icarus' mother—and Keta's clan too, and Nyos' with the long eyes

And I broke and hatred and sorrow overwhelmed me

and I put my palms to the Earth that She might take this poison from me. Oh, and had I not passively pretended to be proud of the whole thing later, brother holding my hand as they'd borne me home? Saying nothing to the eyes along the road seeking out their own kin, Palesus saying *Behold the boy our brother's wound gave life to*

—Poor body! I cried in paroxysms, jerking free of Glaucus' touch, I couldn't believe the heat of the blood inside my skull

—Come up here to this grassy spot off the road, just a moment, Glaucus beckoned. —That's it. They healed your rib well enough, but you'd better let the rest of this bleed some more. You must finish, Deucalion. Because things are even worse than you might suppose

Worse? He wouldn't say, yet, but had me lay my head in his lap as we rested in thick shady moss, facing a short view of the river's flow beneath the climbing sun. Oh, it had felt good to let this out into plain sight even to myself, and I remembered my mother once mentioning how, in her work with nobles of northern houses, they'd almost never talk with her about things inside them. Hiding it, their souls wounded too somehow, shame under bluster or coldness or manners. All of us, festering, like mountains-of-fire: boys' ears round Cnossos eager for the tale behind your proudflesh

Well, I remembered coming to aboard ship in Palesus' lap like this and thinking the javelin had been raked across me, for the pain across my whole lower chest. I pushed at the Taurian woman holding a poultice hard against the slit: they all guessed that the angle and the chipped bone had made the difference, and my brother kissed me and stayed right with me and washed me, it was the first time I'd seen his tears since his own thirteenth year and he

wore this very unbecoming broken smile as Perides brought over Icarus safe and sound. The boy made no thanks-gestures or words, just stared, twitches in his features

But of course our crew and duties were waiting, there were wounded and blood and scorch everywhere. More of our people died before midday and you could hear the souls passing in winds from their guts. We'd have buried them at sea but not this time, Palesus wanted the people at home to really see this: he was sure any families' resentments would end up feeding him support when he came to demand higher fleet appropriations, the way a parent works harder in the village fields for losing the baby—and—he was successful

— It can be a cold business, Deucalion.

Cold? Then what do you call it when we bring home only twelve of twenty prisoners? Palesus made them all swim out and take what was left of those civilians and our own people back from the sharks. Our cracks with dead friends and lovers, well, some of them turned away with a shame but Palesus came close to letting the others make targets of the captured. To just stand there while someone is—bitten to pieces—and all the way home he was hopping ship to ship, as if the contingent were his little island-realm. New procedure, he announces: from now on in cases like this half the copper or any spoils will be shared by the clans of our own dead, and the remainder halved between the Labyrinth and the primary victims' houses, if anyone shows to identify. I don't know. It was the blasphemous *elan*—he had the raiders' ships in tow and each of them tied to a talent so they could fondle what they'd murdered for, as he put it. Then he personally tore their holds apart and he found some waterpots

painted with that stiff clumsy bird you can hardly tell is an eagle, and others with marching soldiers on them, that style they call an artistic advance up north. Showed these all around as if he had Achaia dead-to-rights trying to destabilize the whole web of our trade. And *Hold that!* he shouts because our people were throwing raider-weapons over the sides. *Where's that Hittite's knife*, he says. *The second one I killed, he had a blade made of Arr-yan.*

—Iron? That stuff will turn anything, even bronze, Deucalion. Your brother was flame, for how his kin had been hurt

—But he kept it, I said. —You know it's forbidden to keep battle trophies like that. Even Perides objected, it's bad magic. And Palesus says, *Do you see that blueblooded bird on the pots? Do you know what that implies? My mother herself will cleanse this knife, and then we're going to clip some wings with it!* The time was right: he got three ships' worth of cheers. And she did cleanse it for him, Glaucus. He had the taste not to wear it at the shore this morning, but I'm sure he'll be showing it around when he goes north this moon. My mother is sending him because our Pelasgian cousins near a place called Athens say that the silver mines that we opened there long ago are in some kind of jeopardy. I didn't hear the rest but, you see, he'll be up there to demonstrate their continuing connections with us. And between his spirits and this iron knife—it can all get out of control

—And was justice done the raiders? Glaucus asked, trying to steady things

—Depending on whom you ask. We didn't capture any repeat offenders for the blood field, and if the times aren't skewed enough, some of the other twelve visited their Poseidon in that west wing shrine my mother added,

to thank *him* for the mercy of just a branding. I will have that so-called god out of here, when my day comes.

I had never spoken this last before but some part of me was glad for it: as we got up, composed ourselves and descended the hillock to the road again, a memory seemed to reach me, of something the I in this body at least had not done—saying *Yes, in the oldest days this was how we learned to play with the gods, for reasons: Dare, dare to live these things you feel.* And I felt lighter and stronger and pleasantly warier now, even excited to recall who had kept Glaucus coming after me; and to try to show more poise I offhandedly asked what he'd meant by *even worse*, as we trod between ruts of wagons along the road. Before he answered, though, Glaucus remarked the smaller ruts and hoofprints of a chariot's passage at our feet: together we mused how, in general, only old officers like Perides had the toleration of our horse-priests to ride such a thing. On the mainland with their bigger-bred horses, such a contraption meant status: here it was but convenience, to speed older leaders toward Katsambas if need be

—Which is what they said at first overseas, too, he ended. —Well, Deucalion, I understand that you sit in on all the councils you can, so I'm sure you've heard the complaints against that petty king Kokalos in Sicily, trying to squeeze us now for passage of our own shipments of tin from the Balearics. If I know your brother that won't go on much longer. First, of course, he'll have to deal with complaints from Trianda in Rhodes, about the Achaian settlers horning in close to our station there. Then we have a caste of upstart priests of that mouse-oracle Apollo trying to take over half the year's rites up north at Delphi, which would make me laugh except that

they've got Achaian priestesses to shill right along and help the conservative local folk accept the change. I know, this is old news, but the point is, why take over a major oracle unless you've got bigger things coming which later you'll want to justify through its good name? Why is this new Pharaoh, mind you the one who's purging his mother's very afterlife, why is he trying to deal direct with Achaia now and cut out the middleman, ourselves? As if we don't know this. It's hardly that Achaian shipping is more dependable! No, it's for something in *here* they want to change, everywhere they can, Glaucus said tapping his temple, and suddenly his color darkened

— Do you realize that today in the holy city of the Hittites they'll chop your head off for questioning His Grace? That Pharaoh can cut the nipples off a disrespectful concubine? No wonder they hate him in Pharos and the Delta towns. I thought it was all pretty stories my mother told me of how your ancestors left the Delta when that Menes-king started hammering people into slave-armies. Now I listen better. May I say that I like you for what you suffer in your heart.

— You're as angry as I am, or was, I said

— Yes, because I don't know what to do, what to suggest except that you back your brother up, and not despicably submit to what's going on everywhere. Listen, you can either deal with your guilt about power or get ready to lose it, my friend. If my loyalty to the House makes me unkind, well, you understand.

Aye. Enough sycophants around, native merchants greedy to exploit instabilities, foreign exiles eager to fatten themselves in Cretan clover. Some of them I knew: a blue-eyed half-Pelasgian boy named Orneus, come here with his mother, trying hard to disown her old-style piety

and find out who his father was, just dying to page for some local priest or prince. Meanwhile he was learning our ciphers (nicknames too?) and watching chariots pass with big dreams in his eyes. Another one in Tukato's charge was a Hurrian youth whom friends here called Razorclam, come here on a merchanter from the Pharaoh-devastated East, a worshipper of horses; but this boy, if he shared the Archanes priests' love of women's attire as part of worship, would not yet make the sacrifice which alone could sanctify the practice as a life-choice. I could not blame his hesitation but the women here did not appreciate his use of Tukato's patience for the pleasure of his loins. And Icarus? Why wouldn't he help us return him to his island-kin? Tukato was sure the boy's spasms were real but he was an asocial pest at times, unless we kept him busy in Iris' or Kudru's craftshops or at the boat we were building together. Here he could get the tools and training of which most people only dreamed; and he knew there was hiding-space inside our own delight with healing him

—Then tell me the worst of all you know, Glaucus. If I'm to help the House—you know my mother has assigned me to work with a new trader coming here soon from Achaian Pylos, and

—Yes, she mentioned that, it's to get his folk's purple basalt flowing in here steadily, so the shops can use it to make those ghastly, over-grand fruit-kraters that sell to Egyptian nobles, Glaucus grimly grinned. —You'll do fine if you don't expect much civility. But alright, Deucalion. You know that the Lion King of Mykenai, High Lord of all Achaians as he styles himself, can scarcely keep all the lesser mainland houses from pillaging each other unless there are more interesting targets someplace else. There's

no depth of lineage, no web of custom to hold anybody back with these wanderers—just as Egypt says about outsiders like us, eh? But put that map into your mind that your grandmother wove into the throne room tapestry. Ever hear of Athens, across the bay from Mykenai? Well, you see, there's been an age of uneasy blood between those two kingdoms. And also between them is a strip of land called the Isthmus, a sort of brutch of their own, which by mutual neglect became so lawless that neither trade nor travelers could use the road across it.

—I remember, I said. —And that's why our shipping-station on an island near there did so well. Aegina, it's called. It seems strange to say this, but don't tell me that Mykenai and this Athens have actually cooperated?

—That's where it's worse than you think. We still haven't got much detail, but just last moon, some apparent princeling from a minor barony got together a force, and drove his way from Mykenai's side of the Isthmus clear to Athens, and opened the road. But losses in shipping-business are not the problem. You see, the king of Athens, or rather the present conqueror of its citadel, has no children because of a curse from Goddess, which means of course that the women around him think he's worthless. As a devotee of Poseidon he returns the compliment, but all this goes to make him believe that the princeling who cleared the Isthmus Road is some long-lost sprout of wild oat. If only it was just a loss of shipping-tithes! You see, the arrival in Athens of this princeling's force was just what the old king needed to get rid of all the Pelasgian women's hopefuls around his throne. He didn't lose any time, and the fact is, now we're going to lose the silver mines up there at Laurium. This king of Athens and his gloriously convenient heir are

killing everybody who might ever recall that Cretans dug those mines first, and pulling women off public councils wherever they can get away with it. I haven't digested half the implications but I've yet to think of a good one. Killing our cousins, taming down women's powers and putting up a full-time Goddess of War—you can buy a lot of new-style loyalty with those mines.

—Not to mention that Mykenai and this Athens, together

—Exactly. They hate each other but together they hate us like brothers of the lion-pride. Why, because we shave? Because we like to look good? Palesus is the type they really scorn, a refined young man but as rugged as themselves.

—My brother knows this?

—Your parents were proud to confirm many things he's discovered for himself, including things from that voyage of yours. And I don't blame you for that look, Deucalion, but Ariadne—well, try to understand, they want you as a kind of counterweight here, they know how you are.

—Really? How am I?

—You're as brave as your brother, as Bull well knows, Sweet Wine, Glaucus said, including my name's affectionate meaning in his firmness. —But to your family you're a priest first. You notice that your brother hasn't rushed to find a War Leader to replace old Perides. Palesus may try to fuse that office with the throne, which if I may say so will place him right in the trend these days behind Pharaoh. You, though, could balance that, out of your own nature, or even formally undo his changes later. That's one of the beauties of our kingship, isn't it, that nobody gets too dug-in. If I were you I'd be proud for the

way your sister looks down the road for you. She is a woman! And rather a mystery herself, Glaucus smiled now, — whose unfolding we all await.

We walked. Yes, brother and sister each had their ways of promising that tomorrow would follow from yesterday; and what Palesus might try to force, Ariadne would seek through custom to ensure. From behind the scenes, where I preferred to work, I could help or hinder both; but in any case we all well-knew that mother's and grandmother's relations would virtually rule the House from outside it some years yet. Just how the clans wanted things, an overlap of experienced hands on the tiller: likewise, they'd approved keeping *hieros gamos*, the sacred marriage within the House this time

And you'd done your share of ensuring certain things: too young for your times and ambition, like Hatshepsut's son after all, you'd been only twelve when sister and brother began their Bull Dance for claiming the throne if they could, and you foresaw that with near-twenty years till the next Dance for High Office, time would condemn you to losing your own competition to the young: no man in his thirties could hold off youth like Palesus. They'd planned the priest's life for you but it was the throne you wanted, seeing how much freer father's life was above the Kouretes' endless rounds of hunting and bloody sacrifice: so you'd told them you were a king's son and you would not live to be just some extraneous fop of the House, and the big words had caused enough talk for them to let the Dance make a lesson of you, at least. And you never imagined that with omnipotent parents it would be your blood making sacred the circle of the arena's sands, not until the Day had come and you were out in front of Bull before five thousand people and the throne, brother and sister just too good at playing Him for the score of

cousins and hopefuls-to-the-clergy, yourself almost ridiculous for your size and age among your rivals. Now you had to excel, or live as a true fool the rest of your days, it was all different here, Bull cared no more for your family status than for anything else about you except how you acted in terror of death—and you saw the blood-splashing holes He'd gored in people's ribs, heard the arms and femurs breaking as He tossed and trampled the fallen, you and the others jostling for position before the horns to shine with maneuvers, or just outlast the others till their share of terror betrayed them out of the Dance. And then? You saw that you might help sister or brother get killed by competing against them, you turned all you had against the others and then Bull had turned on you, alone to one side with a quick wheel-about: somehow you held your ground, and more, charged Him because at least death was peace if you failed, you seized the horns rising upward to kill you and in slipping off halfway-over you found your hands holding on athwart His backbone—later they called it a flying handstand but all you'd wanted was to keep behind those skull-smashing hooves. And despite your clumsy fall that moment of lucky poised mastery had done something more for the crowd and throne than your death of itself might have; and so they'd appropriated the prodigy and declared you brother's Heir from that day, another sign of the deep strength of youth in the House of Labrys clan. It was a future as sure as one could be

—But I hope I won't confuse you, Deucalion, if I advise you to speak with your brother again, publicly too, and give him all you can of what he needs from you. We probably can't stop this flood everywhere, but if we don't hold our own, the Labyrinth will have to deal with more than a few resentful clanspeople.

—Yes, I answered with a deep breath, to fetch me more of the deeper calm this walk had bestowed. The trees swirled their leaves a little in a light breeze, the ancient trees, living loom of the world—but as I looked up to measure my heart by that eternal peace in which Mount Juktas dreamed, there was something wanting. I liked the glow out of Glaucus' russet face and body, the strong strides of a man who faced up to all he could, and turned it to the service of his people.

* * *

Ten days later my brother embarked for what was fast becoming Athenian territory on the mainland. Pasiphae and Minos gave him a civilian ship and careful instructions: he was to council with and hearten Pelasgian cousin-clans there, and do no more than lodge protest in Athens for their treatment and the seizure of the mines. Mention the shipments of tin that sail on the goodwill between our houses, Palesus was told, and see what new trade-terms they offer: they might take the mines now but, even if silver was more valuable than gold, no one could win a battle with silver swords. He also had permission to show the iron knife, a ploy to make our feelings more considerable

He couldn't wait to go. Palesus' fusion of power and beauty was real but he was precariously heady with the mission, full-ready to make himself remembered when they later spoke the name *Minotauros* up north. And when I did come to speak with him, more than once, he was already living in some other realm, launching into speeches about the world's fresh need to know that we were the Cretans, ancient masters of the seas and all

things civilized, that we'd thrive as our ancestors did and would match the manhood of all comers. On and on—after phrases like that last one I wondered was he hurting in secret somewhere for our shared years of slighting glances from Achaian guests. I thought so. If to his best friends he already was a man's man, I saw looks among even them on that day he embarked, for to everybody's surprise he had himself driven to Amnisos in a chariot. I was embarrassed for the sight of him streak-ing along so erect and utterly on-show behind two little native ponies. But he was my brother, my future king, and like Glaucus and Ariadne I tried to see him from years ahead, when we'd be glad his strength was ours

Then on the last morning of this fifth month's Willow Moon, word came to the Labyrinth that my trader-guest, one Cadimmetes of Pylos, had beached with his first cargo of purple basalt and awaited reception at Amnisos villa. While my mother found an available priestess and priest to escort me with a measure of pomp, my father fussed over my clothes and tried to put something of the predator about me, lending me his best leopard-spotted trouserskirt and tying in my dagger with a rope of gold, keeping me barechested to show my rib and giving my eyes a little flash of evil with black kohl. I should also look like a man who could make others rich, he said, so he made sure I donned gold armrings, a necklace of that deep blue-purple lapis that traveled a year before it saw the sea, another of silver with a Labrys suspended, and a high-crowned priest's cap with a lily-braided brim. As he admired his own youth in me my mother came back with Cratus and Cleite: it would help to keep our dealings in the sphere of religious practice, she said, for after all, if there were no benefits to it we could simply welcome the man with his own Achaian kin

here. *Offer to begin your business with a moment at the mariners' cave*, she suggested.

Cratus and Cleite agreed as we walked seaward down the valley, especially because the wind had shifted the day before and was blowing hot dry blasts from the south now, coming clear across the sea and down our mountains still as baking-hot as its source in the Libyan deserts, and in each gust were a hundred flies and a shower of irritating sand. Some springs, Crete was spared this, but not this year: in Egypt they called it The Breath of The Ass, after one of their fourfooted gods who devoured all green things, and everywhere it hit there were short tempers and unusual crimes before the courts. We felt ourselves shoved along the usually-pleasant road by hot dry gusts, the trees rattled with it and the flies were ceaseless at us: the very ocean looked out-of-sorts, its waves flattened out and running backwards away from the shore with every Breath. Cratus cursed himself for wearing his quilted and tasselled jerkin, it clung to his back and caught the sand: Cleite's carefully-set strands of gems were all but lost in her thick black hair as the wind tore at it, and wrapped her bellskirt round her legs. I decided to hurry our guest a bit toward Cnossos' indoor amenities, while the cave's quiet coolth might soothe a man salty with voyage.

—Oh dear, what is all this now? Cratus said as we reached the head of the harbor road: a crowd had gathered just to the right of the villa, where the cart-path passed its red-pillared porch. Though it didn't look like trouble there was none of the usual stir for my family's presence. Most of the people were children and youths with little to do but watch port curiosities: many I knew from days when Icarus and I came down. But some adults and harbor-hands were paying close heed to something

too. There went Icarus himself threading the group's far side with his dirty kilt and boy's potbelly, and now I saw our chief artisans Iris and Kudru coming up beach to me, after their inspection of the basalt offloaded already to an ox-drawn cart. When they hailed us and rendered fist-to-brow salutes most of the crowd noticed, and followed the gesture, and parted; and there stood my guest Cadimmetes, a portly man scarcely bigger than me with a red beard and loose white tunic, and a small brown Egyptian man stood with him. It looked as if together they'd been regaling the crowd with all they shared in the arts of horse-and-chariot, for right in their midst was a full rig of Cretan make with two ponies in the traces: together my guests abandoned the crowd to make proper native salutes, and as a hot gust raked over us all, the stevedore Podes came before me with Iris and Kudru at his back

— Good day Deucalion! Podes said briskly, with habit's innocent disregard of the fact that I was no more the boy wanting queer foreign tales. — Old Cordax and some of the fellows here heard you were coming, and I have a cousin who drives Admiral Perides about, so we thought we'd send over to Katsambas for him and this rig—just between us, you know sir, to help you impress your guests. It's a big one and the three of you can ride straight to the city, just like your brother, right sir? Ohh, he sang on, —I tell you, they're already amazed at how light-built it is, the rails of wild figwood and everything, they know all about the art back where they're from. Make them at home a bit, right sir, for the business?

— But they're *not* at home, man, Iris put in ahead of me with some contempt: she was a plump and delicate woman of thirty who'd come to the House four years ago from our western White Mountains, all Cretan blood

with dark goatish eyes, and we all knew her as a real daemon of the shops, which is to say an inspiration. This was because, while she excelled her training as a fresco-painter, Iris made it her place to speak plainly the views of her colleagues, whatever the throne might think: I could hardly scold Podes for improvising (he was second cousin to a former Cnossian priest), but Iris was right, and I was beginning to appreciate more the people our parents placed around themselves. Glaucus and I had had a fine supper with Iris before his set-sail for the islands and there was yet good feeling from it in her eyes, despite the words.

They're not at home. No; and bless old Cratus and Cleite for letting me learn on my own here, but what to do? I liked the stylish skimpy cut of Iris' smokeblue kilt, her deep olive skin with a golden bellychain that romped when she walked, her dark mop of kinky curls and the headband of bright cropped feathers at her brow, a fashion from Cyprus. Where was I? Kudru the older jeweler stood behind her keeping his squinty cragged face deliberately oblivious through the royal pause, watching the shore trees

—Is it good working stone, Kudru? I asked and he gave me a strong pouting nod as Iris stirred on her feet

—Don't tell me you promised them this in my name, Podes.

—I—Well, we—I mean, your brother—We all thought
—We mustn't be arguing in their faces, blast it, Cleite said. —And where were Cratus and myself supposed to ride, Podes, with the rock? I agree with Iris, Deucalion. And I don't think Tukato's people or most anybody will appreciate both the Queen's sons swimming with the tide. Cursed flies, get off!

– Can we just proceed with this? said Cratus as another gust raked us, and I smarted under Cleite’s brusque assessment

– Yes, Cratus, announce me and introduce us. Podes, Iris, Kudru, thank you. Bring Icarus to see me after he visits you next, if you will.

– He’s very gifted. A pleasure sir, Kudru answered with a subtle ushering of Iris out of our path: she went because she knew I’d heard, and now as Podes backed uncertainly away she and Kudru reentered the villa of Creusa the mistress of the port, maybe thinking they’d find Icarus stuffing his face in there. Iris: she’d seemed troubled as anyone by these signs of foreign collusion. With her skills, though, she’d never lack for patrons

– and brother to The Aridela, and second-born son to the throne of Crete, Prince Deucalion, Cratus concluded to our guests: I spread my arms gently with palms outward, smiled, bowing lightly as he added his and Cleite’s introductions. The children and others lingering to watch all this looked graver than perhaps they should have: why? Another prince welcoming more of these white-skinned bulls from the sea. Without looking I seemed to feel the presence of Velkanos in the distance beyond Dia

The Egyptian, named Payare, agent to the lord of Heliopolis and his traveler in spices and beans, spoke a good Cretan full of wonderful flourishes for so proud a young heir: he named his mother and father and the totems of his house, too, bowed his tanned shaven head after holding my eyes well (my father had taught me to watch for that). Over his forty years’ bony grace he wore a long linen robe dyed light brown, and this was the color of his teeth too. His easy civility I’d seen most in Egyptians from their seacoast: they did not much like the ocean but

in busy ports there was too much diversity for people to get crazy with the conqueror's heat. Payare reached for a touch of my hand and when he'd had it he unobtrusively fingered a disk of their sun-god hung round his neck. So he was aware that our kingship had the ancient death within it still: considering what I'd heard of the stigmas growing up round it overseas, it was pleasure he'd acknowledge my existence. A wizened man who lost sleep mainly over business

—And we are honored to meet our new partner in trade Cadimmetes, I said. —Welcome sir. We hope this weather didn't strain your crew or your comfort, but we can offer to help that as you wish.

—Thank you, he answered, blue eyes looking up quickly from the chestnut ponies, and then from Cratus to Cleite to the ponies again. —I am first factotum to the baron of Pylos. I bear his regard, and the finest stone Messenia has to offer. Whoa there. Our business will make the trip pay I'm sure.

Even the little ones' eyes swung to me for the differences felt in these men. Well, he seemed alright for an Achaian. Maybe no one in his house looked the lord in the face: our painters on loan in the East said there were such places. Cadimmetes' red furze of a beard was pointed at the chin in their elders' style, adding quaintness to his burly breadth: his golden hairclasp, and white tunic stitched with a grayblue stallion rampant with a startled dove above it, made him a bright figure next to Payare. Clean tasselled porpoise-skin boots with grommets of ivory: a heavy black belt sagged under his waist but he bore not so much as a dagger on show. I didn't like his chest's blunt heraldry but he seemed just another narrow-eyed baron's traveler, no real shoulders, fair skin

— We hope it will, too, Cleite offered smoothly smiling but at the same instant Cadimmetes had gone back to discussing the ponies with Payare. Most mainland folk scorned this little breed but some part of both fellows was in love with all forms of horse, surely a good sign: Cadimmetes scarcely noticed the hot winds tearing down the shore hills, a fly roamed his temple at will

— Yes, we were just showing your people the workmanship here, look at this jointing, of horn no less, he said to the curious dubiety around him

— How interesting, Cratus said from his distance next to Cleite. — Well! Let us signal the oxen behind us and be on our way, we have a morning's walk to the city

— Walk? Oh, the three of us can ride this beauty. Meaning the prince here, Deucalion is it? And Payare of course. This is my heart's blood back home, driving, my friend. I even invest in the big breeds. Won't you, uh, allow me the honor, prince? That harbor-slave of yours gave the impression

— Slave! Cleite broke in to correct him: I think she was angry thrice-over now, and our people could see it. But just as she and Cadimmetes began to fix each other in their gazes and the latter looked surprised to have to deal with her at all, the world around us seemed to fall still. Gulls poised on the air but were not fishing. Down beach, a dog scratched vainly in sand and stuck its head in the hole, barked and dug again: another leaped and snapped at air, the ponies stamped in place and in a moment the sailors and stevedores about us caught this too. There was a silence like that between crest and crash of a wave, and then a hot Breath blew down the hills, and up came a rumble, a long earthmuffled roar

The entire curve of coastline from western Katsambas

to the headland was vibrating, rumbling louder than it did with winter sea pounding the shore, and I reached first toward Cleite but she drew back her hands and spread her feet, eyes down, palms out to soak it up. Some people and children clutched and knocked on the villa's red pillars while others stepped fearfully back from the house as the Earth's black voice beneath us grew to one long rumble of thunder, growing louder still: Iris and Kudru came rushing out with Icarus and others and so much disorder began to startle the ponies, then the children in their turn—birds and shoremen had started to scream in their ways and both Cadimmetes and Payare showed some fear as everything erupted. I was worried for my House with how long and how bad this might become, and then as a certain *sway* took my body I had to laugh, What else could go wrong right off today? And that was when we all saw the very ground ripple, a shock beneath the sand shot out of the shingle and humped the whole beach, *boom!* right under us and disappeared beyond the tree line, rousting sparrows out of the crowns. Then the temblor's rumbling dulled, and died away; and a gust hit us with hot sand, and the ocean was laving the shore

People shouted again with relief, and the children took up each other's wails and cries: Cadimmetes seemed no man to let Cleite's anger seem the cause of the shock, and had done very well keeping the ponies from bolting—better indeed than Cleite and Iris and others at calming the little ones' cacaphony this time. *It's alive, so it moves!* they were trying, and *That's the big Bull we can learn to dance, see?* No good though; and in fact I saw how many jumping children were looking right at the blue-eyed horse-master man with their fear

— May I suggest we all move away from the shore this instant, Deucalion, said Cratus over the crying (he was old enough to remember why one should). — Come then, Cleite, we'll see the cargo to the custom house ourselves. Our prince will graciously see you to the city as you wish, he informed my guests

— But wait! called Iris now with two little ones at her legs: Cleite herself was fast in the grip of another three of them. — Deucalion, Prince Deucalion, why don't you tell us that story we heard from Glaucus the other night? Remember our big friend with the ocean-colored eyes, children? Oh, listen to the prince now, he'll tell you how a very scary thing that happened to some ponies came out alright, there there! Deucalion, please

Oh, fish heads! It was perfect Iris to thrust her message through against all odds. But if I was going to ride—Was I? To help with this might counter any talk down here later. The trouble was, this tale was a fresh bit of news out of Pharaoh's tramlings through the cities of the East, from a battle-place Glaucus had called Kadesh, and it was not going to be flattering to either guest. Still, that part of me that had liked to hear of Bull breaking loose was just too tempted, I wanted to show I could calm things at least as Cadimmetes had; and they both wore their patience plainly as I excused myself

— Who hears me! I began with a clap, and between the gesture, my clothes and the women's dragging, I was surrounded in a moment. — This is a story from the far red land of our mother Europa, where the sun is born. And out there, let's see, there is a city, called Kadesh. And in the realm of Kadesh live the people who know, beyond all others, these creatures we call the ponies. Did you ever see a pony before today? Don't the holy ones of

Archanes have a whole herd up there that we can visit? So! These people of Kadesh know all about the ponies. And one day, here came the great, big king of another land. And he marched over to Kadesh with all his nasty friends in a big long line, and he wanted some ponies. He likes to have the ponies pull his wagons so his friends can win all the fights! No, stay now, this is a *good* story! So! The big king was pounding, and pounding on the doors of Kadesh. I want ponies! he said. And I want all boy-ponies too, because they're better for my wagons! But No, No, the pony-people inside of Kadesh said. You put a nasty bit in our little ponies' mouths. You don't love them the way the holy priests and priestesses do. You make them look silly, pulling your wagons with spikes and things all over and through the corn, so go away! No ponies for you! Well, who *dared* to say No Ponies to this great big king of another land? My, he scared everybody, with the way he liked to stand up big stones with pictures on them to tell everybody what people he made his slaves. Why, he even rubbed his mother's name off the—Well! Was he angry at Kadesh! No ponies! So! He went back to his big long line of his nasty friends and he got up in his spikey wagon. And he said, *Let's take* these Kadesh people and *all* the ponies! *Readaayy!* But! *Voom!* the big door of the city flew open! And who came out? Who came galloping out? It was the mother of all the ponies in Kadesh! A mare! And she was a big-eyed mare and she went galloping galloping round and round and let all the boy-ponies smell her heat, and all the boy-ponies got so confused? and Which way? Which way? they said because they loved the mare! The ponies forgot all about the big angry king and pulled his wagons every old way! Did he look silly? What do you think?

—Is that the end? smiled one little girl picking sand from her eye.

—Yes. For now. So you see? It's alright. What a crazy old Bull we have here, I'm glad we have our own ways to help, like in the story! We must be going.

—You touched Glaucus' telling, Iris smiled with multi-valent satisfaction: she and Kudru and Cleite took a gathering down to the basalt for another look. I tried to let some of my own smile fade now, for no, my guests hadn't missed a thing; but if Payare showed good manners in ignoring my own poor ones, Cadimmetes' face was a solemn invulnerability. And now I'd be alone with them

No use pretending I hadn't meant to draw some kind of line. Considering the tale's real end, I'd gone easy: Glaucus said that some officer'd had the wit to slash open the mare's belly, tossed her cut-off tail before his king, and then they'd sacked the place. Wouldn't think of trading for them. *Idiot*: one who will not be ruled: new word for the new man

—Send her on, Cordax! I called down beach. —We'll hang close!

—Oh, our pace will be double the wagon's my friend, said Cadimmetes gathering the reins; so I ungracefully asked him to go slowly. Somehow I'd imagined I might walk alongside, but that would look even worse

—Are there robbers? Payare wondered with a look to my dagger

—Of course not! No, no. I just feel that—people might like to ask you about the stock you gentlemen come to trade.

Payare, unconvinced, mounted up into the car and then I took my place at Cadimmetes' right hand: he snapped the reins.

We started trundling inland, and did leave the wagon a bit behind, but I'd let us roll up-road till we reached the altars and the cave, that'd be alright. We weren't too heavy for the ponies and I liked the pounding of their hooves, the gay meetings of their heads and their muscled buttocks' jouncing: Cadimmetes praised their high step to Payare. I made some talk on what these things meant to our Admiral Perides, of whom they might've heard. But—it made me feel unwell not having my feet on the ground while I was moving. And maybe because, in our tradition, the Green God Who fed the crops with His life belonged to the farmers and the commons, I started to feel like another land's lord, too high-up and fast to talk with anybody, empty as the road was just now. We rattled along and climbed the hill toward the cave. Hot blasts struck our faces and the ponies' backs grew sweated already: it made me feel like a dull old man but I did not enjoy this

With a touch of my hand I got Cadimmetes to stop and wait the wagon a bit at the altars: instantly he warned me never to do that as he was driving, though he complied. Then I mentioned that we might bless our business in this time-honored cave to our right, which was known to bring very good luck to everyone from pregnant women to marines—my fault I guessed, but Cadimmetes scowled as he looked back for the wagon

—Can it be like this all year? Payare gently exclaimed.
—Such a pure whiteness in those mountains ahead, and so many different flowers, running all together down to such a blue! What an unfortunate wind. But thank you, young man, I made The Gods safe-voyage thanks at our beaching today.

—How wise is it to go down in there when Poseidon Earthshaker is stamping his hooves, Cadimmetes in-

quired. — I'm afraid I don't come a voyage anywhere to play with that.

Then he added with his first deliberate blue-eyed stare:

— And if I say so, those places spook me. They're full of bats' dung and ooze and bad air like a toothless old lady. The important thing here is, it would be better for the horses to keep onward now.

— Very kind of you though, this man Payare told me across our driver's vantage before I could respond. — We like to find this in a trading partner. Tell us, what is your great temple like?

We. Us. They were confusing me and I did not know what to do with a kind of violence already in our midst: Cadimmetes and I were afoul of each other and I needed to make this work to prove myself—quickly I asked The Powers to help us begin again. Deep breath of my land: a little brightness flowed through me, and I spread my arms demonstratively wide

— Sirs, we are standing in it.

— Oh. I understand, said polite Payare. — There comes our business along behind now, young man. Yes, your kingdom is as splendid as travelers say, he added and Cadimmetes flicked the reins as lightly as he smiled upon the road.

I liked Spice and Beans, though not to trust. And if I had given my share of offense, well, I'd have said already there was something being delivered *through* Cadimmetes, he just didn't seem to feel anything strongly enough himself to be insulting our people and shrines. We rolled down through the almond and olive groves in the shore hills' lee and began passing houses and their bright fields, moving up valley and (as he'd said) doing

what felt good to the horses: woods and open lowland gave way to more houses and common yards and gardens, weavers' shacks, wells and little orchards with dropping blossoms, and we rolled by people with yoked jars or waterpails, kilted boys switching mules stacked with kindling. Everybody noticed our passing and a clutch of old fellows stood up with hails from their game of draughts in the morning shade: after moments like that I was more relaxed about appearances and now there lay just a mile or two of open valley between us and Cnossos. It now seemed the Breath's hot lashings were at rest: home ground for me, sun-shot, sea-aired, lush

— We noticed that monument ahead from offshore, how long did that take your builders' corps? That is scale, Cadimmetes, said Payare gazing ahead above the road and I told him that truly we hadn't moved a stone up there, it was magic of the land

— I'll wager your priestesses keep it cropped as clean as goats would, Cadimmetes said with some of the glare-within-a-smile he'd had for Cleite. — Why? To keep men cowed by their death, of course, like old granny with the windingsheet.

What was this, then? Riling me with some game

— Well, in a simple sort of understanding, I said slowly, — Mount Juktas could evoke the man like Talos, say, meaning the giant people call our military. *He Who Consents To Suffer*. Or he's the hero who Steps Forward and harrows the place some people call Hell, where souls who've lost their way malingers. As a priest I can tell you that in the oldest stories, that was a woman, but nobody here will bother forcing you to honor any of it. Can you understand? If not, try to ignore it and show us what else you have to offer besides rocks.

At this Payare fairly exploded in congratulatory laughter, repeating looks of supportive wonder to me and a kind of *See? I told you* amusement to his friend with the reins: Cadimmetes kept to his own blithe smile as I pointed him leftwards away from the custom house road and along the base of the high wooded ridge east of Cnossos itself. And then their eyes began to fill with the Labyrinth's visible rooftops, its alabaster glints and crimson pillars, one set of huge white stately gypsum horns just showing above and behind a brake of male and female cypress trees. Good: we were there: I wanted my home to drop the bellies from both their sails, and I hardly felt anymore what I had lost, to be making my home a tool of anger

—What is that, a town inside the town? said Payare.

—Ohh, my

—I don't believe it. A town all one building? You hardly notice it from—I don't believe it, Cadimmetes echoed

He must've expected to sight a walled-up citadel as at home, but the Labyrinth's northern approach ahead of us lay open and level with these meadows, only a few fine white houses and the custom house branch of the road between the narrowing and steeper sides of Cnossos valley. Now before they could speak again our path dipped downward between the Labyrinth's east bastions and the banks of the Kairatos River, sliding along seaward to our left: the cypress trees were fewer along this side and I leaned back subtly to let their eyes climb

A white stairway wide as two people and with terraces staggered along its climb led upward from the road in zigzag flights, through gardens of lilies and blue anemone and red corn poppies: the stairs' layout spared one the

steepness of the hill on this side, and the Labyrinth was looming above us now, the high east bastion's white alabaster facades crowning the stairs with an entrance halfway up the hill. Above this doorway's lintel of red-painted wood rose four upper stories overlooking the gardens: these were built right into the hillside and each story had a porch upheld by crimson pillars, cypress-wood with their tapered ends down in night-blue pediments. My family's apartments were over here for the morning sun but I declined to say anything so personal: it was hitting them all at once, the white and multicolored massiveness of the place with its trimmings of greens and yellows and russets, with its *glowing* even where the sunshine had moved on, and either side of those stacked porches the long white colonnades and verandahs loomed over us, tier upon tier receding upward with the hill in a kind of crazy-roofed complex that seemed to keep shifting its angles and shadows before your eyes, vines and creepers overspreading walls of limestone laced with wooden beams so that the walls could play when the Earth moved. Here and there little balconies jutted out over secret stairways: birds shot in and out of the lightwells; and the edge of every receding roof was decked with a row of stylized Bull's horns, painted red or white or black in alternating pattern. We'd passed house staff with laundry and baskets down near the stair-landings' catchbasins, seen a few of the Daedalaë talking in the gardens, the colored concentric circles on their foreheads showing them to be architects and their initiates: people moved in the high outer corridors, priestesses at morning prayer-walks, men watering potted palms. With their doings, with the birds, the shadows and colors and the erratic collidings of the planes of the roofs and staggered porches, the whole

building seemed to be moving even as it thrust itself up from the hill's green bushy feet: my guests looked full of confounded questions but now we were clopping down close to the turn across the stream

—I advise you to slow down as you cross this bridge. Then turn right, I said with eyes-front. —Your lodgings will be up there on the left of the main inland road. I'll see you there and arrange your audience.

—Makes you—dizzy to look at it, Cadimmetes said as Payare loosed a little laugh, trying to take the whole place in

We rumbled across the alder footbridge to the south side of the Labyrinth, and trotted up wide paved causeway that came out of our inland hills, paralleled the stream called Vlychias along the south gardens, and led one straight up into the west courtyard entrances: as you came round that turn the building swung itself into fuller view. This side of the hill was also steep: broad white irregular shifting tiers of red-pillared rooms and corridors and horn-decked roofs, a lightwell there, a stairway: doors at ground level stood open to freshen the halls of this south wing with the morning scents of the gardens sloping down to the sunny stream. From the Labyrinth's southwest corner (where you climbed a pillared portico up to the courtyards) a long open corridor ran parallel with the stream and causeway, and within its columns you could glimpse halfshaded figures of tribute-bearing Cre-tans along its walls: at its end halfway across the building the corridor turned north and led into the central courtyard, invisible to us, but from here you got the best sense of how this crazy-roofed complex of joined buildings was not unlike ourselves and our hybrid history. Opalescence of limestone and gypsum, half-overgrown with creepers

and flowering plants: smokes rising from shrine-altars within, and kilns and workshops: partridges perched on the tips of rooftop horns: even to me it looked impenetrable yet open, hoary and thriving, fearsome and a place where humans were the aim of its amenities. As I dismounted the light on it changed, a shimmer of whiteness

—My, *lords!* Payare said. —If you know what I—it has this savage—it's *luminous*. How many rooms?

—Counting storage and shrines and all? About fifteen hundred, I think.

Payare laughed with pleasure as Cadimmetes dismounted and went straight for the ponies' heads to settle and thank them in his way: The Breath resumed and came hard and hot down the hills, sand ticked our ears and faces. Then with more charmed exclamations Payare turned to look over the Guest House behind us and remarked how its front walk's slabs of light pink schist seemed to mimic the swirling shade beneath the trees: he had Cadimmetes take in its stone drinking trough and footbath fed by a pipe, too, but his friend said watering the ponies should wait a bit. Trying still, I went and joined him a moment to stroke and pat the creatures, who snorted and chuffed and shook their sweated chestnut barrels. They liked Cadimmetes' hands: such a different feeling from him with them close by. Again, he scarcely noticed the wind and flies at all and even sang them strophes of some Achaian song I'd never heard

By now it seemed things might still go alright: this was one of the buildings my mother'd had Iris and the Daedalaë redecorate and its gaeity was a help as I showed them in. In the east room there was a gaming board and dining furniture, the scent of golden-drop flowers and, on the walls, a frescoe of partridges dancing

round the arrival of a kingly hoopoe: the west chamber held the sunken pool where you could sit on a gypsum bench and bathe your traveler's feet as you looked on the Labyrinth through woodsashed windows full of sun. I knew the walls in here as Iris' own work: she'd surrounded the pool with a moving maze of marsh reeds, pintail ducks at their games, wild sprays of copper and blue butterflies, and some of these flew right up along the stairs to my guests' sleeping quarters. It all seemed to please them enough. Yet, for the first time, I felt something of a stranger myself, as the house staff's hospitality seemed to verge upon the servile. They always offered to clean guests' clothing, draw baths, show them how to work a toilet, fetch favored foods; but as they even offered complaints about the wind some part of me knew how these things were really received

—Welcome then, gentlemen, I lied as we stood together a moment back outside on the crazypaved walkway facing the Labyrinth. —When you've rested yourselves, follow this causeway up past the portico there and you'll come to the west courtyard. Have a seat, enjoy the traffic, and I will arrange your audience. And we'll spoon you right through procedures, we've pruned our House staff recently, and—Well sirs, good morning.

—Thank you, Payare smiled with a courtly half-bow.

—Uh—if it is a fair question, said Cadimmetes preening the point of his beard, eyes to mine again, —why is my lord's business being handled by a boy?

And as I wondered what to do, and felt my right hand move toward my belt, he said to a wincing Payare:

—At least I *think* he's a boy! Is it those pretty painted eyes, or is it those lovelocks under the little hat. You'd never guess this one is building ships to save his life. Oh

no, forgive me that's the other fellow, what's his name, Androgeus?

For all this, one could not deny the man some courage: I stood in shock as he laid that name for *Earthling* on my brother, and Payare carefully fussed with a fly and made weak movements back up the walk. But what truly stuttered my breath was the mention of building ships: he was doing more with what he knew than any merchant in his senses should, and I just didn't know how to answer the fact that here was more than some personal matter. So I took the most cautious tack against the boil in my blood and, breaking off our stare (he looked so blithe!), turned back up the causeway away from the Labyrinth portico and away from making their wishes my first concern. I knew a fine place to pass a fine morning out of the wind

Just round the turn of the inland road a white cluster of buildings stood within a brake of poplars, with higher willow trees between the back gardens and the river: this we called the House of the Horae for the many kinds of learning and pleasure our women fostered here, women neither of royal blood nor priestesses but of all ages and with gifts of great public worth. A young woman named Tallay (Woman of Rain) welcomed me in under the lintel's three painted hierodules dancing *The Circle*: she was a newcomer from Lasithi up in our eastern mountains, with crowblack hair, broad birthing hips and pendulous bare breasts, a smile in whose light you might well measure your own tranquility. I heard music from a tortoise-shell lyre out back and another woman singing: Tallay saw me sit at a front-room table though, and brought out a loaf and some dipping oil and wine. I remembered watching her dance one night at a rite in the Labyrinth,

her selfcontained joy, her heavy slow-motion, how she liked peeking through her woven-together fingers at her watchers and then would turn back inward: she saw I was in some state of my own and stayed cordially untalkative, we fed each other bits of bread and played draughts awhile. She won every round. And the wind blew through the house and I could smell rivermud and the weird secret medicines and jellies they concocted here: a corner-shelf held stacks of Egyptian papyri in flats and scrolls, prayerbooks and histories they'd taught my father to read, and near the back was a big sorting-table with jars full of all the grains and seed they studied and crossbred, sacks of night-picked herbs and a candlemaker's clutter about its feet. It was terrible feeling so far from where my body sat and the light of her smile (she won again) made it worse. I might ask her to read to me but from what, *The Struggles of Osiris with Set*, or *The Book of The Dead* ? *I have not been a man of anger*, it said, *I have not judged hastily*

The walls were bright with dolphins and scenes of villagers at dances round a huge tree under the moon, with blue fire shooting off people's fingers: birdfeeders with suet busied the sills, snake-tubes whose dishes of clay held honeyed milk. A gust brought the smell of glue for making instruments and I remembered another night here when they'd promised to teach us the stars up on their roof but it had clouded over and the whole house got drunk instead: Ariadne had been there, wrapped likewise in the arms of this spirit whose gift was forgetfulness, laughing, hanging off my shoulder

— *For I have a Word that I shall tell thee*
A matter that I shall declare to thee

*It is the Word of the Tree
And the Whisper of the Stone...*

—Lovely melody, out of Byblos I think, Tallay said of the harper out back

—I hate everything, I answered as she collected her winning toss again. —It's not as if we haven't shoved around our share of islanders in our time. But do you know whom I hate most of all?

And as she stared at me, in through the garden door came one of our high-ranking Achaian guests of these days, a rufous-pated man named Elphenor who thought he was Goddess' gift to our House accountants, showing them ways all the time to refine our ciphers. His faked shock before my brother over that list of his juniors' nicknames. No hail, no greeting: his blank blue eyes were all his regard (another of those who affected to honor my father), and I gave it right back to him from my seat. As he went to the front window to sun himself and studied the hill of the Labyrinth Tallay smiled equitably between us

—Enough draughts then, you always win. I'd better go

—I think you should, said Elphenor out the window.

—There seems to be

—What did you say to me? I demanded: he looked over quickly and Tallay's hands paused above the table

—Sir? I mean, there seems to be some commotion over at your House.

I went straight outside: yes, three heavy twists of black smoke were rising above the rooftops on the hill, a summons to bring all clergy to some grave business. There was no drum or other alarm but from here you could glimpse flights of the east garden stairs and a dozen people were scurrying down for their houses along the river,

messengers, craftshop staff: then I saw one of Ariadne's younger attendants (who'd always had eyes for my brother) fairly staggering along the Labyrinth's south corridor, she looked to be tearing at her hair till she came to a large potted aloe near the turn—and she shoved it over. What? The crash startled birds from the garden below. Already I was trying not to run along the wind-raked causeway, the chariot and ponies were gone, no guests about: now a halfdozen heralds in white kilts and boots and diadems jogged down the west portico in a group headed for the inland roads, bound for Phaestos and other southern towns. So there'd been some royal council I'd missed and here came its instant dispatch, some matter one had best not flash hill-to-hill using sunlight and polished gold. Here came the man Hippeus with them, a horsethighed olive man of twenty, but that couldn't be sweat on his face yet

—I'm so sorry sir! he said passing me with the brutalized look of the others: he was crying. —You're wanted in the throne room, *right now*. Rhea, Rhea Dictynna! he shouted to quicken his whole group's pace against the hot wind

Invoking Justice, like a marine in sea-battle? Truly it was all my family had taught me that I kept myself at a walk now, over the stream, up the slabbed portico and into the bright cool hallways of the first south stairs—Had someone dropped dead? Since Hippeus would not speak it, I prepared myself, but there was some shame to be had for my morning from the tall slender princes of townships painted along the corridor to my left. Their calm light-smiling grace, their lovelocks, the gifts and tribute they bore; the sway of their long formal kilts that touched the right knee, and the musicians and clergy standing with

upraised palms closest to that Great Lady holding forth Her double-axes—Who could touch this? I stepped round the broken-spiralled shards and bleeding aloe, a stranger again, for if brother and I had made ourselves like them in a hundred major processions, well, when had we ever lived their life? In our hands today was the power of the ancient unity they expressed and I pushed away a despair

What! As I turned left for the daylit central court I saw bodies sprawled facedown on its sunny white slabs in a chaos of directions: I slowed, and listened, and drew myself up before stepping out of the hall. Cedar-smoke climbed from three tripods ahead, a matter of Justice, yes, and its char-smell harshened the scents of flowers in planters and palm and the green of vines that climbed the court's high inner porches. The prostrate were house-staff and a few clergy shaking with tears but, except for a few shocked faces up above on the pillared balconies, all who might speak seemed fled, or still out in the valley and town on clergy's business. How I feared the pity in the faces up there! To my right was the great turning stair to our upper and lower-level quarters, to my left the solemn chambers of the pillar crypts, where blood ran in sacrifice to The Powers. I passed the strong triple-pillared shrine with its crown of nineteen horns built into the west facade and the stair to the upper banqueting halls, keeping my eyes on the four dolmen-doorways of the throne room: a little round stone kernos lay by the doors, decked with grape-berries and votive clay oxen all sprinkled with corn mole. Spring offerings had been going on and now a violent loyalty surged my heart with purple blood

And inside there, quite disconsolate on the sunken anteroom's stone benches sat old Diamat and another elder

priest of ours, Auxo—just facing each other in dumb vigil before the sealed-up throne room doors until they saw me

– Minotauros! Blessed Be! they both said; and then I knew. For the title without first name had been my brother's alone. They knew what they'd told me and my face felt hot and melting as if of wax: Auxo opened one throne room door and as I hesitated the draw of air moved the indigo tapestry hung upon the north wall to my right, grandmother's work, the lands and isles of the world we knew in stitches of gold, with a silver star for each trade-station in our web. Minoa. Minotauros. Me. What me? I physically dizzied to realize that whole peoples soon would speak of my person within that name; and mine the power of the death it carried

And Ariadne

In the close blood-crimson chamber before me, that flickered with only two lamps' light, sat my mother on the throne, silent with hands on her bellskirted lap: her large wet eyes turned to me, and she rose on the dais taller than the palm tree painted to shade Her Presence on the wall behind. For one small moment she seemed to waver between familiar warmth and throne-impersonality: in her swollen eyes was the death she had asked of no few others, now come home. She opened her arms to me and my father stood up as I approached her: he'd been seated on the stone bench seven paces across from mother, at the edge of the sunken chamber beneath the room's lightwell, from which The Very Manifest One arose in ritual showings-forth. Minos' eyes looked both exhausted and glinting-wild with rage, and for the first time we saw each other in the way only our kings could; but it was for both our hard-set jaws to tremble now, and he touched

my back as my mother stepped down and gathered me. Grandmother Paria was the only other here, seated silent facing the doors against a gryphon painted couchant on the inner wall, her silver hair like a small dimmed moon in these shadows, in all this stillness

— It seems you are a wine for drinking young after all, she said; and if I was longing to disappear at my mother's breast, those words were a merciless stabbing-pain, for they spoke the nineteen years off my life-thread this day. I opened my eyes and saw, behind the wavy-backed white throne with its graven moon and sun symbols, the simple landscape painted on the wall: just green hills, a river flowing through them, just the world we all knew. Utterly changed. And no more together, my brother? No more races out on the rainy winter roads with a pack of cousins and envious friends? No more go down together to badger the ships in with rarities of Nin-Eveh?

— Your Queen, my mother offered, holding me at the shoulders, — is out in the precincts for now, to try and keep order as this news spreads. People won't want to worsen her grief. The fools off your brother's ship couldn't bring it to me first, alone!

— Ohh, we'll show them what killing is! my father exclaimed behind me. — Tell him then! Tell him what happened! And I'll tell him what we'll do about it, he ended with a sound half-laughter, half-growl so that my hackles rose

My brother had done all a civilian ship could to make impressive beaching at Athens' harbor, even borrowing escort-ships from our station at Aegina, the very people about to lose good trade to the Isthmus Road. And with his iron knife at his hip he'd sent no more than a herald to the king of Athens, to say that he was passing through

the country to visit important kin at Laurium, and that soon he'd pay a visit to Athens' citadel. But by the time he'd got there the burgeoned rumor of a royal Cretan presence had made him seem a foreign army on the land: he never made it to their citadel even to council with this king and his heir: a javelin had struck through his back in the midst of their marketplace, and only dread of Crete and a kind of public shame had let his escort and crew get out of there. First volley for the steersman

—Murdered him mother! I cried at last. —Did they bring him—Can I see

—Ohh, you can imagine the honorable rites he got from their hands, they all but chased the crew into the sea, won't you tell him? my father yelled. —I'll give them stuff for their songs, I'll top their valleys with proud corpses! Rivers will run black, I swear my son! *Houloi, Houloi*, what killing is! And you, Great Lady, sending builders over there, welcoming scribes and barons, these two-legged ticks, shipping painters everywhere—and where are we now? *Houloi*

—Stop it! Control yourself! my mother commanded him. —You old gull, do you still think nothing but the open sea and my brother's marines will protect us forever? Why *do* you think the island is sick with anger? We've discussed all this. But my dear Sweet Wine, we have a response. The details we were discussing when you arrived. I rejoice that you're safe. Did your duty go well?

—Oh yes of course, business first! We can make basalt sling-stones! my father mocked through his tears, and I grew more afraid for the way his lifelong tempered bearing seemed smashed to pieces before my eyes. Always his own death before him, now he scarcely seemed to know what to do with his hands

—Minos, my mother said with a deep breath. —We hurt just as much as you. May we inform our son of our intentions now, or shall we ask you to leave the room? Go and sit beside your father.

I did so: he'd leaned forward palms to brow, and before I touched his back I felt the heat of his body. A coiled barely-latent resentment for what *She Who Shines for All* had led us to with her Achaian policies, her ways with their lords in her private chambers. We all sat a moment more in the heart of the House's numb silence. And as I searched that unremarkable landscape behind mother once more for I knew not what, I realized that for all our idols of Goddess, we ourselves were all She knew of existence: we were the order, and I felt myself forgive mother's swift proceedings where, as yet, my father could not

Minos had wanted to cut this sheeptown Athens right out of the seachart tapestry and let the Lion King of Mykenai across their Isthmus choke in trying to swallow the mainland whole. Use their nature against them, since (in his view) conquest was the only way they had to keep their men loyal: then the foreign queens Glaucus dealt with would wake up and commit themselves to the drawing of a Crete-centered line against them. But considering how many lives would be lost or unforeseeably changed for so much uncertainty, my mother recounted, perhaps we should seek the cure deeper in the wound

—And that was when your grandmother recalled the embassy from Ugarit yesterday, my mother continued. —As you know, Pharaoh seeks our consent to land his soldiers there in northern Syria, to cut off the Hittite retreat. The point

—*Pharaoh is a god by whose dealings one lives*, my father mocked at the diplomatic wind we heard at times,

— *the father and mother of all men, alone by himself, without equal, overthrowing the vile enemy as Amon-Ra commands.*

— Your grandmother's point was, my mother went on with effort, — that for every city of the East in Pharaoh's grasp now, he takes the Baal's child into his own house. Not so much as hostages as pupils, and after a time standing at his door, they go back, well, educated, if puppets. We all seemed to agree this is an advance on the usual slaughter, and royal governors. Perhaps his mother taught him a few things after all. And so, as we hear this old Aegeus of Athens has a son now, and since it's imperative that we respond to this assault on our very family, we mean to have Perides pull us together a force never seen before. We'll bring this Aegeus a promise of a war he won't live to forget or hear their bards on, play off his clinging to life and throne, and then mercifully offer to school his son for a term.

A bluff? It was like a Canaanite tale I'd heard from a harper once, about a prince named Kret whose beloved woman had been kidnapped. He'd marshalled his thousands and surrounded her captors with sure annihilation, knowing in his heart, though, that their love was not really worth so many other lives. Still, the bluff had worked, and he got her back. In a dark city of the East

And what would bring Palesus back? Kill, kill!

— But clans and clergy like it or not, I myself am going to lead this, my father said. — I will have the life of the man who threw on my son's back. One year to my thread! Then let it be the one that makes all the difference to my children. I swear, Deucalion, I'll pull this realm together and hand Ariadne and you—Do you know there are mercenaries we can get from the East that are seven feet tall? Yes, yes, and you're going to see them! We'll make

Athens an example for Mykenai, and oh it will be rich! Their songs tell how giants *built* their citadels, it seems only right to have giants take them down!

He wiped his face and squeezed my knee with a laugh, but for all else this day, this shocked me. My father, Consort, High Priest as War Leader—as if no matter what we did the tide was sweeping a world out from under us; and my rage grew nonetheless as I scratched sand from my irritated ears

—And Ariadne approves this? I asked the room.

—We'd better dispatch more heralds today if we want this moon to help us as we've planned, my father continued, and they started listing allies to call upon

They were not listening: I was yet the counterweight in their eyes, not king-to-be: I tried to tell them what hints of collusion I'd got from my guests, but they scarcely heard that either. And my brother was dead. I would have torn out my last hair to change it, and nothing would, ever, nothing: I had seen Bull kill people and ships kill them and disease and accident and age and I felt as if I were the mountain-of-fire that could take no more without its due: a *bluff*: would Palesus let that do for me? Was this the answer to the anger beneath our Earth? The pain and loss of confidence our family would endure now; and the insults his body must've borne, his body whose fierceness I'd feared; the black sparkle of his eyes as he'd teased Ariadne across our tables—no, it was too much

—Where are you going, Sweet Wine? You've not heard everything

To get me my consolation

At the back of the throne room was a sanctuary chamber and I went in there and turned right for the access-hall to our royal storage crypts. It was narrow and cold and

poorly lit because of all the stored oils but I knew these ways as well as Ariadne and you could get out this way without interference from people on the court. Voices called my name but I nearly laughed as I drew the bronze-studded door and bolted it from behind, and ran the long storage corridor. All the fruits of our web were down here, a good hall to walk and feast on memory, smelling the lemon and peppermint, almond and pitch and pine, dry oats of the provender stores, sacred vestments and vessels, spikenard: it was like a ship's hold and it brought everything back up into my heart, and I was crying and I wanted to kill. Perides was hardened and so gruff because of his endless violent sea-duty but not even the few bluebloods in our Admiralty had dared to nickname him—What did they call me then, the cowards! Androgeus! Palesus Minotauros! I ran harder to dry my eyes, get battle-mad, I had to do this, it was my brother and he'd have made sure they knew *him* both sides of that Isthmus! Find that furze-face, jump his back like a panther and knife his neck open. I drew my dagger on the run and in moments was down at the back end of the wing's pillar crypts, and smelled the zinc-sharp blood that people poured to The Mother, or to The Powers, or to blind Necessity—well, whatever one's understanding, was this not in harmony with such an appetite? The Earth-gutters so black and greasy with it so they had to be flushed with wine-vinegar

I kept making turns till I reached the south corridor. Not a soul among the pillars: through the reception hall: out to the brighter floors by which you reached the west court. Painted scenes of Bull with His dancers would back me as I came out and I looked at my knife again to keep myself hard and mad: this was a new kind of knife, shorter and ground more for cutting than for thrusts, to give a

wound of warning first. He'd had his! A hawk was tearing up my heart with grinding talons

By the west porch's crimson pillar I stopped and looked up the raised-stone walkway that led northward along the Labyrinth's west facades. The tree-lined courtyard spread out spaciouly beneath three tiers of windows, below which the building's walls turned at recesses and up its whole length ran a short stone bench where people could sit. Ariadne had always liked it there, letting the strange things of the world come to her. No, no! The trees out here rattled and swirled in sand-shot heat, *It's something in here (tap of temple) they want changed*

Where was she? I stepped out farther and beyond the altars set along the walkway, saw that a mob was gathering round the Labyrinth wall's deepest recess: white goats, dogs, an oblivious peahen roamed behind them, pets and stock abandoned for something better just now. My stomach told me I would find—A dozen monkeys strained to scatter against their common chain while master someone joined in the shouting crowd: it bristled with people's pruning hooks and staves, vicious voices. What had been *laying up in the ground* was come forth and the wind had come just in time to marry it

I stepped off the raised ritual walkway, looking to kill a man after all, and saw gossip-brothers and sisters of Pale-sus' circles heading over before me, surely seeing the knife in bereaved brother's hand. Gathering to watch. Look at them all: a black man with a white reef heron flapping on his arm, linguists of the House, craftspeople, gardeners, merchants of Eastern houses in gaudy gold earrings, local farmhands. A shepherd's voice bleat mockery in the tongue of his moony-faced flock and the whole mob laughed, weapons rattled like bones. I, to han-

dle this? An elderly man down from his house on the western valley-side stood alone amid the sand-blasts and flies on the court's far edge, in a tattered rag of a shawl to say: Despair

Show them they have a king still! Turn the tide! Now through the shifting bodies I glimpsed white helmets: so guards were holding people back from someone, surely some foreigner, they had a standing order, and I knew it was him because now I saw Iris and Kudru on the steps of the House of the Artisans beyond the court, and Payare was with them. Well, horse-master, your knack for making friends didn't run very deep

One voice shouted a broken *Megistos Kouros!* and now the crowd opened to me, they'd been pressing but not too hard against the guards' crescent-formation of lowered javelin-shafts. He was cornered in the recess, cursed as the common foe, cowering bent-kneed up on the little running-bench: the blankfaced guards made way for me, good, and now Cadimmetes saw me and wailed and the crowd raged at him again

—Cut him a new breech! —In the back, in the back!
—Scum of Asia! —Raid before trade!

—I had nothing to do with it, I told you! Please! Minos! I was only supposed to—Don't, boy! Guards, hold him back! I can explain!

—Shrikes! —Scoop his eyes out! —Cut his testicles off for me, I want to poison my nephew's garden! —Kill the Blue-Eyes! —Revenge, Minotauros!

Suddenly a long white bolt of liquid splashed down over Cadimmetes from a window above: some winesteward's contribution of what smelled like vinegar. No, no mercy as he wiped his stinging eyes: the mob pressed in closer as I drove my dark pretty eyes into him. I owed him

this, surely, for my brother: who had delivered remission of tax when the fields had been thin as old men's hair; come to people's village festivals, tasted their head-cheeses and raki, brought them shares of foreign barter; flowered their daughters with royal seed

Cadimmetes had turned away and I told him to face me but he wouldn't so I went up and grabbed him by the big belt and he screamed: I jerked him down from the bench and he let his older man's bulk fall, on his back at my feet. The crowd had fallen near-silent and I thought I'd go mad in this cursed wind; and yet, if I fought to *be* our ancestors, soothe Their anger, *be* my brother's own hardness on the sea, this *I* was only alone on the court, in the sun of a day like any other, and I fought with secret shame, rage, and helpless grief

– Pray if you know how, you turd of a horse. Do you see this? Where are your insults now? Pray, I said, pray to your Zeus Skyfather or Poseidon or whatever useless blueblood you're pushing this moon! See what color your blood comes out!

The man saw no hope for himself: even his ship's crew were keeping a wise low profile just now. It was all he could do to beg *No*: I raised the knife and tried my best at one of those bloodcurdling Taurian yells, inarticulate protest that I was not a soul who'd lost its way. And down that cataract of voice the knife

– Deucalion!

Oh, too good, the mare out of Kadesh: watching from somewhere all along. A stillness fell upon the crowd and I flashed with contempt, did they think a tree had spoken? The guards' white boarstoath helmets turned rightwards, pointing her out across the courtyard through parting bodies. I set my teeth

– Deucalion, hold!

– Don't boy! I'm sorry! I prayed to Demeter once!
Truly now! Oh gods

– Kill him! – Blasphemy! – Pelasgian blood cries out!
– For Delphi! – The bloodfield!

Where had she been? Letting it go this far as a sop for the public wounds? Clearly these people had been angry long enough to make a war now and have done; and, generations under the Minotauros, few thought very highly of what foreigners called the scapegoat, it brought to mind other old sacred ways under assault and made The God a limping slave of others' burdens. If we all killed an Achaian named Cadimmetes today, he'd only be known as the first. But—What she was to us cast shame before her as she swiftly crossed the court, keeping her steps to the raised-stone path across the flags. My Queen, my Queen, I couldn't believe this had come about as I watched her approaching, dressed for rite of sunset not far off: she looked so grave in the high formal tiara with her black hair out loose to her shoulders, her tresses sharpened the purposefulness of her features and there was the broad bronze Labrys pendant at her plexus, backed with red lacings of the bodice beneath her breasts. Flawless iconic stateliness blent with the daughter we all knew. And what resentment I'd been hiding! Spirals, signs of life-upon-life trimmed her everywhere and her long red-chevroned bellskirt's flounces kicked out with her paces; but then a bad gust of wind hit us all and, as she winced and reached for her headpiece, I saw that she too was full-vulnerable and I was no longer quite her priest or adorant. More like a rival, an intimate antagonist blind to himself, to tomorrow—Yet what was this Great Year about after all? The will to push it some and

find out was no more than our great Dead had done. All my life *little brother*, till today

—Get up! I told Cadimmetes and when he did I shoved him away from me, he stumbled and panted leaning back over the bench. Look at him, soft as cheese

—I call you to *maat* now, leave him alone! Ariadne said thrusting herself to the center of things. —Deucalion, do not do this, she said looking slightly downward into my eyes with her clear, hard brown ones, and it seemed everybody could see she was too much for the prince

—Why don't you ask this Horsewind about his insults to our brother? To all of us? Do you think we can't read that stitchwork on you, friend?

—Nice clothes he has! —An embassy from the sky!
—Stick him!

With controlled disdain Ariadne looked on these people who'd seized on my answer-back to her.

—Then don't shy from your hatred, she said. —It's the healthiest part of you right now.

—Oh Lady! Cadimmetes cried. —Don't let—It's just—I was only supposed to sound him out a little, just sound him out

—Well now! I said looking upwards, then menacing him at the bench's foot: how odd to be flattered thus, *and* enraged, that he should even speak to her. But Ariadne just kept staring at me, weaving round and round her silken will

—Stop it! I told her, unable to think how she saw no Necessity here

—Let Iasu take him! —Heal us! —I brought no clay votives!

—Then you belong in other lands, where slaves fashion their masters! she answered with an anger that fright-

ened many and they palpably moved back, hid their eyes. *Whose Face is a burning wind*: yes, they'd seen her swing the mace, her teeth at flesh, all knew that her power was waxing and that she did not fear it

— Deucalion—*Minotauros*, she said. — If he dies—Listen! All of you know the childish stories that we hear they tell of us Cretans, in his land! Kill this man, and you yourselves will make those lies into truth, that our Bull devoured him. What would you have

— They have to fear us! There's nothing else! the world cried through me, and now Ariadne, interrupted, shocked at my ferocity, and stricken by these words in public from a kinsman, held her eyes very steadily on me, just as I had kept myself from panic-running awhile ago. And—idiot—I wished I could take all this back somehow, not lose her before we ever came together, but now was the moment to declare myself and I would not live in my own contempt

— Come here Icarus! she called suddenly: he'd been sitting up at the bench's last turn by the northern precincts with a green young gecko in his hands and at her call (aware of this all along) he was up and running down the bench

I thought of the arrows stuck so playfully round him in the stern of his people's ship. Of his mother's pooling brains. Of the contorted corpses of Nyos and Keta, death-masks with friends' names: cruelty had branded both our brains

— Stop it! I don't care!

— Please! Cadimmetes cried

— And what will we tell him after? she asked: it was that simple, but her tremulousness said she was improvising, mother's style of seizing events at hand

— And who's that you're holding, Icarus? she asked as he climbed between the wall and the crowd into her presence, half-plowing past the gaping Cadimmetes. Icarus gave her a fist-to-brow hail with the gecko

— It's a lizard, he smiled with half a spasm at his mouth.

— What kind, Icarus?

— Kind! A good one!

— Gecko. Say *gecko*. What will you do with him?

— Play, he said, eyes full of her. — Does it please us?

— Yes, oh, yes, she wavered. — Then what?

— Eat him! and Icarus' mobile haunted face revealed a stark unhappiness

But somehow, Ariadne managed to laugh, and then just a few people joined her, and then a few started to cry, and these turned away. Timing, sentiment, something had broken, she'd taken away the blind satisfaction, yet others around us hardened the more for that, and me with them

— But Mother Dia sent him from under the stones to visit you, she kept on, squatting to Icarus' eye-level.

— She might miss him, miss him, and be unhappy

I missed this *him* too, and tomorrow seemed to be something years away: not yet brave enough to look up at Mount Juktas, I forced my steps to do what Achaians would respect. And I knew now that she was going to let me, it was all in my hands, this was her answer to my hope for her regard—*Choose*.

— Will Deucalion hurt the Blue-Eyes?

The trees knew: loom of the world

For I have a Word that I shall tell thee

Our brother now lived nowhere but in our blood. I put the gravest look I could muster on this boy

— You say, Icarus.

He nodded

Cadimmetes screamed and I stabbed him to the hilt in his right shoulder. As he fell back and crumpled it pulled itself out and dropped blood at my feet: the crowd had made sounds of shock and I was glad, and empty

— Now you have sounded me! I told him, a hollowness about my ears

— More! Icarus said. — Deucalion, give the knife?

Ariadne shot up to full height, with her features set hard and blank as ever we'd seen them. Not a look at me: most of those who'd backed away had returned to the guards' leveled shafts, and now she lowered her eyes, looking more sad than publicly grave, and spread her palms out earthward, opening a chant like the one often sung to calm the sea. The stones of the court would not accept the blood. And as I wondered what this was going to cost, Icarus offered his gecko for the knife in my hand: I told him to put the fool animal down. It cocked a speckled head, blinked; then took a few steps toward the bench, near the boots of panting Cadimmetes.

2

The Monster Responds

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

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

— *Come to your House*

Palesus Dionysos, true of speech

I light the fire, I pour the wine:

The clothes that still smell of your being

Are here, the linens of your bed

And the good silver earrings,

The little ship for your journey

And the foods you always craved set out in bowls:

Come to your House,

Palesus Dionysos, true of speech

I pour the wine, I make the offerings

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

—Deucal-ion!

The voice was Tukato's, sauntering down the inland

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

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

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

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

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

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

—What horses?

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

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

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

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

I was wholly at a loss

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

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

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

* * *

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

—With so many solid stately reasons, I said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

* * *

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

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

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

Our clergy knew foreign affairs enough to keep the

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It was happening

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Krack!

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

— And a moon full of honey! Iris smiled.

* * *

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

—Uh—What? my father said

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

—Cleite! Minos ordered

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

* * *

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

—What do you want to tell me? I said

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

I said *What* but no voice sounded

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

* * *

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

—Know who that is beside Labrys?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

* * *

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

—What do you want to say, Minotauros.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

—You gave word for our safety, Aegeus objected

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

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

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

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

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

—All this, for *you*?

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

Yes, too late already

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

—And the girls must be virgins? said Theseus

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

—Indeed, Theseus nodded

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

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

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

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

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

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

My heart was pounding

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

II

Daughters & Sons

3

A Bull in the House

It took five days to get us home. My father left Glaucus at Perides' side to add discretion to good order on Athens Bay, while our host remained camped to wait their twelve youths: Cleite generously offered to stay as well, for their young women's benefit, though this life in a tent was troubling her bones. Minos and I departed secretly on a ship of the line, hoping to seem to be everywhere while readying Crete for our guests; and so we savored the Cyclades once more, and spent a full day making offerings for the future at the foot of Velkanos. Then at last the summer-green mountains of Ida and Lasithi rose out of the sea east and west before us, and Juktas drifted peaceful in his dream above the wide-open arms of Crete. It was home, with its secret upland valleys and well-ordered towns, the smell of rivers and grass and hills patched with orchards and wildflowers—My father wept, smiling with the sight. He let the crew race from Amnisos as they wished, to find kin and spread good news (and to teach me more about keeping the fleet's good side). And as we watched them it rose like a wave from my heart that for all the wild strangers and deeds behind us, family and home were the life of my soul, that without them a man is dust to the wind. I wanted never to leave again, only to

live as our oldest kings had, and sleep forever in the bosom of the land. And with this, I tasted some of the mixed wine on my father's tongue: triumph had brought him near the end of things. When I said I was at his utter disposal he gave me a deep smile and asked my help with three days' thanksgiving for the public, before we rested and furthered plans for the Athenians. *Let the vintage pour from every door of the Labyrinth*, he said, and he already had a way to help me on in this Shepherd's eyes

Nor did we lack for jubilant homage as we climbed the shore hills homeward, but Minos took us down into the mariners' cave and stood a long while before the two glistening roof-to-floor pillars deep within, which people called Mother and Daughter. *Did we bring peace home, then, Mother Kriti, Strong One?* he whispered with palms out to them. He seemed to trust the easy feel of the Earth around us: I liked my father's beautiful hands, quiet about his person, still moving like priests themselves for all he'd done with them these moons. So we ascended again, and let ourselves enjoy the virtual road-race ahead of us with the tidings. Cratus and Yamo, Perdix and Diamat met us first at the Labyrinth's north entrance (I gave the latter her sack of pumice from Callista), and they told us that Ariadne and Pasiphae were just now at offerings at Europa's tomb, a mile or so up the inland road. Our clergy each had their own share of tension to let loose and they overwhelmed Minos and me, getting us both bathed and groomed and waiting in our ladies' chambers. So there I sat on the quaint gypsum bench at the foot of Ariadne's lightwell, late day's gold pouring in, the neat elegance of her things and their sandalwood scent like a Blessed Isle end to so much turmoil. I'd not forgotten our last talk here, but could give the matter no more now

than her finches chattering in the sun. As I waited her it felt like I had a sparrow in my chest

And bright as her eyes were as she came in from the great stairs' corridor, she didn't rush to me with some passionate reward, but stood there in the doorway and smiled (for of course they'd told her we were back): she had her hair up, leaving that delicate tangle of strays at her neck the way I loved, she wore only her pendant Labrys and a light green kilt slit at the sides, and as soon as we'd embraced we danced a few circles round her floor as we had at the betrothal. We'd done it, we'd done it, and when I praised her work with the sun (and inquired about it) Ariadne passed over that as before, and took us to her bed within its snug alcove. I was still shaking my head when she said she had her own news of wonder: I thought she meant a child, but she said that for the first time since she'd borne The Flower, she and mother had bled together, while we were gone. I'd always been afraid (like a good priest) to talk about it but I loved her the more as I heard her voice swell with a kind of joyous heartbreak: *It's a thing past words*, she said. *Our differences mostly remain—But we almost lost each other she and I, Deucalion.* And when I asked how that could be, the answer nearly stopped my running blood. *Because of The Offering*, she said. *I was prepared to make The Offering myself if it came to stopping a real war*

What! I sat up beside her boyish still, having thought old Paria's cunning and spells enough to work the threads among our clans and their matriarchs. Fear of moon-blood's potencies, shock that she would have done it for our sakes, dread of complicity in driving her to it—All this told me how even the whisper of it must've hit our nobility, and kept them from the ruthless edge of all-out

war over trade. Ariadne saw I was jealous, too, that her life could do things mine probably could not. But she was becoming the Voice of The Powers, of Goddess among us, and no *bluff* could make a woman so in the people's eyes. At least they had softened the message by bringing most rites in our absence before Europa's tomb, drawing strength to themselves through that venerated mother, breaker and preserver of custom

– You did it with us brother, she said with a touch.
– You made things ready for a new life, without pain, as I thought only The Flower of a woman's body could. Now please, tell me everything, everything, and start with that present from Callista's women. What are their names? Can I give it to Iris awhile to model for our shops? Come and hold me, tell me everything you saw. And what is our man like? Were you very afraid

Well, I could be eyes for her: The Aridela could not leave Crete without forfeiting power (another part of our Egyptian anti-imperial roots). Laurium's mines, then, were officially lost, especially as we'd never win a land-war up north according to Perides. Achaians might be a minority of nobles with little love lost on Pelasgian peasantry, the Admiral had lectured me, but their chariots and armor and ships, most of all their endless blood-feuds, had made their presence on the land a fortified permanent certainty. Short of long-term success with Athens, maybe the best we could do right now was keep homesteading refugees, Pelasgians too pious or proud for their new order, like that boy Orneus' mother. The islanders' help, meanwhile, was sure to cost us later at the trade-table, even if Perides (not to mention Alxiona) planned to use this season's high spirits to scour the isles of raiders everywhere they could. And our brother's ashes

had come home for their royal interment. I told her of Theseus and the allies' demand for twelve youths, and that our sailing ahead would help to keep him in his place

—We have to be careful of their pride with talk like that, Ariadne said, but she grew excited, even in worry that we might tear up such a group with all we could offer their women in particular. —Oh, we'll make them leaven for Aegeus' lump! she gloried.

—Where is my son! we both heard then as our mother came jubilantly barging down the dog-leg stair with Minos in tow, both of them dishevelled from hair to dress and careless about it in the wake of their reunion. —Sweet Wine, I knew you'd go conquering cities the moment I gave you arms! she laughed. —Come here, my Goodly Bull!

Through these next days the kisses seemed endless, likewise Pasiphae's embrace of her own joy every time her path crossed any man's who'd taken part in the operation, or his clan's. We'd never seen She Who Shines For All so live up to her name, even round Elphenor and his Achaian kinfolk in our midst, who had to put up as they could with this celebration against their grain. Mother herself tore open wine-jars and stores of oil and textiles and, with Ariadne's and Paria's help, literally poured forth the triumph of her reign on crowds beneath Labyrinth windows: through the three days allotted before we did have to rest and make further plans, Pasiphae led processions first and last each day to the great and lesser shrines of our Dead, and seemed to be everywhere across the local land delivering blessings, even interrupting people at the barley-harvest with praise for their youths and their brave belief in her. Like our father at our beaching, she did much of this with great gravity, for

on top of our military success this was not an Offering year, and the cut fields looked ravaged with our taking; but there was extraordinary fire in our clergy's and people's music and voices now, so that the gravest processions had light in their step. Dogs ran alongside us, slightly sideways as they do, goats watched from rocky outcrops standing so quizzical with all their feet together, chewing: birds and bulls and sunning lizards seemed to know the whole story and all but welcomed us back to a world of easy breathing. With Tukato and the brood of Archanes (Phaedra, Icarus, Razorclam too) we made a kind of revel of the winnowing-work and old Cratus and the still-grieving Yamo let loose with dances round the girls and the grain-heaps, prefiguring my father's steps to come Midsummer Day. Then when everybody was drenched with sweat we'd go down to the river's shallows and play there, uncommon seeing in people's eyes as the cool clear water of our mountains dripped from mother's breasts and thighs. She loved display, and no image of Goddess had more power than when she raised her arms with fists *or* open palms. Of course there were still many sons and daughters abroad, cripples and parents with afflicted children looking the more for healing from these auspicious days, the daily chores of births, initiations and funerals; but under this bright sky and the summer-tossing trees people played and sang for now as if they felt themselves bathing in the *damos*, the very wise-blood of our mothers. As Ariadne'd said, it was not a thing for words, our unity now for almost losing each other in the heat to protect the realm. Not for nothing was it said that the river of the underworld poured forth near the fabled city of Clitor. I saw people crying aloud like the body does when it flies beyond itself at the climax of love. There were *kyklos*

dances round huge fires at night and we scarcely needed say more than what a parent's looks said to the child, the mother's blowing lip-noise on baby's belly till it squealed. And again, if there remained that world of daily funerals and sick-visits, of blood and the overpowering filth of animal-bowels in the halls of sacrifice, something lived anew among the creatures and trees and river and sky and could not have been plainer in sight. However brief my own past here among the shady river-stones I could feel the endless years within my mother's mind, the past of her mothers here and her bones' satisfaction at having met their trust. And as praise and presents and summer's wealth poured in now from our other great houses, Pasiphae farmed it out, or told stories in the evening of generations from the time when Cnossos itself was a hunting-camp. These hills would bear our story now, too; and we were going to go on, just as ever, and people cried aloud exaltation and relief.

Perides sent home a few Cretan ships within these last five days before Midsummer, so we knew things were proceeding up north. It irked me that there was no immediate hope of a progress round the realm at Ariadne's side, but it was good that as she watched crews come home to kin, she decided to reconsider matters of the fleet. Meanwhile it grew plain how thoroughly she and the women had prepared for Athenian tutelage, for the Shepherd, like it or not, was going up country to start his learning from the ground up, with miracles of the earth (dung becomes food) and husbandry. After that he could learn our system of domestic trade with one's villages, progress into legal judgment and diplomacy, whatever arts he fancied: Yamo and our young Kouretes would give him the sport and hunting a hero might want, and

there was no reason this plan for one couldn't work for twelve more. Pasiphae, though, still wanted a contingent of Itiri's cruel-looking Libyans for the House guard (to keep our alliances plain before Athens, she said). Ariadne disliked the appearance of fear behind that. But Daughter abided.

Most of all we had to remember, grandmother said, that the Athenians were only more foreign pupils: that was how we were to carry ourselves before them, even if long ago we'd thought the first of these Bright Hairs gods (and they themselves, she said, had disclaimed such a thought as impiety). It was frankly discussed which priestesses might take on what they called offices with their men, as the crown of their tutelage, and I sat there certain Ariadne'd claim an exemplary role, but she only suggested The Powers sort it out when eyes met eyes. No, this Theseus was not going to just walk into anything. It was their young women she most looked forward to. And as Iris and Kudru began to present us with redecorative designs from the shops, based in vines-and-pillars as agreed, it seemed our world was turning sure as the stars again

It was part of Ariadne's rest and pleasure to spend time with friends from Cnossos and her mountains-days, town sisters like Tallay at the House of the Horae and the daughters of rural clans who had wild Artemis as their totem. She liked long walks and swims with them and eating outdoors (roasted venison especially), their dances fashioned in the mountain air: she was still debating whether to greet the Athenians surrounded with their company—our priestesses (let alone mother) were sure to intimidate—when Podes and Cordax sent word the Athens ship had beached. A day early! You couldn't fault

Perides or Glaucus for speeding things along but, once again, our bellies were unsettled as we hurried to meet with these people. Ariadne donned her electrum chaplet of roseleaf and asked our father and me not to wear our daggers this day: even so he scrambled together thirty marines and half the House guard to escort us. He wanted their last oarsman to notice our casual strength

At the same time, Minos had made it public that he'd soon march to the sea in order to remarry Europa, as he put it: he felt he owed Paria and her conservative circles some gesture of respect, a last affirmation of the price upon his power. More, he wanted to do this in sight of Theseus and his company, remind them (and no doubt, Elphenor and the rest) that the Minotaurus was no thoughtless snake-charmed fool. Thus we had an especially boisterous, spectacle-seeking crowd thronged behind our walk to the shore, along with the people out to see these Athenian upstarts. Icarus himself was around because we'd planned to work that day on my boat, and that could wait; but he seemed disappointed that even we were often contingency's subjects. The boy walked just awhile near Ariadne and me, for we were too nervous and pensive to keep him entertained. She liked his raucous energy, though, and seemed to hold nothing against him for his part in Cadimmetes' wound

Our guests arrived on a ship of their own and were still seated aboard it when we reached Amnisos. Its sail was brailed up but later people told us its device had been a great green serpent of Athens' Erechthid clan, itself (said many) a Pelasgian symbol arrogated to the cause of men like Aegeus. Well, the escort of five more returning Cretan ships answered the point for us. The harbor-crowd stirred with royal arrival and as all these numbers mixed

and arrayed along the shore we saw Cleite sitting on the main mole amid Cordax's hands, looking sea-frowsy and exhausted. Diamat, Perdix and Iris hurried out to her with their attentions, and we learned that Glaucus and Itiri's contingent were only a day or two behind Cleite in the isles. My eyes, by now, had fixed on him—Theseus—who'd stood up before his brood on the foredeck looking tawny and fairer than any Cretan, eyeing us and the body of guards and scarcely moving but to touch at his beard: my hackles went up anew that he looked even bigger and more muscular without his battle-gear, in just a gold-chain necklace and a deep-blue kilt chased with the same gold, woven in our style but reaching the knee, which Achaians thought more decorous. He looked royally composed, to the steady bright blue eyes I remembered, and now their captain handed him a small bough of olive wound with gauzy white wool. *A peace-offering!* our mother said, *I'll explain that later, quite a story I've heard;* and then she told Ariadne and me to go down and officiate. It was our future, and as people took in the bough's benign suggestion they grew so still you could hear the pebbles beneath shore's waves

Caution, reserve: those were the looks I saw first between her and him. Knowing something of the burdens out of which they watched each other, I was proud of the words Ariadne spoke between our guests and the onlooking crowd. She asked all Crete to make them welcome and for them to have no fear, adding that one day we'd be kin, prosperous kin who'd hold their differences second to what they held alike. The Shepherd took her in, her eyes, her strong pliant stance in her elegant bellskirt and openbreasted jacket, her hair today in a sinuous mare's tail down her back beneath her crown: as she spoke I

mounted the mole and nervously accepted and lifted the olive bough, Theseus smiling coolly as if he did not care whether I breathed or not. His look changed not at all as Ariadne told the crowd his name and Athenian titles, and then there was an awkward pause, as people weighed a Shepherd against my brother's memory. Ariadne called forth the youths now, requesting their names and their clans' concerns back home. Theseus signed to them to obey, they rose from their benches in a silent clutch and mounted up onto the mole: they were in their late teens, the pale males dressed almost just like Theseus and the women in voluminous togas from shoulder to knee. Perhaps Cretan teaching would come as late for them as for him. They all wore fixed prideful looks and, as we listened, it struck us that while Aegeus had met our demands, we were dealing with something of a sheep-town after all, whose behavior might not matter so much as we'd hoped

There were Phaeax and Tenes, blond-haired and wary like a couple of green lieutenants; Geryon with an eye on Ariadne's ladies, Scirus the only one with a beard thick as Theseus'; and Stichius and Kapha, both small, one fierce-eyed, one scared. Their fathers were overseers in grain and livestock, master beekeepers, traders in finery from cinnamon to silk, but like Cadimmetes before them, they did not name their mothers, nor did the women: they were clinging to custom in such uncertain straits. Now came Aithe with hair like white gold, a courtesan she called herself, taken to mean a daughter-of-captives, a chattel-gift for Aegeus' house-guests offered up to help others surrender their own; two redheads, Kia and An-chinoe with fathers in building and heraldry; then three dark-hairs like us, Scotia, Nereis and Polyxena, by turns a

priest's child, daughter of a leading soldier, and a moun-
tebank's girl. More than the males, these were not at all
comfortable orating: this was what they got for discourag-
ing women's council-places, and now I saw that (though
these women honored their city with no obvious fear)
their eyes were harsh and their lips were curled whenever
they looked to Ariadne and her company, dressed as they
were among men in public. And Ariadne saw, and gazed
back at them with a smile perhaps to obscure a loss for
words: her friends tried to help with a welcome-song
from the mountains, but then this Polyxena looked past
her into the crowd and said *Look! I know that fellow, it's
Orneus! From home!*

He did have a way of turning up at odd moments. Ari-
adne, nonplussed, and Theseus each let them have their
share of reassuring greetings, Orneus (just back with one
of the ships) aglow with being admired as a proof that
one could survive here. Their women had somehow
known his mother before she'd left the mainland—What-
ever it took! But I noticed Theseus rather preoccupied
looking at crestfallen Ariadne, and next instant Minos
came forward and up beside me and the Shepherd. He
wanted his moment, before rites and a feast this night
would christen the new world between us, and that was
how he addressed the crowd as he slipped a small gold
ring from his finger

—And Mother Europa bless every Man Who Steps
Forward, in love for his people! he finished; and as the
crowd (piously pleased so far) rendered him accolades,
he threw that ring to the sea. But there was hardly time
for people to feel what he'd done, for as I looked to watch
the ring fly the Shepherd broke into a run for the mole's
end, and dove. What? I heard Icarus yell with rancor that

the bush-faced pirate was getting away and there were other cries like it: none of the Athenians understood either as we spotted Theseus surfacing, diving again no farther out than the ring had gone. Even Pasiphae was looking about and humping her shoulders in rare confusion and I stood there holding up a greeny sign perhaps already contradicted

—The fool thinks it's power! —Don't insult them, they're primitive! —Look at him dive! people shouted forcing past each other, as Ariadne climbed the mole herself and saw the Athenians back away from her in a flock

—Another Herakles! my father joked for Cretan benefit, but few people laughed: it was one thing this Shepherd had seized the initiative, but we couldn't imagine his intentions. And yes, my brother had marred things down here too in his way, but now there was something more earnest afoot, and I noticed that young Phaedra of Tukatō's brood slip herself to a prime watching-spot among Ariadne's friends. More people pressed forward who hadn't been here moments earlier

—He'll never find it. Who could find it? Minos was saying looking round for guards to fetch the hero in. But he was wrong—After eight dives or so, Theseus swam back in with both fists clenched and walked up out of the sea. Playing it. Son of Poseidon, he looked like something beyond even a Glaucus doing that, bond of the white bulls' herd, young and tall and burly with spangles of light in his dripping lion's locks, his kilt clinging and his smile as evil-bright as the sunny gold on his chest. The crowd gave backward in silence, Icarus with them, transfixed as Yamo and half our clergy worked spells with nervous hands to protect us: Pasiphae, with Elphenor's rufous head peeking past her shoulder, stared too. Theseus

mounted the mole again, passed by my father's outstretched palm, and *Please do the wrong thing* I prayed

—For you, little goddess, Theseus proclaimed as he proffered it to Ariadne: he made sure she saw it was Minos' ring (how *had* he done it?); but as she opened her mouth to speak he turned and flung the ring farther than Minos had, back into the sea. Silence: silence: there was little doubt what he'd meant, that he knew his deed; and now eyes turned from Minos' stalwart indulgence to myself, as her betrothed. I spoke as casually as I could

—Bold man, I said. —But there are more bulls in front of you than these. And the last one won't ask your name or titles, Shepherd.

We stared anew. He smirked and the steady bright-blues gave me some fire. Ariadne managed to deem the action a compliment, but where I looked for her to deftly put him in his place, she then invited all present to the evening's welcome-feast. At her first words a sound like an indignant murmur had risen up along the shore and then a lighter applause took over, a masked uncertainty, refusal to question her lead of indiscriminate nurture. Who Shines For All. My bones were bad again. *Little goddess!* I repeated, as Minos chose Orneus to form up our guests for Cnossos. My chest dilated as I felt Ariadne step gently to my side, although Theseus, his omen accomplished, brushed past us to head their company. And still, as we moved, the clapping continued: I reached for Ariadne's hand.

* * *

Finishing-tools and fire-kit: bolts for the benches, bronze fittings, four buckets of pitch against the sea-

worm. With these things Icarus and I had our boat nearly finished now and he was avidly carving its little figure-head as I worked the insides, and the pitch heated over flame. The boy (this day after Theseus' arrival) was as tranquil as I'd seen him, just working with his mobile pixilated smile on his face, or chattering out of his island sweetness, as he did when happily eating or waiting to fall asleep beneath your arm. And as I watched his work come out of the wood I realized the time he put into watching animals when he ran off alone. Surely Icarus was the child of some foreign shop, for he seemed already a miniature master of the rough-hewn, half-abstract style of the Cyclades. Indeed he was so tranquil at work that, for all the time I was spending with northerners lately, I knew almost an envy. At noontide I'd had to see off the nearly-forgotten Cadimmetes. Mother had sent his people word that he'd been recovering from snake-bite, but she'd since decided that an apology might arise if I escorted the man (on an ox-drawn wagon this time) down to his ship. But it'd been a journey of naught but stony looks. Goodbye and Good Boating. The basalt-trade would survive, though I knew the echoes of my deed had yet to be heard

— By those sharp-angled wings I'd say that's a frigate-bird, Icarus.

— Frigate-birds have the forky tail-feathers. I can do that, he answered excitedly. — You watch, Deucalion, I'll finish before Sun goes under. You can brush the pitch on yourself, is that alright?

I smiled assent as if it mattered, watching his shaggy brown head and plump boy's body against the afternoon-blue summer sea. He was alone in a foreign land without family or name: my heart was full for him with things my

elders had given me, how to take care of yourself on the land, build what you needed. Thanks to Tukato's decoctions his fits had subsided, even lost their suspicious consistency—What was it, then, that spoke my love in anger, swearing I'd kill to protect him if need be? After scarcely two days' Athenian company I was finding my thoughts not always where my body was and I blamed them. Why, the very shape of our land, Mount Juktas that is, had seemed an impious insult to them as we'd brought them up Amnisos Road, as if it were wrong or unnatural that Zeus (as people sometimes styled The God) offered up His Life. Maybe it made them feel important to have some sort of immortal personal Being watching their behavior from the sky, but even Theseus, son of a ruler's house, had been shaking his head as if in pity. A prisoner, pitying us. A cocksure generation of Cretan priests had let them borrow our boy-God Triptolemus' triple-dingus as a thunderbolt for their Gods, and it'd gone to their heads. Worse, at last evening's welcome-feast in the south gardens—once their dropped-jaw gaping at the Labyrinth had subsided—Ariadne had kept herself subdued, eating her venison with hardly a lick of her fingers and, as her friends had risen to dance with Cnossian men, everybody in kilts cut-to-the-hip and their best jewelry, she'd kept herself tied to small-talk with Athenian women at the table. *That* was unnatural, not to see her with the keenest of our own, shouting and tossing their hair, teasing partners with dark painted eyes peering Eastern-style through veils of parted fingers, *Hello, You want me, Maybe later*. And in bed with me afterward she'd seemed tamer too, brooding

—Next time we'll bring down a sail and rigging-rope, I told Icarus. —You work faster than Iris painting a wall,

that is good! Now, have you ever tried slapping on pitch? Uhn! Sometimes my rib hurts when I lift heavy things. How is your scar?

—What? Icarus grinned. —I don't have scars. Tukato gave me medicines. Look at him, fly, fly! he cried looking over his work and the bolted-in benches. —Next time, a big mother-bird on the sail to fly behind this front one, Deucalion. Hurry up, it's near Midsummer sundown!

—Aye sir, I said, beginning to black the inner hull: the sea-air felt good and it was good to see Icarus giving up certain afflictions, now that Crete felt safe. Could this help me with Theseus? I thought of the long tale of his journey across the mainland Isthmus, much of which my mother'd heard from Pelasgians here now for home-
stead—She'd dragged it out of him as she'd purified their company with Bull's blood, entering the Labyrinth. Made it plain to Theseus she knew what he'd done at that city Eleusis along his way: how he'd married their Goddess-on-Earth and then maneuvered his way past the obligatory Offering; and then, just like his putative father at Athens, he'd reformed the city councils in Achaian style, ridding it of difficult elder women by playing off resentments among the people, problems unmet by a system for balance and change like our Great Year. And I'd seen him color above the timber-line of his beard as Pasiphae pulled it all from him. He hadn't minded letting us know the tale (he'd killed several Isthmus outlaws with just his fists!), but mother made him look less than thoughtful as to the long-term effects of his deeds. Such an unsettling fellow, and youths like Geryon in his wake

—By the way, *Prince Deucalion*, this Geryon'd said as Kouretes and I had shown their male company to quarters. —*Meaning no disrespect of course, but we're wonder-*

ing how you Cretans keep your heads with these half-naked women running everywhere. Can we speak to them? Yes, if you abide the answer. Then Theseus, disdain his own: – My mother is a priestess, sir, I know some custom. But this Ariadne. You hold her The Very Manifest One, I believe. But tell me, how do you get round the fact she's just a girl?

– Get around it! Our turn to laugh, though that couldn't be wise

– You're missing places, Icarus pointed with a chirp. – Got anything to eat, Deucalion? I'll go swim and get clean then. Do a good job for when we sail her! the runt said running for the water. I laughed to free my spirit of its fear, and asked The Powers for his lightness

Was it possible I was attracted to Theseus? In one day? Glaucus would be round again after Midsummer and it seemed we both had need of his example, more a man of the world than our priests. It was not the light in Theseus' tawny hair and gemlike eyes. It was the lingering taste of his life's unpredictable days, his vulgar courage in captivity, how he spoke as if nothing in the world could set fit limits on desire. That world of *no rules* looked through his eyes at us, he even seemed to glory in it. It frightened me, yet something in my chest wondered why I had rushed myself to the throne's obligations. Between this and their women's effect on Ariadne, who'd be teaching whom? I wanted to be a man in their eyes, though I hated what they embraced to be men themselves

I got Icarus to help me flip the boat (she was only a four-seater) up onto our horses so I could pitch the under-hull: that done, I thought to take him to supper with my family, show off the boy born of my blood and his overall progress. Back at Cnossos, though, nearly every-

body was in an unusual evening council. We found our eldest priestess Perdix tending the court's main shrine by herself and she didn't seem to hear me ask what was afoot. Her black eyes had never lacked a crow's glint and her hair had been gray as slate since I could follow a nurse's tale. It did seem true what some people had been saying, though, that her mind or her soul was slipping slowly into the other world now, and she rather eerily turned from her smoky tripod to Icarus and asked him to visit a certain old clan-tomb west of Cnossos with her this night. He knew she was (like Cratus) a bones-handler, entrusted with shoving over the old for new arrivals to the tombs, and there was no one who found them more full of life and Voices. But *Some children are not quite with us the living, in their hearts you know*, she mused to me as he backed off in fear. And next I knew, Pasiphae and the others emerged from the throne room and he was clinging to mother's skirt. This was not the time for her lap's old indulgences and she sent him with a herald back up to Archanes till tomorrow

— He can live with less coddling, that needs to stop, my mother advised as we watched them go. — You don't understand him as I do, my son. How angry the boy is for his mother's death, for her abandoning him in a way. He told me many things while you were at sea. Apparently his mother and uncle insisted on that fatal trip of theirs, just to move their clan ahead in certain aspects of trade. *Ahead*, that was the word he used. He said he knew somehow they shouldn't go alone in the one ship. Terrible. But *I* can't give him what he wants. You need to demand more of him. I'm arranging with Tukato to have that young novice Phaedra help make Icarus a man, or so I hope. Dear, we certainly have a House of such cases

now, haven't we? He'll be alright. Good evening then, Pasiphae concluded, turning for her chambers

This left me impatient, but Icarus' tantrums did fit with things she'd told us from her years of office with northern men. Pasiphae believed that Aryans bore a kind of mother's wound; that ages ago, when they'd been herdsmen on those oceans of grassland beyond the north wind, some catastrophe like a mountain-of-fire or too much rain had spoiled their forefathers' grazing. Of course (she'd said) they called it destiny now because they liked it here in our clime, but to people back then it was like a curse of banishment, from the earth they'd always known as the very Earth. Suddenly compelled to wander by Powers once completely nurturing, generations of Aryans had found themselves crashing through one still enviably-well-settled people after another, with such a wound in their souls—It could chill you like nothing from Perdix to hear of old cities of the East in their wake, places they'd conquered but couldn't administrate, *Earthling* skeletons lying in the streets. Perhaps by now their very blood bore the contempt for Goddess in their hearts

I breathed the mild fragrant evening, the lilac sky above the Labyrinth's roofs: Cratus and Diamat were starting to set tall Labrae out on stands for tomorrow's Midsummer rites and I went and helped awhile, asking no questions about the council, mellowed by day's last birds soft on the air. My life returning to the priesthood. Our guests had all retired, utterly fascinated with House plumbing for night-soil, Diamat quipped. Tomorrow would be good for everybody and when I said so Cratus answered *You go along now, sir, Go and comfort your Queen*. Comfort her? My, there was nothing like victory

I trailed her down the great zig-zag stairs of the east

gardens and across the road to the riverside: Ariadne was sitting on a stone and letting the twilit rippling waters soothe her, half in dreams (I thought) before the place of our bright celebrations days ago. But where I looked for a brooding mood or worse, she brought her hands up before her and blew noise through a split piece of esparto grass, a sound she'd giggled about in girlhood, the love-cry of a tiny pachyderm. And it was an almost luminous face she turned to me, and it stayed that way as she filled me in on that council

She had indeed been reconsidering military matters as she'd watched our crews coming home. Tonight she'd heard our parents receive further intelligence on that building-fleet rumor out of the north. Our pilots out of Aegina, backed up by vengefully-watchful Pelasgians, had gathered word of new numbers of timber-cutting gangs being conscripted among mainland baronies. At the same time they all doubted that enough cooperation between mainland houses was possible to form a threat to Crete. They even had a word, *stasis*, Ariadne said, for their traditional in-fighting. For all this, though, Pasiphae and grandmother had decided to re-commission these pilots to spy for us. And when Ariadne'd risen to protest the rumor and fear taking over the House again, Minos (being clear that he wished to help) pointed out that, however divided they were up north, their common aim was to cut out Crete's middle-man tithe for patrols of the sea-lanes. She understood his regard for her; *But he only sees so far*, she told me

—Our old friend Cadimmetes suggested they do talk big plans up north, if you remember, I said squatting at her side, trying to tread as lightly as a boatman-bug. —You don't think our parents have it right, then? Just to keep

Rhodes safe and Sicily in line till we really open the west for tin—and meanwhile have Glaucus find us steady supplies of iron. That will set up Achaia for state-of-the-art obsolescence by the time they catch up to us in bronze

—Until everybody has iron, and our children have to find something else to cover problems we've passed on. I know, this all goes to protect me and my sisters, Ariadne answered with only a slight note of sing-song resentment: now she reached round to embrace me, and touched the proud flesh at my rib with a finger moistened in her mouth. —And who'll protect you, hmm? And all our young men. If we forget the brother we've lost, we are worthless. Theia and our new young clergy hardly dare yet tell us such things. But who'll keep us from murdering our own spirits? Deucalion, she said with a quick look up and down the riverbank, —we're going to find a way to live without the military. I have another decision to share with you, too

—*What?* Forgive me, I'm not laughing, I'm—a disbanding? *Now?* What I've told you of overseas, that *is* the world now, I—People won't stand for it. I mean, half the men might not want to go back to the plough anymore, and the investments overseas your own wild mothers have—You *can't*. You're not serious, Ariadne, you don't realize

—Some people say I'm insufferably serious, she smiled in a way that began to frighten me, for all I'd sung of wanting to be there when she started to work her powers

—So, it's time to change that impression, brother. And I do, as you say, *realize*, but people are dying already for the way things are. The killing would stop once the wealth got farmed out more evenly. With our guests we can begin to work on the deeper problem. But that's all I'm go-

ing to say on this now. You needn't panic, brother, this won't come about tomorrow. But I've told nobody except you, not even mother or Paria. So honor that, and help me. You've learned a lot about the fleet, I know. So use it to help me when we take the throne next year. One year from to-mor-row, she softly sang now

The killing: So easily spoken: her wildness, or naivete?
Wild mothers

—Oh, and here she comes touching me, look out Deucalion, I moaned

—No, you'll like this other decision, Sweet Wine. This came out of that foolishness of our guest's with father's ring. You know he's going to ask me, in the offices' regard. That was in his eyes. But I think it's more important for Crete to see us two bear fruit first. You and me. Mother and I always seem to come from opposite worlds to the very same place, that Crete is everything—So let's see if our hero still wants a Cretan Queen after my child is born. Our child, I mean, she smiled. —Does that make you happy? Does this feel good? Ariadne said now plunging a rake of a hand up my thigh, and *How do we keep from going crazy?* I wondered as I writhed

—So I wanted unpredictable days

—Give me a child, Deucalion. Right here by the blood of the mountains. Let's have a child to show the farmers next sowing-season. Oh, you have a nice touch

—Tell me you need me, I said

—I *am*

So we played and joined, and I knew good things would come of it, given our hearts and the twilit hour between the worlds, the Voices of the river: I was learning, too, her body coiled up and shuddered without her helping fingers at her pearl, she cried aloud and bit my shoul-

der hard. And then in the softness of the grass in our place among the rushes, she fell asleep, and as her breath evened out, began to snore lightly. Why did that give me so much pleasure? Goddess snores. A girl. But love with her—Now I understood what this Shepherd was doing in my life, he was helping me lie here and wonder afresh that she was enough for me. And soon I heard the shaken systems and the flutes and the strong chants of the clergy carrying on up in the courtyard of the Labyrinth above us, a long coiling serpentine array of women and men with arms linked round each others' waists, turning and chanting in both longing and satisfaction before an image of Goddess half as high as your knee. Maybe our guests were out on a terrace, watching. I hoped they didn't hate us too much. Ariadne mumbled and scratched a mosquito away. *Give me a child*: nice way to put it though we knew who'd carry the work. I was going to make a person! What matter the looks in the Shepherd's sleepless face! Let him call me an infatuated princeling, he'd learn about Cretan spunk. As if the men led here by Europa and who'd sailed beyond Calpe's straits since then had nothing manful enough for his dreams! Feasting with friends, dance and music, clean clothes, hot bath and bed after long day's toil—We'd teach them what mattered. We'd win. And poor boy, he'd consigned himself to the lies of men like Echion, doomed to know himself forever as *Not Her*; while here a man and king before he mastered the Dance of Changes could let himself dissolve, even back to a child, the groping mouth, the writhing rhythm of flesh, sliding and slipping in and out of Her, body and spirit, disappearing, pouring forth and coming back again. New. Touching stars out of the center of ourselves, like the people on the court

How awake and pleased I felt, beside her in the shadows! *Tell me you need me: I am.* What other Best Things actually lay in plain sight? Why were northerners so possessed by Gods their own tongues lacked affection for? I was not even seeking and the river and the dark stones were oracling, impish things, a sentient babble, mother of words. My heart's darling's snore. Millions of lives, that was where she saw the world from: I was astonished and afraid of this plan of hers, afraid *for* her because of it. But that was tomorrow: already I was learning how to live with these foreigners, let them in and love your own life more

I got up and danced between the music and the water's edge, just to get sleepy before we went home. But it took awhile: they make you crazy, women.

* * *

We took to my chambers so we'd have Midsummer sunrise between the crimson pillars of a third-floor porch; and we had it, pouring itself fierce and molten-bronze over the east valley, livening the crocus and lilies of my painted walls, till their green leafage shone. Ariadne got up and lit a chunk of dittany off a candle, stood before them at her subtle spiral-gestured wakenings of herself and then came back to bed; and afterward we bathed each other with a sponge to feel light and cool the rest of the day and she chewed no wild carrot or other seeds now against conceiving. She bathed me longer, too, her Oak King standing there in the warm sunrise, in honor of this the height of our God's year of homage: the Thunder Moon was not a Rain-Bringer summers here in Crete, but a Door in the Universe, the great One Turning. And

as we shared dressing-touches, darkening our eyes and flecking gold-dust on our cheeks and exhorting each other to wear something more provocative (we could feel the drums outside and the whole House astir), word came that the Athenians, by our leave, would catch up on their rest

— Sweet dreams, I said. — Do their women know wild carrot and such?

— Diamat says daemons teach herbs to those who give themselves to the woods, so I don't know, Deucalion. I'll order them down later on, he's not going to confine them here. First they can learn Oak from live-oak, Ariadne smiled.

She meant, First let them find out what a King should be, a wonderful compliment to our men; though it was also a hint that she and I weren't going to spend this feast stitched together. But Oh, did she know how to show a man near her heart—And I ran with that, all day

People greeted and hailed throughout the halls, and it made their reserve more galling. *Like* us, blast you! Another salute to victory

Priests and priestesses were already about in the cool of the morning, winding House-pillars and the shafts of Labrae with helixes of flowers. Ariadne's new young ones Sinope, Geilissa, Clio and Theia and the rest were a bit fierce today as they saw Ariadne and opened the day's aspirations circling round her, sister, friend, Daughter, Queen, their center. So were our Kouretes toward me with their blossoms of oak, the older and the younger like Teledamus and Ion and Asculus, Yamo's helping brothers. They'd all been up through the night getting ready the west court's altars, the kindling for the pyres out there and atop Mount Juktas (procession up there tonight!),

preparing the cotes and stalls and pillar-crypts within the Labyrinth for visitation by the clans; and now from the top of the east bastion stairs where we met our family we saw people of the town working their way across the long valley slopes, children holding baskets while the adults knelt and took judicious cuttings. White, cream, pink oleander, the soft blue of love-in-a-mist, myrtle: it was moist and cool in the sun of our east gardens and voices sang as we were seen beginning ourselves with roses, blue anemone. Mother and Paria (in short kilts today and lots of gold, the Sun you know) kept close by our father, who looked brawny and tranquil with his gray-touched love-locks down over his shoulders, flowers tucked into his belt and diadem. The very lines round his eyes seemed relaxed, a man with nothing more to prove. He was getting ready to dance and they kept feeding him scents and delights of the gardens

We took our time, and followed a flagstone meander through the lower beds and round the Labyrinth's south-east corner (our guests lodged up above us). People with baskets and excited children began to gather in our wake as we strolled in informal quiet through the south precinct, the stream on our left and the great south corridor's processional murals above us on the slope: we felt on our backs the warm colors of sunrise that tinged the entire House as we moved along, listening to the water. The grass smelled wet and there were so many different shades of green in the bushes and small trees proffering flowers, swamp-iris, the fire-vermilion of pomegranate, yellow of squirting cucumber and golden thistle: insects and sparrows were about now to coax the senses even as people tried to keep their noises down, everybody putting trance and secret excitement into the walk for knowing

what later and tonight would bring. Minos walked slightly ahead of us, with hands out both sides to touch high shoots of fern

I loved Paria's quaint careful half-bowed walk, the old flesh loose on her bony shore-bird's legs and her eyes and nose as sharp together as a gryphon's, looking around at the morning with no bad joints today: she was holding hands with Ariadne and together they paused to look at an aloe, what Paria for years had been calling her hope-plant, which was budding out for the first time since Pasiphae's accession. Ariadne squatted closer to see, Paria's hand on her shoulder and they whispered to Pasiphae to come and see, pushing back some greens as if grooming back a child's hair. *Eighteen years!* they whispered. Everybody was watching. And we were all looking at each other. And now all these people would want to stop at that plant, the grand-dams who loved to be up early, the house-men and ladies, daughters and sons, all the goodlooking youth I remembered from blade practice now with baskets of green and blossoms in their hands, for the altars of Minos' honor. Doing all their lives as the House did: would it be so if and when Ariadne moved on her plan? Not likely: she'd have to fight even these people, who'd been up all night dancing and were back here now in silent clamor for more, more abundant life

I seemed to have decided to help her

The crowd building up along the west court went silent to the last hand-drum as Minos entered their presence and laid the day's first cuttings at the altars: gaily-dressed as they were, many stood the whole time with faces averted or shielding their eyes. Two elder Kouretes, Sillus and Auxo, stood between the close-by pyres of birch and oak and vine-stock with a man-sized effigy of woven sticks be-

and you knew that streams and rivers were near their year's low-water marks. The subtle threat and the shimmer of His insatiable greed made you glad that from this day His progress was decline; but the Earth underfoot felt utterly calm, the crowd's bright mild chaos a pleasure to have about you. I helped keep the pyres stoked as Ariadne and our mothers fulfilled the morning with more public healings and hearings of complaints, marines and sailors with old gripes, people rendering wooden images of afflicted limbs, laying babies in their arms. This time was mostly for those who couldn't manage the night-procession up the mountain nor the fire-leaping there, the all-night wildness. Then, suddenly, I was seeing the Shepherd and his six rams file out behind two of our priestesses (trying to help) onto the court from the southwest portico: they were yet in their blue homespuns but they'd rolled them up shorter on the thigh and their locks were combed Cretan-style, right to the kiss-curl. That ladies' man Geryon had even painted his eyes, likewise little Kapha the one most scared the other day (it wouldn't have looked good with Theseus' big red beard), and they were trying to say Hello to people, hanging close together. I went over, greeted, inquired

— I'm alright. — Fair. — Well, we're here, came the answers as Theseus stretched and twist-cracked his torso from the hip, just as my brother always had in the morning

— My father imports textiles from your Miletos but I see you keep your best work at home, sir, this Kapha smiled. — Has your Diamat done my eyes alright? What a crowd, what is this today?

— Are my eyes alright? mocked their tall wary blond fellow Phaeax

tween them: inside it was barley-dough wrapped in gold-foil and my father stepped in front of it now, giving blessing to the people, opening the Day. We breathed together, invoking Her, summoning Powers, sharing this breath, this Day His death and resurrection, we turned The Wheel: then Yamo gave Minos a lighted torch, and he set the pyres alight with good-humored bawdy thrusts of it under the kindling. And when he raised his right palm out high to give blessing and adjourn, the Day was begun: people gathered themselves into lines to enter the Labyrinth with clergy and make their private offerings, a caged dove or a goat's or ram's tether or their house's small snake in somebody's hands

The morning progressed (no Athenians) and we watched the altars' glorious piles of blossoms grow, kept the pyres burning strong, tried steps to brief drums, sang: Tukato and half of Archanes came down as festive as ever, and I saw Icarus in company with that Phaedra already. He'd said she hated him, though words from Pasiphae could change many a mind. As they greeted Ariadne and me I was sure he was still hurting for all he'd imagined he'd given our mother of his past, and his worship, but this oval-eyed Phaedra looked a woman to help him along. She carried herself like the image of our young women and asked Ariadne (whom she imitated every way she could) how *her* work with foreigners was going. The answer (*They're sleeping, but it is awfully soon to tell*) made Phaedra laugh and creased her brow at the same time: Ariadne promised to introduce her

The head of each tall gold Labrys grew too hot to touch as the hour neared noon and the sun cleared the Labyrinth's west bastions. Summer's weak breeze up the valley tasted of dust and the smell of greenery drying out,

balked her. Then she disengaged, and Icarus stepped up to Theseus' hairy plexus. Taste of smoke in all our nostrils

—I think I mentioned they've a fine herd of horse at Archanes, I said

—Yes! You'll come and visit won't you? All of you, Phaedra specified with two hands on Icarus' shoulders

—They are so much to me, horses, Theseus told her.

—With luck you'll be there too.

—Just send word first, Phaedra happily shrugged.

—Prince Deucalion, excuse us now? Tonight on the mountain, gentlemen? and she backed away with a five-fingers wave, a gay hop back into the swirl of colors

—My, my, droned Geryon as they all followed her back. —She is so—How old is she? Is she high-born? Is that her brother?

—Fifteen, I think. They're all children of our Commu-
nions, but the boy's an islander.

—Really! said Theseus, for the first time apparently speaking without thought first. —I was sired that way, though a king—Fifteen. She has something, like your Lady over there. Phoo! Like a child, but that sort of sneer on her—She *knows*, it just flows out of her, did you feel it? he seemed to be asking the bright air. —When can we go up there?

—Well, anytime, I suppose, I said. —But she's been given responsibilities with the boy right now as part of her own matriculations. About the herd though. As I understand your Poseidon

—Oh, Cretan ponies you mean, I'm sure. Well, one makes do. We'll talk about it. You boys hang close to me today, am I understood? You too Geryon, you mutt.

And they turned with him (*Yes sir*) to watch the healings end. He was himself again.

—It's healings, and their Midsummer. The king'll be out to dance, Theseus equitably explained from above his folded arms. —Don't flatter yourself that I let them do this today, Prince Deucalion. My mother as you probably know is a High Priestess too, so you Cretans aren't the only ones can honor old custom where it's useful. We enjoy ourselves, things have their place. I hope I'm not upsetting you.

See? *This is I, Theseus, and I tailor nothing to your ears.* At the same time, watching your face, captious, open with his handful of snares

—I look forward to more discoveries, I said carefully; and I was going to ask about their other moiety when Theseus' eyes caught something behind me. *Who is this?* he said lifting the point of his chin

Phaedra coming through crowds with Icarus at her rereward hand: the flowers now in her dark teased-up curls brought out the oval eyes' depths as she feasted them on our guests, they on her open blue bodice with puffed sleeves and the tight-cinched kilt of yellow and blue chevrons. Her etiquette and the willowgreen sprig at her navel made her look the more like a woman bound for Ariadne's life. Winsome, just a bit homely she was, her lips small and with a suggestion of sneer

—Our father Tukato said to extend Welcome from Archanes. Icarus, please let go a moment, she said

—Thank you—Phaedra? said Theseus borrowing our fist-to-breast hail: his men followed. —Are they all so beautiful up country here, Prince? I can believe it, now

—And you were complaining about—Nevermind! their Geryon fumbled

Second surprise: Theseus let that pass, just looked at Phaedra and she gave back till the adventure suddenly

amid new applause and music, priests Sillus and Auxo tried to keep the man-effigy moving with him so that it became Him in our eyes. Oh, He was beyond himself this year, He let go all restraint, mesmerizing people first with a few slow curls of His arms and hisses: then House Snake turned to Bull and He charged the edge of the crowd; but He drew back suddenly, with struts and flapping arms, hobbled and cooed and displayed Himself until His eyes turned sullen like a ram's and He frightened the crowd again. People drew back from the touch that'd surely burn. Yet He still had beasts and daemons to spare and before my father'd done He became horned serpent, too, rubbing Himself against the effigy and just aching to get out of that old skin: He pranced and shook out His mane, then paused as proud-looking as a buck on a crag, bellowed and tossed His head, lunged forward and burst forth with eagle's wings, curled at the feathery tips. And every person seeing their clan's totem in His steps gave their creature's cry, or slapped their thighs in uncontrollable excitement or copied His gestures—He was fast wearing out His priests too, though in their faces you saw their years of brotherhood and the savor they took in this work, for the passing Great Year. At last He finished; and the Kouretes set the effigy burning atop a pyre as Minos submitted himself again, and the flames began to devour amid a newly pensive silence

—Don't you have some part? said Theseus: I seemed to wake up, and told him it was small; and then I found myself telling him, against the meditative silence all round us in Minos' honor, about the Dance and how it contained our history and The Powers a man might draw on in his life; that I was learning it

—And his death. Does he burn next year, like the doll?

People noticed us whispering, and I felt a shame as my eyes rested on my father before She Who Shines; but I kept on anyway, for here was a chance (I thought) to show Crete for a man. I even emphasized parts of the violence as they'd been explained to me; that it was for the Heir to strike the first blow next year, light or mortal depending on the Offered One's wishes, and on His sense of the example people needed. I did, I kept talking, the disposition of His Remains among our towns' fields, His unmarked grave: I thought I'd been judged as weak and, once again, fought back by sullyng what was holiest to myself. This Day was my father's, and I *used* it

—But no one is ever forced to watch, or—partake, I said. —People come because, afterward, when their own death seems near, they remember His and how He met it, all the shameless things He might've done before succumbing in any case

—Oh, there's a comfort, Theseus said. —They had something like that waiting me in Eleusis. Gods! And my guts and blood sown into fields like manure. They used to dance round me at rites up there, like one big snake trying to freeze prey. I can—Maybe I can help you somehow, if we talk.

By now too many looks were upon us and I shushed him just as his words reached that last idea—And how was I to take that, *I can help you?* But now the risen Minos and Pasiphae had rent open the charred effigy and lifted between them a huge smoking barley-loaf; and the people came up-court toward them, hungry

—Behold! called She Who Shines, —His Life is gone into the barley! And —*We shall have plenty!* came our roared response. —And His Life will make rain on the mountains! —*We shall never thirst!* —And His Life is

within the trees! In the flocks! On the vines! — *They shall be fruitful!* — And the Earth will receive Him! — *We shall come back!* — Strong! — *Stronger!* — Eat!

They fed each other, then Ariadne, then Paria: then I stepped forward and took bread from my Queen on my tongue, let it melt to an inseparable savor of ashes and barley. In turn, I fed old Cratus and Perdix and other clergy (where was Cleite, by the way?), and they began to distribute His Gift to all comers: when I rejoined the Shepherd in my officious way I saw how fixed he'd become on Ariadne now, wanting her or what she represented but unsure of the cost. Maybe *there* I was not quite a fool to him and I told them all to go and receive from her, as just a gesture she'd smile upon. But they held fast behind Theseus even as Ariadne made a point to come over herself. They balked: he was looking at her now as if he'd shake her to come out of some *fancy*

— It's only bread, she told them but, still declined, she turned back to that other world with diffident grace. And the group of us watched her go, like men stranded on different islands

Daylight formalities closed with people's palms pressed to the Earth, to give thanks and ground the power running along the spine: even so, some kept up impromptu dancing-circles on the court, while others shared food and wineskins in the shade, sought lovers for the evening coming on. Our family was going to retire to Paria's villa to wait the moon, and before we left Ariadne saw to it that clergy (and anybody else they could find, like Orneus and Elphenor) helped to socially separate the Athenians into pairs at most. Their boy Kapha and Diamat seemed to enjoy talking fashion while Yamo offered to officiate wrestling and such against local youth.

That was accepted, since (as his face seemed to say) Theseus couldn't have what he wanted. All these daughters around, and he had to have just her and right away? Paria finally chided my bad example and said I was showing Athens too much concern, *Let them be awhile*: I was glad, only now Ariadne wanted to ramble with friends again, and their gay going left our mother in a mood of her own. I hadn't seen her tears since my brother's funeral but she began to talk of how quickly her reign had passed, how long it'd been since she'd run wild like her daughter. *Don't your three days of thanksgiving count?* Paria teased; yet before long Cleite appeared in Paria's red-pillared foyer and the six Athenian women were behind her. No miracles: the same uninteresting clothes and cautious faces; but they'd come to trust Cleite a bit for her time with them, and she'd invited them to page, just today, for Pasiphae's Midsummer. *If you'll have us of course*, Cleite said to her

So this is why I remember my mother's evening as powerfully as Minos' day: she truly enjoyed herself encouraging them to wear (or not wear) this and that, showed them some Cretan steps in Paria's courtyard, and at least their Anchinoe (one of the redheads) and Polyxena the tumbler's daughter gave themselves with shy pleasure to new beginnings. By dusk there were torch-bearing crowds arrayed along the narrow royal road from this villa to the Labyrinth, for people always knew where the Queen would rejoin them from: Paria kissed my mother, who this time next year would be a widow, and we were off, she stepped out from under Paria's lemon trees with their dangling corn-dollies and began to turn loose upon the crowd. The very road between its fine houses seemed to flicker and shake as people waved their lights or

clapped or shook systums to see her make the spirits out here wilder, to feel her strength and take it into themselves: Pasiphae swung past with taunting tongue, with hands imploring them. Were they alive, she circled Minos more and kissed me weaving herself back through our procession and taking the lead again. Amid it all I heard praises of her years bringing Crete's fields back, her managing enemies, healing: people loved to see Goddess-on-Earth like this, in control at the wild heart of everything, and in turn she nourished herself on the fruits of her powers, capering, wagging her hips, fingers at her nipples, rubbing her belly. I'm sure most of her new pages viewed this as something only their Aithe might do in barons' halls; but they'd neither been raised to celebrate her passionate power, nor did they know her mind in council chambers. Their eyes looked big, though, with what She Who Shines cast light upon before them

The Labyrinth's west bastions and horned roofs looked prodigious, gravid, inviting with the blue night rising behind them, lamps in every window, and torches of celebrants helping to stoke the twin pyres again: the crowd was wilder and louder for the day's wait and drinking, more lasciviously dressed, too, and far off from the nearly day-bright court we could see two fires atop Juktas, bright eyes of The God come unnervingly awake. There were more rites round my parents and by then the courtyard was overflowing with people forming up for procession behind high-held Labrys: I'd drunk some myself and, once I saw Ariadne returned and waiting me, I strayed again, to offer Theseus *help*, as he'd offered. But in the milling chaos I found him haranguing his full twelve from their midst, *Stay close to us up in these hills, I have to answer for you back home* and such—At least there was

something he answered to, somewhere. So I helped find them wineskins, and left them with only a promise to show them our pouring-rites, if they wished, on the mountain

– Think how many people across the island are doing this tonight! Ariadne exclaimed by my side, drinking in the uproar

– Plus thirteen more or less! Give me a squirt, Auxo! Let's go!

Down the southeast portico, over the stream, along the causeway past the Labyrinth's shimmering illuminated wings: the deeper inland we went the sparser the houses became, and past Europa's tomb (we sang to her) the night air grew richer with scents of fields and night-opening jasmine, livestock-dung, and smoke-hallowed stars. We trooped along up gentle slopes into the hills, fireflies off in the dark either side, moths wild as lost souls above our torches: the sun had fallen like a king in glory and we looked for the moon and let ourselves go, and soon as we began the climb in earnest you could look back and see a great snake of light along the whole road back to Cnosos. A dream, a dream! We reached the crest of Juktas and fanned out round the place of ceremony where there was a fissure in the Earth and, tonight, two flanking pyres ablaze as below: we let the Kouretes lead a breathing again, people rested briefly and felt out the night and with the breeze and smoke the mosquitoes weren't bad at all, for so many near-naked bodies including mine. Grandmother was feeling good and led a hand-holding chain of people round and round inward in a spiral, and at the center there was an intense sort of rub-against-me mill, like they said schools of dolphins did beneath the sea. The Kouretes meanwhile (they'd carted up great

pithoi of wine) made places ready for the pouring to God and Goddess in each other, a rite getting popular with Ariadne's step back from blood; and by the time it was clear that all who were coming were with us, my parents were eager to lead the leaping through the fires

The point was less your grace going through the flames than what you did on reaching the other side, for being purged: last year they'd turned to face the fire and called people through by name, to lift spirits higher. But tonight Pasiphae and Minos hurtled through shouting and then kept on running without a look back, down into the dark of the grassy hillsides, and a long knowing *Ohhh* of pleasure came out of the crowd. Ariadne said *Let's do likewise*, and we did: the scent of her hair mixed in with the ground beneath us woke every memory of our betrothal in my blood, and later when we sat up, there was the Thunder Moon, low and honey over the trees in its just-begun wane. Next year Midsummer, it would be full

She wanted to go back up and see if our guests and her friends needed help between them, and crossed to Juktas' far side in her search. The pourings had been proceeding so that by now, many people had left these heights for their pleasures; but then I saw Icarus, still jumping back and forth through the leaping-pyre and Phaedra off to the side just standing there, arms folded, her mouth's shape more pronounced. I went over and stopped him. He was welcome to refuse the new life from anywhere but not to cheapen the magic in others' eyes. *Don't you care?* I asked Phaedra but the very question startled her back from a thousand miles. I left them waiting their turn in line for the elegant seats and cups that, used rightly, brought one near The Mystery; but it seemed there were more than Athenians needing patience in our midst

I found Ariadne down off the mountainside, listening to and coaxing chat among the Athenian males and Talley from the House of the Horae, with other Cretans. Their women, unfortunately, had decided themselves to go back to their rooms (the sounds off in the dark could be daunting, I guessed), but it appeared that at least four of Theseus' youths had found friends for the night. And while he, and Phaeax and Tenes still seemed sober and aloof, that Geryon looked transported. Cleite herself was with him and he yelled Hello from under her arm as I came down to them. She was quite drunk and smiled me a kind of message that this was not only settled with Iris, but another part of her Delphic vengeance, and help to Ariadne; but look at this Geryon, his rapturous eyes for the elegant Cretan woman by him, as if he couldn't believe you could have what you wanted most

—He asked, Deucalion, Ariadne told me as we left them to their evening. —Yes, he's a bold one. When I came up I found him giving *them* all a speech about home and reputation. But for himself—Well, it's settled now, even if the women did go home. I told him they're free here, and that I'd take them out of his charge if he couldn't let them be.

—I'm sure that pleased him, I said.

—Oh, and nevermind your promise about the pourings. I invited him to share it myself, after I declined his other wish. I'm glad you take no insult, Sweet Wine, though I'll wager he thinks you should. And he said *With all due respect, an Achaian does not do that. Men are only men*, he said. Well, to each his limits, I suppose. He's not so bad. Look at the stars up here, the milk pouring forth!

I kissed her deep and she let herself let go everything, just awhile: that's all I'll say for the rest of this Midsum-

mer. Yes, there was more to this Shepherd than raw ambition and the need to keep sober and aloof, as we'd discover. That night, though, that night of nectar, even as I revelled in our making a child, I had to wonder about our ancestors. Had they been simpler, or more blessed, to have called these newcomers Gods?

* * *

Glaucus came back from home in Praisos a few days before the new moon, looking rested and strong: he'd gone first to the Admiralty (a separate building just west of the Labyrinth) to see that his crew and his ship *Themis* were ready to sail, and that's where I met him, on an errand regarding supply for Perides' hunting-force in the islands. Then we'd walked through the House to Minos' east reception hall for his briefing, and I hoped we'd run into Theseus, but we didn't. Another time: later I learned that Orneus (with permission) had taken the Athens men hunting. The plans to send them up country still needed some arranging

—Met quite a woman back home Midsummer, Glaucus said as we waited in the pillared hall with its cool draw of summer day's air. —Her name's Antibia. Someone I'd like to settle in with, after next year perhaps. Ho! he laughed out of golden thoughts. —I had to sleep outside the night after Midsummer too, I couldn't fit my head back through mother's door. Well, my young friend, too bad I'm always enroute when I see you.

Yes; and as I knew where he was bound now, no short jaunt, I wished I could tell him Ariadne's hopeful plan. But he seemed clear of some of those tensions of awhile back, and there was no sense sending him abroad unset-

tled. Our eyes told the slight envy at play between us for who went roving and who stayed home. Just as my parents came in Glaucus said what a changeling I was, that I looked kinglier for these past months, the willowy youth with a brood of secrets. *The very Kid*, he smiled

After greetings and Ariadne's apologies through Pasiphae, Minos laid my iron sword across the table and reviewed latest word from the Admiral. *Three raider-camps burned, surviving hostages released, plunder and prisoners on Paros till autumn halts fleet operations. Thirty-four casualties: twenty-two killed in action, seven home with disabling wounds, five succumbed at sea. Request reinforcements, standard rendezvous. Now is the time. Perides.*

—Even granting where I stand, it's intolerable, Glaucus, like some endless war we're in, my father said.
—But first we want all the news they don't put in the herald's mouth out east.

—I was telling Deucalion of a wild Midsummer, he answered, —so I know morale is high, especially given whom you hold against more trouble. Harvest looks strong thanks to the rains. I did visit Zakros, and Lady Titone and Sarpedon talked all night on the pleasures of a little fiscal leeway, due to your tax-abatements. You can count on them, I'm saying, however much they strut their independence. They like your idea, too, Lady, for selling grain to the East where Pharaoh steals it, to recover us an affordable source of silver. The main thing, I believe, is general uneasiness because of the Admiralty warning about that Ptoliporthos abroad this summer. So many old towns out east sit right on the coast, as you know. Places built when Crete was—well, another world. In short, people feel vulnerable, much as they trust you, Minotauros and my Queen.

Nirou Chani's gold-pouring shops, the great house of Mallia, Gournia the market-town, estates on Pseira and Mochlos isles. Miletos the envy of the weavers' world. Sitia, Palaikastro, Patsophas, at Zakros an indoor pool and the riches of Syria in her coffers: fat prizes all, and that was just the northeast of the realm. And if Ariadne failed to implement her dream? I looked at my black iron. Glaucus had to do this, for the uncounted lives in those towns. It was sure meanwhile that our elder kin would use the abatements to keep a few extra shades of Talos patrolling their coasts. So, again, little had really changed, in fact this tide toward a realm full of warriors was still outwrestling our hands at the helm. And the longer Ariadne waited with other policy, the more uproar against her. Yet who knew what she had in store, after such workings with the sky—And after Glaucus' slip about a world she too remembered, well, her vision shimmered my blood, and I felt my brother's heated policies fail within me, guttering like the last of a flame. Glaucus had noticed secrets, alright!

So he was to head first for Trianda, Rhodes, and show this iron around: Pasiphae said to tell the colonists we were waiting their further views on solving this Achaian trade-rival problem. *Assure them we have not forgotten*, she said, but Minos cautioned that soldiers were no cheap answer in any sense. From Rhodes, Glaucus was to link up with Carians who'd guide him inland and straight to Hatussas: he'd likely find the Hittites ready to talk some kind of steady iron-trade (given how we'd kept their wishes waiting since spring's delegation): he was trusted to make any deal he had to, and then he was to head overland, meet up with his ship's crew at Antissa, Alxiona's home on Lesbos. It was through people north of the

Black Sea that the Hittites themselves often got iron ore, so Alxiona's connections would reinforce the likelihood of success. Finally, Glaucus was bound for Troy: they were known to handle a lump or two of Arr-yan, and he was to promise whatever they wanted in exchange

— Because you see, while you're at it, Minos said, — we play up the tin that just now is pouring in off my ships from the west. That shoreman Cordax says six ships are in on season-schedule practically swamped with it. And when we farm it out and then leave everybody behind with their bronze, we'll breathe easier than ever. One more thing, son: unless it jeopardizes success, I want you back here before my Day. So I'll know that because of your labors, my daughter and son can give you Praisans the life you deserve. And by this House, you'll want for nothing, including that wish you spoke to me one day on the beach.

It moved Glaucus that Minos remembered, forgave and honored him besides: my parents embraced him long, and so did I after walking him to Amnisos behind his well-fed crew. It hurt how he tried to hide his long looks to the mountains of home, and on the mole I cried a little, actually. Glaucus asked who my friends were these days and there were youths enough around, but none quite like him for where I stood, so close to a Shepherd; and now he wanted to know more than what he'd heard of their bumptious arrival

— Well, except that he knows the place for everything, barks at his flock before they breathe improperly, despises excited people and generally hates us and women, it's going as planned, I half-laughed. — Be careful, my brother. We'll make you offerings. Good winds!

— Blessed Be, Deucalion Minotauros, Glaucus said:

the shoremen led by Podes today swore to look after me, and the *Themis* rowed out of sight beyond the eastern headland. Flexing my knees to the unheard music of a rite I sent some prayer to The Grove out on Dia Isle. Couldn't see Velkanos today beyond a white wall of summer sea-haze, but that was moot: I meant to feed it as a *brutch* no longer.

To that end I did what was needed to send Perides three ships' reinforcements of men and supply. There was nothing else I could do till Ariadne declared herself, and it weighed on me what we'd become, needing only to scratch the right signs in clay to alter lives, villages, worlds. I even consoled myself that the current butchery was at least *out there* in the islands, our first defense-line; and as my stomach gave the lie, I prayed her hour come soon.

Late that same day my mother sat me down in her chambers for some good news: when the Athenians had been sent up country, Ariadne and I were to make a brief progress through some of the towns beyond Cnossos' dependencies. She warned there'd be meetings with kindred out to take our measure and so forth; and then, as we sat together amid the almost comic chaos of her working-rooms—with their candle-stands and censers, wardrobes and stacked clay tablets, foreign parchments and gifts and plants—Pasiphae wondered aloud how she and Ariadne came to such differences at times. She said she should've known that leaving her in Paria's charge in those crucial early years of her own throne would affect her daughter's visions: *I just have a sense she'll run things far far differently than I have, Sweet Wine*. Silence. Smiles. My eye lit on that Callistan plant-hanger I'd brought her and I offered to put up one of her potted cactii. Mother did not like to

be parried. I received a forceful scolding now about reports of my profane behavior, Midsummer. Indeed, she said, it was for House staff to put up plants, it was for artisans (or, some of them) to be found wanting proper respect at times for the House and its vital mysteries

—Do you understand, Deucalion? We *deign* to associate with them, and never at the expense of each other. We condescend to play in the world, your father's very Offering is play, for him—Do you understand? she said again. —Good then! Pasiphae said, getting up to look over Cnossos-town from the spacious porch of her court-level chambers, where mourning-doves busied her feeders. —Now, I want you to deign, she smiled, —to take our guests through Iris' shops tomorrow. I'll be holding a dinner for them soon with some of our leading business-people, too. Sophisticated they are not, but I want them to take a taste of later plans for them up country, so they don't grow too resentful. Just let them watch you move among your subjects, she ended, and she went back to her cluttered work-table. —Will you excuse me then?

As I kissed her cheek I noticed the business before her: clay tablets and sealstones of sard, chalcedony, incised with signs of last rites completed, to be sent with her personal sympathies to the clans of Perides' lost ones. She did not fear, especially now: young men's kin would remember she knew what it was to lose a child. How far, though, could she and Ariadne push the *damos* which had shaped them, especially if they worked in different directions? It was enough at times to be glad I was only a man.

That evening I was told that Ariadne would spend the night with friends at Paria's villa: I guessed I'd better expect the years ahead to be something like Minos', though I knew she needed her own ways to bear her burdens.

Mainly I missed her advice on how to do best by the Athenian women, but in the morning it didn't matter, because when I called at their door first (the whole House was curious about them) Diamat came out to say that two of them bore the moon's Flower

—They're sworn to keep together even if they are getting used to us, Diamat said with a smile of pleased sympathy toward their rooms. —But have you noticed how low in spirits Cleite seems, since she came home, sir? I'd've liked to be at Paria's villa too, but Cleite needed someone to spell her with these guests. She's so weary—But it's more, I know it is

Taking on too much? I remembered Cleite lifting her arms to the sea for her being retained. Well, I went up one flight and knocked on Theseus' door. A cautious but haggard Phaeax let me in (they were all in there and had the great wooden porch-shutters closed to sunrise), and the place looked more a sick-room's vigil than a gathering after the hunt. Theseus labored to get up but groaned and grasped his temples, then sat bent forward in a kind of collapse

—Oh, Deucalion, one of your priests is swinging that roarer in my head, round and around—Please speak quietly, that's my dying wish

—I thought you went hunting, gentlemen, I said: None of the others looked well either, particularly Phaeax and Tenes his two right arms. Still, they cleared clothes off a chair for me and as I learned what happened I gave their Kapha directions to fetch bathroom-water for a compress

Our friend Orneus had shown them sport enough, they agreed, and in the hills south of Cnossos the Shepherd had got a deer. As they'd roasted it after home's manner, though, some Cretans came down to their fire, and next

they knew they'd been invited to a villa up there. Belonged to an older woman in the wine-trade, one Nomia, and she had a house-man or husband named Virbius who wore a little ruby stud in his nostril, his own sign of the wealth he brought her in sharing residence. Anyway, trouble was, a guest of theirs last night, a long-retired marine named Mestor with a vicious-looking scar across his cheek, had got them to table under the arbor and drinking from a jug in which he kept Crete's daemons—all, he'd said; and before long, mutual toasts (a good mortal's version of a pouring, I figured) had turned to a competition of sorts. *I felt like Earthshaker, and this is the punishment*, Theseus groaned, awaiting Kapha

Raki, maybe the last thing you could squeeze from a grape: our elder men said that even Earthbull feared that stuff. Messing with moonshine. Their hosts were known as birds of Pasiphae's flock and I remembered my brother once complaining of that Mestor: an old marine living bored among the landsmen, happy to complicate a council or play for some useless upper hand in trivial chat. He and this Virbius had probably feigned their swallows and shared a fox's laugh at the foreigners—Between this, my night, and mother's words about them, I felt impelled to tack my own way yet again. And oddly, as the Shepherd revived enough to ask why I'd come and they heard of the craftshops, the seven of them actually seemed pleased. They started comparing the gay virtues of dolphins over foliage-designs for making a vase or a wall come alive, the way a Nomia might talk in deigning to show her finer ware from Labyrinth shops. They weren't mocking little Kapha now: Theseus himself had her terms on his tongue, and somehow they'd grown more willing to *be* here at all

Theseus had one favor to ask. Round this time last

year he'd been in the thick of things up on the Isthmus Road, in a fight he'd not thought he'd survive against highwaymen. But he'd vowed to Poseidon his birth-God an annual offering for His help, and that had seen him through: he hoped we might go down to the ocean, where he could improvise some way to keep his oath. Kouretes had shown him Poseidon's shrine in our west wing, but indoor places had never made him feel The Presence. *Of course The God lives in Bull*, he said, *but here the creature reminds one of—the Eleusis kind of fate. I hope you understand, Prince.*

I said I was not above rejoicing myself when animals sometimes said No to altar and axe: he might've called it a *Cretan* kind of fate, too. What was this? To help it unfold if I could I suggested the herd of horse at Archanes: that cleared his red eyes a bit, and so much the better if Phaedra could help us tame him down, enmesh him in even half a social web here. Before we left we shared some bread and dipping-oil and I liked how Theseus fought off the last of the stupor, pouring water down over himself and sucking breath for the shock, then crack-back stretching and slicking back his mane as he dressed. It felt good to think ourselves a pair of rogues, suspicious but getting along. *Shall we?* he said: with his wet hairy head and royal necklace he did look a blue-eyed king of beasts. Maybe he'd even shave!

His youths chattered in good loose spirits as we headed up through the wakening hills south of Cnossos. Fine with me if he did not wish to stop at our Bull-herd's water meadow: that was where the climb to high office began, and it wasn't good magic to show a man the path you hoped he'd eschew. More of their strangers' unease was dissolving, and we passed orchards and rolling pasture

and they spotted wagtails and nightjars and even a golden oriole, birds of home: Cleite might be wearying but her work showed with the more decorous Geryon, while Phaeax's contempt had softened too toward the nappy young Kapha. Not perfect: on the way we passed a certain tree and, seeing a goat in its low branches, their Tenes and the small fierce Stichius tossed rocks at it till I asked if they had goat-regulations back home. But they let me show them horsemint and vervain, couchgrass and yarrow too, speaking well of our priests' reputations with herbs, since medicines could mean a warrior's life. Before noon we reached Archanes' precincts and they let their exclamations fly that here was yet another palace, Archanes' greatest house like a quarter of the Labyrinth, with three bright alabaster stories, big woodsashed windows and horn-decked roofs, entrances facing all sides of the water-rich valley and plenty of trees and trained-up grapes. Some of Crete's oldest houses and clan-tombs were also up in these hills because of the plentiful good water (I showed them pipes that ran all the way to Cnossos), and moving on to find Tukato we crossed his fore-yard, paved and set with outdoor altars, these flanked by silver Labrae and decked by the children with blooms of elder and silk tulip, bright pebbles and spiralled mollusk-shells. The spirited peacefulness of the place seemed to please them. Usually Tukato's brothers and sisters were shuttling to and from the place, delivering jarred concoctions they produced here to help the Labyrinth follow through on healing-rites, while their charges would be shouting Hello's from windows or chasing about, harried by brothers and sisters in their elegant gowns. But today seemed to be *the* day for juniper-berries and they were mostly gone gathering

— Very good for fatigue, young man, Tukato told Theseus after a gracious but reserved introduction at the house-door: Theseus seemed less than at ease with the priest's mix of strongly-built height and gynandrous manner, while Tukato had heard of events at Amnisos. Not to mention his spiritual rancor against the mainland's ways with horses; but he was willing to do what he could for the cause. — Perhaps I'll send some down for you, Tukato carried on. — Won't you come in then? If you'd sent word, Deucalion—Icarus will be sorry he missed you

Somebody else (with lips pursed between his whiskers) was sorry to have missed a certain person, too. We strolled in past some murals of blue monkeys gathering saffron to an open-doored sorting and cook-room, where the novice Razorclam fed kindling to the fire beneath a boiling batch of valerian's pink-white pinnates: all plaited locks and eyepaint, in an elder's gown that half-lost him in its folds, this pale-skinned exiled Hurrian youth (his title was actually Rajkumar) trudged past us rather happily grinning with his sweaty labors, apologized for the stink of the stuff and fetched back his perforated spoon, to strain a cooling batch of its froth on a sunny sill. But as we all took each other in, his crooked toothy smile lost its light: there was a look in my guests' eyes which Razorclam's grin could not endure. He took himself outside for wood, though plenty lay stacked by the hearth, and Tukato did not fail to notice

— We perform blood-sacrifice only at times here, up-valley at our Cave of the Winds, Tukato answered to the Shepherd's inquiries. — Nor can I offer you wood of your Poseidon's tree for a fire, we don't plant ash hereabouts. Its shade is bad for grass, you know. Ash strangles off other trees too, a jealous tree isn't it, like acacia. Our

mare Leukippe wouldn't like that, he smiled with serious eyes. — Perhaps some offering of your own, to better your communion with the creatures? They're not so wild as to overlook such a deed.

Tukato folded his well-shaped hands at his belly and waited, doing his dispassionate best while putting himself out not a bit. Theseus accepted the comments but seemed as if his outing couldn't prosper now in any case. Then, with a look round at his youths, he took off his royal necklace and asked Tukato to see it reached the most sacred shrine here

— One has to give what came dear, Theseus said.
— Let this come to The God in the names of my newest Companions here, as well.

This term (strange to me) lit up his two lieutenants' eyes, while the gesture and the heavy gold somewhat mollified Tukato. Now Phaeax and the rest asked to have offering-locks of their hair cut: no small deed, given mainland concerns about women's magic. Thus Tukato surrendered just a bit to their seeking their God in these precincts entrusted to him; but after he'd readied them with aspersions of salt and water he led them outside to be guided down to the paddock—by Razorclam.

— He doesn't feel good to me, Deucalion, and the others are slavish, he said taking up Razorclam's utensil and stirring the frothy pot on the sill. — But I do understand your House's hopes, so let them learn to abide such a novice if they want to come here. Fair enough, Deucalion? Tukato said; and despite his sternness I wished I had more of that, the same thing in Iris when she'd said *They're not at home*

— As for the Rajkumar, in case you're wondering like half the priestesses, he went on, — I've given him till the

Frost Moon to make up his mind about his offering. One cannot have and not have. Before long, you—Nevermind. Ah! Did your mother tell you the tale behind that olive-bough they brought? Just imagine! The people up there vote to choose the totem of their city, they have the common sense to choose Goddess' olive tree instead of some God's power to make things tremble—and the losers rob the women of their old land-holding rights, in recompense! I saw the design Iris has in mind for your throne, the vine-and-pillar, very nice. But that's a world of difference from Athena wrapped round with what a shepherd fleeces from the flock. Don't you agree? I declare, I never did understand certain parties' *rush* to bring such people into Crete. Let's go outdoors, what an odor this batch!

So we sat in the shade of his courtyard to wait the Athenians' return, and now Tukato politely warned me that Phaedra had been asking every messenger from Cnossos about this Shepherd. He did not like the prospects for Icarus. The boy had become quite attached to our Queen early-on, more so than anybody realized, and now Tukato feared that Phaedra's infatuation would hurt him worse. He asked me to have Ariadne speak to the girl about the gravity of office, and I agreed. But mostly Tukato seemed distracted with this foreign presence round the herd. These priests and priestesses could be very fierce but it was not an image of earth-shaking power they loved the creatures for; and when the Athenians did come back up the paddock-path with Razorclam well behind them, Tukato read his novice's hang-dog look right away. Apparently Theseus had wanted to leave the herd before long and see the sights nearby, Archanes' other great buildings, the splendid round *tholos* tomb that was older than the Labyrinth; and Razorclam had dutiful-

ly tried to inhibit him. *Another time then, perhaps?* Theseus said as we departed

—So I wasn't—polite with the other fellow, he said as we took to Cnossos Road again (he'd waved his youths on ahead of our conversation and I thought this might be the man-to-man talk he'd offered; but the first thing he did now was drop my title). —Say what you will, Deucalion, I am Achaian, and a man has to set example. I don't hate the fellow, mind, but that's not our way to honor Goddesses. Especially when a man hasn't made his sacrifice, and I can tell he hasn't. I think I can be frank with you, that disgusts me, neither goose nor gander. Why do they let him do that? Don't think I don't understand about the bastards, he continued, —because my mother is High Priestess back home and I was sired in a house just like that. I was just blessed she cared to remember that my father was a king, not like that Orneus, say. Ahh, mother, they say she was beautiful before she got old. It's good for children to grow up that way, if they can't do better. Hope I'm not talking too much. I want you to know I'm interested, that's all, and I wonder why they tolerate that fellow.

—They won't much longer, I said, uneasily holding back like an Elphenor now. Yet I was walking higher on my toes, trying to match his height and hating it in myself, for his speech alone was like an abrasive

—I see, Theseus answered. —Yes, it's the example we set, isn't it. Some time I'll tell you about my real Companions, my first command in the Isthmus wars. But these city-boys with me here, well, between ourselves as princes, Deucalion, this trip today was for them. Their fathers begged me to keep them alive and on the right path through this, and Poseidon's a good tool for that with

young men. Ask your own Admiralty or your mother who put in that shrine, eh? Oh, don't look at me, we're both royal sons and we know who makes and breaks gods, don't we. It's true, I have what you'd call a daemon, Theseus said having noticed my demeanor but nudging up to my side to rouse me past it. —There's something about you that brings it out. But you know, I seem to hear my own voice differently round you people. You look at me as if—Well let me put it this way, has it occurred to you that you're marrying your sister?

—It—It has to do with Necessity, this Great Year, I said; but as that sounded apologetic without much reason I understood, I went further, and told him no man had ever been king who hadn't married the *damos*. That in Egypt itself no man was divine *or* king if he'd not drunk *Sa*, secret mixture with moonblood; that my own sort of ambition had won me this place. And as I protested on I thought of his father's attempt to poison him and the way he spoke of his mother: dust in the wind, yet he was the one whose words matched his thoughts completely, his eyes alight with a kind of jocund burning

—Listen though, Deucalion, he charged ahead. —You know we see these images of this Bull Dance of yours on every other wall, and last night your fellows Mestor and Virbius told us it's a way you have of choosing people for offices, high office too. I can't recall what you said about it when I beached here, but I'd like to suggest that if we are here to learn, I might learn faster if I had some—some way to serve like that. When is the next Dance? Do you think you can get me in?

—Well—This autumn—The harvest celebrations, I said with lame concealment of the leap within my chest.

—I mean, in those rites there's a place for people to lay

on hands and take His blessing. But after that, well, there is a Dance coming in the spring, with some minor offices at stake. But taking part, Theseus, I don't think our women—I mean, you shouldn't

— Why not? he said with plain scorn

— Because people often get killed, I said. — You're not here to risk that. Do you realize the trouble if something happened to you?

— Mm. Mmmm, I see, yes, thanks, he answered, more mellow now but with that tilt of his head that'd always disturbed me. He said he hoped we'd think about it, and then he seemed to lack conversation altogether, clear down to Cnossos. Man-to-man! How could it be I was trying to match him, please him even as his presence laid a kind of suffocating weight on my chest? I said I had to work on my grape-arbor in the south gardens now: thankfully they weren't interested, and my grapes were in thick enough leaf to give me privacy. I paced. I paced back and forth. Attracted to him? Him I needed to love my life? I felt a sickness all out of proportion to his words, I was in a rage for a kind of assault in them and I wished we'd killed him at Athens and taken the consequence. I did. He was under our control no more than any Bull of the mountains and my mind began to look for ways to intimidate him. Mother's House guard of Libyans? Itiri and they had skipped off somewhere after all, there was little predicting their ways, Admiralty or not. We had militant wounded Yamo and our young Kouretes but neither their mysteries nor our sports would hold him long. Visits to Katsambas and other military jaunts? But the body of our best was at sea till autumn, and that was the doing of my own clay and stylus

The blood-field. There'd surely be some executions

when Perides' ships put in with prisoners of second-of-fense. It happened almost every autumn nowadays and the kin of slain Cretans got some satisfaction beyond the Queen's sealstones. Good, frighten all of them, good, that was what executions were for. My brother'd used bodies for his ends. I breathed some; but I was feeling *well* less and less and I got an urge to rip my cursed vines down just to clear it

As our trip approached Ariadne and I scarcely saw each other except in bed-chambers, for she wanted innumerable councils with the leading women behind both Paria and mother, before we presented ourselves to the houses of Zakros and Phaestos. I had my share at my father's side, with priests, the Admiralty, traders and embassies, but it was through her that Cnossos and our kindred would be tightening down the ship of our shared interests. She must've done a lot of padding round the edges of people's questions, such as how her throne might differ from Paria's and Pasiphae's; but as I told of her mother's probing me, of Phaedra and Cleite and the Shepherd and too much else, she let me know she had limits herself. *Maybe Perdix knows something we don't, with her endless talk of heavenly sleep with one's clan*, she said in my arms. And I wanted to be that place of peace for her, but had lost it, somehow

—I'm eager for next year, Deucalion, but I think we've been both been simple to reach for power the way we did. I love mother the more, now that I feel how she's borne her place these years. And well-well, this Shepherd wants office. What does he think it is, some sort of trophy?

So it was with a true greed that we waited their going up-country, and looked forward to some normal life. Mother's business-dinner served as the Athenians' send-

off, but what she'd hoped they'd glean from it didn't quite work. First, with summer's dog-days nearly upon us, most of our best international merchants had gone to the mountains themselves as they did every year, and Paria made her see the self-defeating stir it'd make if she summoned them all back to town. What we ended up with, then, was mainly the lady Nomia and Virbius and their underlings: neither of them missed a chance to dine in the halls above the throne room. Nomia was pleased to share some little of her clan's vintners' skills (she bragged that her vines had been chosen for export to Sicily by Pasiphae), while her Virbius talked up his export of lichen and oak-moss resin into Egypt. But, though they lived and dressed almost as richly as ourselves, we hadn't counted on the Athenians' attitude toward such industry. Virbius' was a sizeable enterprise—the stuff was a popular aromatic along the Nile and went into their perfumes, into enbalms' craft—but as most of our guests did hail from better and rising clans, as we'd demanded, they didn't think much of such labor, even rolled their eyes or changed the subject, most of their families climbing the Rock of Athens already, so to speak. They generally lacked their Shepherd's quest for glory but still seemed to think Crete wanted them slaves, and when their Stichius inquired about the gold-trade, and learned that gold came from Egypt partly in payment for Virbius' humble stuff, the response was no choir of curiosity. Pasiphae later confessed she did not much understand this generation but she talked up their futures as she could. It was for Theseus to cap the evening, offering what he had to give, I suppose, when he took me aside and said he and Orneus had some recommendations to make about the Labyrinth's defenses. The two of them shared diplomatic

gifts, aye: I said we'd have related matters to share when he got back.

It was thanks to a talk with Paria that I got some measure of peace before we left Cnossos: no wonder Ariadne spent such time with her. Grandmother helped me accept that I was simply a man to throw all of himself into things; that rather than go mad seeking out some stable position on these foreigners, it was better to stay supple like my father at the Dance of Changes, do what was needed with each day. *And wait for the caves of Dicte, Sweet Wine*, she said: *When your father takes you there at midwinter you'll see this world as the Minotauros must. Meanwhile, take care of your Queen and your clergy: there's sickness of worry like yours in their midst*

Thus Ariadne and I did what we could by choosing Cleite and Cratus, the two worst-off, to come with us. Cleite's joyful wit, old Cratus' confident strength—The decline in just these two's spirits had grieved many in the House, and a bit of change and the beauties ahead had to help them. Our kindred, too, would see the sober experience we'd keep around our throne, and there was no lack of young-blooded clergy to balance that out. Officials of the appointed villages came down to Cnossos for the Athenians, and next day our troupe was on the coast road, headed east

We traveled that whole moon, town by town toward Zakros: we'd council with Phaestos and other kindred there, and at last a ship would take us home before autumn's equinox. At first we all rode muleback, until a kind of relay-system of carrying-chairs for the two of us developed among the towns ahead and Ariadne abided their wishes in her honor: troupes of people waved palm-boughs as she passed, performed their harvest-dances

like The Bunch of Grapes in the courtyards of houses we guested at, and baskets of sticky-juiced figs and grapes and oranges followed with local children, begging us just to taste. The houses, like at Nirou Chani and Mallia, Miletos and Gournia, all boasted spectacular sights of the sea *and* the shore-hills: it was a thing to make Cnossians envious, and another reminder of facts behind Paria's good old days. People lit fires at the sanctuaries and shrines atop those hills to hail our passage, we made offerings at the Labrys-shaped graves of clans older than Europa, and sometimes we paused for a swim in the gold-blue sea or to wade through a luminous field of sea-daffodil and cyclamen. Nor did we miss much chance to make love, and conceive: my heart was in flight, even if she had planned this trip with our brother, even if her heart always would be bigger than marriage. Olive-groves thriving, birds, wild lyre-music, the fresh-roasted meat she loved to eat outdoors, white roads disappearing up into tranquil sunny-green valleys like invitations to another life—Her young priestesses, behind Theia the wildest of them, cheered Cleite's leading efforts with so many things, and brought her back to us step by step. Ariadne seemed to take strength from even impromptu healings she attempted, by touch and chant with local sisters' help among the huts.

These displays of unified devotion brought Cratus back some way to the man I'd known. Like Tukato he was no one to spare any feelings for what seemed right; so it meant the more when over meat one night he said he couldn't see anything but Life ahead of the realm, *And I speak as a man who saw Velkanos' smoke*, he added (knocking thrice on the table). That was in Sitia: two days later we were at Palaikastro, where one of Crete's largest

houses looked out on huge standing-stones along its shoreline, and just before sunset, the earth shook for the first time since spring. It felt at least twice as strong and the dreadful thunder under our feet lasted twice as long, too, and did more damage: later we heard of no town in all Crete that had not felt this. Cousins and local clergy urged Ariadne to return to the island's center and her kin, let business wait; but she confidently declined, and that pleased people the more. At the same time we turned round, as it were, to find Cleite now significantly better: for all her work with this Athenian matter she'd been carrying a lot of despair in her heart, but this power to shake the very world had freed something inside her. A *sweet indifference* she called it, *All is in Goddess' hands, how do I forget*. And with this stepping-back she became again the priestess we'd seen on Athens Bay. The house at Palaikastro wound up sorry to see her leave, too, for Cleite'd tucked away that Pharaoh-beard to tell stories after dinner, and we knew from the howls that the realm would hear her evil wit

Indeed, after so much, after the winds that sang through the great gorge near Zakros, and their *very* uncanny falling-calm as Ariadne sang to the Dead in tombs there; after the trip down our Syrian sea-coast with its majestic unpeopled rock-shores glowing gold in the rising sun—it needed effort to bring decorum to these councils. Cratus and Cleite kept us wary of the fact that there was no lack of youths either side of the distaff to put in our places if needed, that others' Bull Dance could be arranged; but we found that our anxious labors at home had given us a command of issues that, out here, looked extraordinary. Sarpedon and Titone of Zakros, Rhadamanthys and Amphissa of Phaestos (who'd come

by ship a week ahead of us)—We knew how many people listened through them to learn how Cnossos considered their interests. We talked of containment of Sicily's ambitions across the flow of western tin, the plan to raise more grain to get back a silver-source: it was mainly Sarpedon, who constantly spoke in a kind of Trust-nothing staccato, who pressed after something new on Trianda's problems. Rhodian trade meant a lot out east. But he knew Glaucus, and was satisfied (for now) to hear that Minos' personal ambassador was at the colony seeing for himself. On the Athens matter, toward which they'd all sent ships, we could only say that our purpose was going to need time. Titone's brittle elegance, Amphissa's warm but cunning eyes—Perhaps they felt grandmother's and Pasiphae's supervision enough to let Ariadne by with a minimal grilling before our uncles. But they did ask private council with her before we left; and it gave our journey an unexpected end

With the sun's reign declining and the Corn Moon upon us you could feel the faintest chill taking over the sea and the afternoon winds: we were on a ship coasting for home and had closed the side-screens of our awning for some warmth, up on the afterdeck. Even before we'd embarked, though, I'd seen the change our aunts had put on Ariadne. The brightness of our month had turned to something hard and, rather than that radiant knowing I'd seen when she'd told me her secret, she now looked to be staring down a future she no longer knew. I joked about returning to our guests, talked up my trip to Dicte Cave with Minos: then Ariadne got up and checked our privacy

—Deucalion, she said, —how will we know it's time to send the Athenians home? What do we really expect? Nothing has changed in our priorities, lover, but I may

have to find a way to work with him to find out. Theseus. He's the one. I'm sick of our lives being a reaction to them. One minute it's going perfectly and the next I dream we've brought a mad bull into the House. I mean, ask any sister how I've tried to get near him in talk. You can't, and at the same time, he's so forward, so sure that his views are the ones you'll *have* to come to when you grow wise. The peace. Does this feel like peace to you?

I had a different answer this month than last: I only gathered her left hand (for luck) in both mine, and kissed it. She smiled to see that I did not leap to worried argument. She'd owned me as Consort every step of our trip, and in more ways than one the love between us was life to me. Meantime, the blood-field's so-called hope—I asked her thoughts now.

—Titone and Amphissa wanted to know more of our military intentions, Ariadne began to explain. —They want certain lines drawn round their security, and I gave them the same general answer that I give my good sisters at Cnossos. But Deucalion, listen. I have noticed you giving me the room I need to work with right now, and no complaint: I don't intend to repeat mother's neglect of father for—public ends. But forgive me—I told grandmother our secret awhile ago. I needed to, I needed a woman in the flesh to talk with about this, this *thing* that wants to be born from my heart. We have a problem, Deucalion, she said letting her hands fall now to her lap: it was a gesture that spoke things deeper than exasperation

—You've been in battle and this may seem obvious, I know, she said. —But brother, if we disband the military, we'll be asking civilians and merchants for their lives. To just had the fruit of their labor to thieves, to risk being sold as slaves, or killed outright. If it's hard now to see

Hippeus and his heralds bring news of soldiers' deaths to the villages, how long could the realm survive worse? All along I thought there'd be deep magic or curses and such to help us as in the old days. But Paria says that out in the world those things rarely work anymore. I'd hoped—Now I see that our aunts know this too. You can see how I misjudged mother, thinking she told me these things to steer me her way.

No, such things did not work anymore: not among men like the Shepherd. He'd plumbed his mother's tactics early, turned to see what other powers the world had to offer; and won Companions to him for his nerve. Like the mercenaries I'd seen, such men lived in a sun's ruthless blaze, lions unafraid to rend what they did not understand, the ruling sex's veils and mysteries of custom. Yet they tore through only to tear: the grave marked the horizon of their visions and for that they had nothing but death without the Circle, to put in place of a world they could not rule

—Did grandmother oppose you then? I said gathering her hands anew

—Put it this way, said Ariadne as her pleasure with our touching softened the look on her face. —She and some others know I meant it about an Offering of my own. So when I told her, it was as if she had to suck her soul back into her body. But she wouldn't judge it. Say what you will from Minos' side, Paria has let go power with a lot more honesty and grace than mother, I can't help seeing that. She only said how proud she is of us, and that if we mean this, we'd better be ready for a lot of suffering and trouble. Maybe even revolt. I *hate* keeping things from mother but—to purge what we've called this poison—She'd never approve this

No, not likely, not a Queen whose throne had rested on the restoration of the fleet smashed by Velkanos, who'd put a shrine to a Poseidon in the very House, and opened our throne room ceiling to the sky. I looked at Ariadne and knew that this visible anguish couldn't be half what she was feeling. How *had* they grown apart? Had grandmother intended this to happen, sponsoring child Ariadne's passage into The Queen's Brood, where daughters of our race were raised for the office at the villa of The Holy Three near Phaestos? From there, once she'd borne The Flower, she'd become a pupil in the mountain shrine-schools of Lasithi, round Dicte Cave. Tutored by wise women, wild mothers looking down from there on Cnossian life, who knew? But I remembered her dream, the dream she'd waited long years for after all her efforts and isolation: her teachers had chosen her to help aboard a *kaiki*, a festival boat that brought harvest-wine some years to seaside towns in honor of Dionysos, and her playing Him for the villagers had turned into part of the dream. Instead of The Kid, she'd dreamed herself Pandora All-Giver, coming to see to her offspring's needs: she'd understood people's gratitude for blessings their pride wouldn't ask for, the lives they'd built on the edge of loss—*To be a Pandora that won't leave them to useless pain*, she'd told me, *I could live for that, I could make The Offering for that*. She was to be believed; but no Offering had ever asked Daughter's separation from the source of her life

—These towns look up to us, Ariadne said squinting through our screen at the hills that had mothered her.
—Maybe it's we who've gone soft with these fineries. Out here it's only nature to fight for your life and children if you must. I don't know, I don't know Deucalion, but I can

see in his eyes that they wouldn't leave us alone. If only they would! I hate my own hating them, it's like a chancre on my spirit—And I see now, it's something deeper than wealth, it's—As if we enrage them just by *being* and I don't know what the antidote is

Now she lay back in her seat's cushions, not much relieved for her words. We were two people in a closed-off upper deck weighing out the risks to a hundred towns and colonies, thousands of people never met, never counted. Sarpedon had shared his own recent message from Trianda as those people pressed all sides of Crete for their tomorrow: *Help us. Send us ships, send anything you deem wise but help us, there's a race on out here, don't abandon those who've worked so hard for you, we have little ones, we won't be responsible if it comes to a fight*

I looked at her coldly as I could to see where she'd gone soft, if that were so. Already unlike mother, she'd learned to regret power's burden, but there'd been no one more determined to match our brother in the Bull Dance. She never interceded at funeral games, when men drew each other's blood in honor of The Dead, and to show clan-strength enduring. She might eschew blood-sacrifice, but that was to fight a harder battle with custom—Why this plan of hers, then, if it wasn't *fear* in her?

—The difference is Necessity, Deucalion. Blood teaches us the place of death, but it *is* death to mock death, to make it a game, a pleasure, a tool for getting things the way *we* want them. I haven't told you quite all. Paria said it's not her place to judge a young Queen's vision, but it is for her to help it be born if she can. And she says, Ariadne began with a swallow, as if she knew she had to let go Paria as well, — that if this is what we want, then we're going to have to find this Theseus a way in. You've told

me he's asked about the Bull Dance; so you do know what I mean. Either that, Paria says, or we have to kill him, in order to snuff what's looking too much like unity up north. Oh, yes, our little grandmother, Cratus and some of the rest, they've arranged such things before. But I will not accept that kind of— magic at the heart of *our* House, yours and mine. Necessity. How can grandmother confuse that with our imports of purple dye and ivory-tusk? Who's living in a dream-world?

She rose up to see the silhouetted mountains passing once again

—I have to know that you, Deucalion, she said with a softening shift of her whole tone and posture, — can consent to whatever way I find to work this out. I know you have our father's heart, and I love you for that. Don't answer now. I'll even abide till you come back from Dicte. Yes, you can lay it before The Powers there in our behalf, and meanwhile I'll work the Cnossos side. But *should* we assume that saving his life will help save ours? Help me find the answer. I don't want to—give you any more heartache, let alone the rest of the realm. You've become so dear to me

The ship's sail and brail-lines snapped in a sudden wind off the shore-hills and the sound shot my body through with a pulse of panic, the feel of an old bull as leering jackals ran him down. I nodded to Ariadne and got up and opened the landward side of the awning. Find a way in for Theseus, or kill him. How well old Cratus and Paria had obscured their share of this world men now called the real one! Well then, as she'd asked me once, whose power were we after? Were we to ride the tide and let Crete carry on a policy that more and more seemed a mirror of changes overseas? I knew I'd live out sorry days

if I turned from her vision out of fear. But she'd been to the great caves ahead of me, and they'd helped to bring her to this. What could they teach a man? To see beyond this life to one's millions of lives; but my very bones rankled to think of handing *him* the world, our throne

Without it, though: raider-princes might well come and kill. They'd have to kill because if I knew our people they'd never kneel to these sheep in wolves' clothing. Then? If these sheep had souls they'd have poisoned their own enjoyment of all they took from us. And if they had no souls, if foreigners were less than animals, as Egypt said—Then the ethics were moot. Blind haters of life, they could only be what they were. We were different creatures and had to do likewise

And people were going to die anyway! Ariadne and brother and I had gone to that edge for them and perhaps if we gave them example as good as our father's—The commoners themselves to fulfill what our ritual pourings implied, that you be to one another as Gods, Powers? A subtle retreat against polite invasion. And an end to Cnossian dynasty? Better to meet Goddess cleanly, your own master with the Voice of your family in your heart than to face Night Mare with crimes on your hands. Oh, what I'd got for wanting to be at her side as her powers unleashed!

—Let's rush nothing, Ariadne. But we'll work something out. There must be ways round the obstacles. I don't care if we have to go back to the woods and caves every one of us, at least you'll have kept us from becoming *lost souls* and we'll still be happy. I think I can do it. Give me awhile

And she sat up, and looked at me; and to my surprise there was a moment of some secret resentment in her

face, against me, or my sex, or the world I could not tell. But then she reached with both arms to embrace me and laid her head to my breast. She was warmer than the wind and weather, and her body felt stone-hard with its thoughts

— You may be right, she said dully. — I hope all my choices turn out like this Consort of mine

I felt like screaming! Oh I hated these people like Echion and the pitiful boys of his flock; but that was small within the rest of my being, where a wild exaltation began to sing, though shot with fear. What the Minotauros surely felt as he neared the Offering Tree: I breathed deep and the breeze in the sail was like the luminous wind that ran between the worlds

— Tallay read to me once about old Egypt's Mother Maat, I babbled on, my heart aching to soothe hers so that I even called up words she'd once used on me. — *Let the evildoer alone*, Maat says, *for he will destroy himself*. I don't know. But look at our land out there, our mountains. To me they say that someday we'll come down to the ocean or our children will, and they'll still be able to—to hear what our Yamo said once. *She wants us to live, the ocean*. Do you hear?

Ariadne looked up, almost smiling as two tears rolled down her face.

* * *

Four moons passed. Four months. A matter of weeks, an endless progress of interlocking labors as summer vanished into autumn, autumn into winter and The Wheel turned. Yet, for so much change already behind us, you could hardly tell anymore who was in control, ourselves

and timeless custom born of the land, or in my Queen's words, mad bulls, one beneath the Earth, scores across the sea, and one in our House

Minos and I had come to Dicte Cave, high in Lasithi plateau: it was midwinter, the Long Nights Moon, the time for his final communion with The Powers and my first as Minotauros, and for two days now I'd heard not a sound from the bottomless-looking deep green darkness he'd gone down into, chanting softly, leaving me warm by our fire in this grotto. Once Minos' voice had faded as he'd picked his careful way in, singing to reassure daemons of the cave, and himself, the only sounds under this huge sour-smelling mossy shear of gray limestone had been the crackle of our fire (essential in this icy nook of the mountain-face), the lost-soul moaning of snowy wind and trickles of water off dangling lichen, the woods and orchards below us a constant southing, broken by swifts' cries. This place was truly the mother of the mariners' cave at Amnisos, with its outcropped grotto around me as big as a house: at night there were sounds of prowling creatures, and shapes in the flickering rock that looked to be moving toward Face. But with my father before me in that darkness and half our Kouretes at vigil in Psychros village below, I was doing alright for first pilgrimage. Such a place had mothered Ariadne: no wonder she seemed ages ahead of me, though even the chilling advice I'd got from Perdix was making me smile up here now. *Don't worry Deucalion, Dicte Cave is safe even if it kills you*

Between prayers of aspersion and preparations it was good for your heart just to look out at the snowy folds of the surrounding mountains, the jagged ridges of Dicte shining above in the sun, the tower of naked rock called Karphi across the plain rising off its ridge like a ham-

mered-in nail, everything sharp against azure sky. And between these surrounding heights the flatland's orchard-grass looked green beneath a light snow-dust, a tentative promise of those midwinter-weeks we sometimes got called Little Summer: the farmers up here sowed white bunch-narcissus with its yellow eyes everywhere and the *koumaria* strawberry tree for their scents and colors. With so much and, cloudless nights, stars beyond number, you felt you'd arrived in some changeless place-eternal, guarded by a rugged ring of mountains. Out of the depths of Dicté Goddess had birthed our world, our people and our ways, said old country-tales, and we were come as Lovers born at midwinter to give an accounting, and to listen. My father'd said not to look at the oracle-stone in the goatskin pouch he'd brought me from home: rather I was to ready myself for below by prayer and memory, form questions and clear my heart for the good of the realm. But I knew the main question, whose answer she wanted affirmed by this wild mother of hers. Amid this sanctuary, keeping warm on a stomach empty with three days' fast, and touching something of my Queen's young mind, I resented (in truth) the intrusion of that world of Cnossos into this one. The world's oldest Green One Osiris Himself had to struggle and change and die; but it was another thing to be swept up into some foreign ravenous haste, to be swept along toward a goal they themselves did not know—Their mad *story*

Earthbull's thunder had hit worse at Cnossos than anywhere when we'd been at Palaikastro: there were deaths and not a few good houses collapsed in the town and along the royal road from Paria's villa, and mother was still at long rounds of sacrifice when our ship brought us back from Zakros. The Labyrinth itself took damage: a

wing made up of clan-shrines and candlemaking shops near my grape-arbor in the southeast gardens had fallen in on itself: mother had our Cyclopes-guildsmen prise the blocks apart and, as an aspersion, laid the heads of three bulls within. But for the rest of her reign there'd be no rebuilding effort, she told the crowds, she wanted all to see that the Labyrinth felt every public loss. An allusion to Perides still hunting in the isles? We didn't want to think she could be so angry over Ariadne's secrets that she'd leave her daughter a damaged House after nineteen years rebuilding Crete; but there the rubble lay, and as Cyclopes worked their way through the Labyrinth tapping master-pillars for damage, they found a huge crack in the south wing's granary-bin, too, so that mounds of grain had to be drawn out for its plastering. And at just this stricken moment of indecorous disorder, with fearsome House guard fending sparrows and field-mice from the grain, a needleboat beached from Callista with an ambassador's generous warning from Queen Gelania. The waters off Velkanos were turning queer colors and bubbling up a stink like bad egg, an ancient sign of trouble. The quake had split a stone staircase in half right under Gelania's feet, and her people might ask to evacuate into Crete come spring. Secondly, though, just now the Athenians came back from their moon up country. Cnossians noticed the coincidence and a delegation of the hardest-hit actually asked the Shepherd to intercede with Poseidon if he could. This provided him with other guides back to Archanes—He made it a priority (by our leave) to go—and this time, no after-shocks. The House became uneasy again

And this although the Athenian dozen greeted us with bright sunburnt spirit when we sat at meat with them, re-

galing our table with the labors and leisure they'd enjoyed: *We came here expecting to be eaten you know!* their red-headed Kia confessed with laughter. Theseus himself (a prince, dunging fields) seemed to have passed through the bottom of resignation and brought back a sharper-edged manner than before, just short of outright defiance, as if he still believed we were out to break him or knew he was yet a long way from our trust. But nobody, him least of all, missed the new clothes on most of their women now, Cretan tunics with bright chasings and cut (if still above the cleavage) with slits up the sides, *very stylish just now*, mother told them. He did not like this slipping-away but he'd not forgotten Ariadne's threat and his lieutenants lacked his own ability to intimidate. Still there was something he could do. We hadn't known that their courtesan Aithe with the locks of white gold had been in love with him since he'd arrived at the Rock of Athens. And though he had no intention of making an Aithe his queen back home, rejecting her in rather hurtful terms (as we heard from the friendlier Kia) had been a way of reminding them all of their places. Yet to Phaedra, the object of his visits after rites at Archanes now, this was proof that he needed *something* the more from Crete. Telling me, the while, that indeed he had much to learn, *Isn't that what your Goddess is about, that you give yourself to the overwhelming spell of—*I'd cut him off and warned that Phaedra was a priestess in the making, that if she deigned to work with him *after Icarus*, we expected him to treat her as such

—Oh, I will, he'd answered sunnily

And Aithe? She must've enjoyed our mountains or found something in herself because the next anybody knew, she and Yamo were seen everywhere. Ariadne

warned him that she might only want revenge through a Cretan priest but Yamo grinned that it was sweet carrying off Poseidon's women. Some of the others like Anchinoe were finding their own path into our ways, Yamo confided. Besides, this Aithe's hair was almost a cornsilk-yellow, like a certain woman's whom he'd lost to Bull. Yamo was a man for wedding personal cause to the welfare of the House, alright; and his scorn was remarkably diplomatic whenever Theseus smirked his opinion of the affair

But Icarus, Icarus—As expected after a few more visits by Theseus, Icarus was unceremoniously dropped by Phaedra, as if their relation were a love-trifle rather than a trust. He ran off for a few days (worrying the House so that I went down to our boat and fetched the oars and sail home), and when he came back dishevelled and filthy and starved, he seized the moment to reject my mother's apologetic succor. They *glared* at each other and at this point my father stepped in: for lack of ideas just now he made Icarus a kind of honorary page to the throne and the Kouretes. You couldn't say he knew enough to like the boy but maybe he liked the idea of a son regained. I wondered if our place-seeking friend Orneus would take umbrage but he seemed to like his adjutant hunting-dog role to our guests well enough. Meanwhile Kudru and Iris and I got Icarus a work-bay of his own in the Daedalaes's shops, too. The boy lived better than most Cretans, and we hung onto hope that somehow he'd soon settle down

At the same time Phaedra was summoned to Paria's house, and disciplined with honor. That is, grandmother was ashamed of her treatment of the trust, and Phaedra was now to prove herself (or not) by taking up life within Paria's circle, among the daughters of our best families

taught and curried there. Because it was important to Ariadne and Cnossos she'd be allowed to work with Theseus as they both wished; but even as Paria meant to protect young Phaedra from this powerful stranger, she also had to see the girl live up to expectations for those who proclaimed themselves devotees of The Aridela. Through the weeks afterward, grandmother kept an owl's eye on them both, and the Shepherd seemed pleased with his tuteress' few steps nearer Cnossos Labyrinth. I was not above hoping he'd find *her* all he wanted

Aithe with Yamo, Phaedra with Theseus: the one other ferment in our midst so far had come out of the shops. We kept up the pace of our guests' schooling so they had no time to think themselves languishing captives: since their return they'd been learning our ciphers through Elphenor and others in the custom house, the best place to study our trade-ways and now especially so, with the great jars of lentils and honey, chickpeas and onions and figs coming in with the harvest in exchange for fine pottery, textiles, smith-worked tools and adornments. Inevitably their work took them into the shops where, with permission, they could try their hands at a craft or two and get to know artisans' needs: without too much grudge old Kudru let them peer through the mounted crystals by which he cut detail into tiny ring-bezels, or Iris' painters took them along to a villa to repaint a quake-cracked mural in some noble's rooms. Iris herself then, through these weeks, took up with the youth Geryon exactly where he'd left off with Cleite. It had not helped Cleite's reviving spirits to find, when we got back, that he just wasn't interested in her anymore, she was old to him and so were her teachings; and with the way Iris repeated these phrases of his in Cretan company, we knew she was after more than

some too-late protection of Cleite's feelings. Iris: few had held less hope than she for this Athenian plan, though she was not obliged to offer any alternatives: she called this *my part for the side* but everybody knew she was going to wrap the youth round a finger, and then show him what she could do with it. Poor boy—But what did it mean that none of us even spoke to stop or soften her? A trivial thing that warmed the heart with a satisfying bit of evil, do what it might to our efforts—We were losing touch again with our own deeds

Blast it all. What could you ask but that some of the fear and hate wear off within half a year. Were we not following our assimilative ancestors, was that not the way to abundant Life? Had the flocks of cranes cried any differently passing east to west this autumn, migrant partridges stretching their wings in huge flickering white flocks up and down the land, our merchants beaching with the season's delicious smoked tunny from Trojan traders? We'd even received another shipment of basalt, a good sign of—something. Perhaps that The Lion of Mykenai still considered Crete his equal. As I brooded these things—and danced the Changes my father'd taught me so far, to help call upon the kings who'd come here before us—I laughed to think I'd ever believed the throne meant control of much. Priests thought it did, some of them, Cratus and Haemon, *Leaders of Worriers* I'd dubbed them at times. I'd be trying to stay with my father's advice to keep close relations with Admiralty, playing the sullen ram, letting them see my interest in operations-accounting and keeping the shipyards busy as I bore along Ariadne's secret—and then Cratus would come and recite his litany of fears. The Shepherd's pressing with Bull Dance questions, his evasion of the Eleusis Offering a disastrous ex-

ample in itself; his first omen that day at Amnisos, his social evenings with Phaedra at houses of the town, or up at Vathypetrou with Nomia's crowd (and militant old marines like Mestor right behind them)—*And suppose, Minotauros, young Phaedra should show child before your Queen? You are working on that, aren't you, begging pardon? And how will you answer the outrageous audacity of our own people turning to him and Poseidon with these tremors?* You could not tell men whose daily lives sustained you to leave you alone, but I did go to Paria again: she said that people (especially old folk) were trying to avoid new catastrophe any way they could, even by addressing others' Divinities. *But they always come back to Goddess, you'll see,* she'd smiled. *And as for a child, Sweet Wine, you eat more urchin-roe and seafood*

And now grandmother was dead: killed in the quake that hit after harvest-celebration; and we'd face our fear of the mainland, fear of ourselves, without her. *Make yourself entitled to be one of us, your Old Ones in procession on the walls,* she'd said. Even if she had done things we ourselves would call crimes—Would she not be ashamed of me, using executions against the Shepherd? How it *stank*, like Velkanos' breath

As the equinox had approached and our two fleets hurried home before the sea grew too windy-wild, Perides' hunting-force, with its wounded and prisoners and recaptured plunder (he'd kept to my brother's policy-change on that) wasted no time completing its season's duties. They pitched a temporary camp in what we called the blood-field, a barren coastal plain several hours' walk west even of Katsambas, and there, though we were willing to brand first-offenders at the Labyrinth, any twice-caught raiders were to die. Meanwhile, though robbed in-

vestors and grieving kin of marines well-knew it was time to come down to the sea for satisfactions, our House by tradition announced the proceedings, in order to own them, despite our refusal of criminal blood in our precincts. So I'd thought the Shepherd's presence would make me love our life more? I'd seen but half of it. I'd simply never bothered before to attend because none of our clergy did. Oh, where was the bottom of all things, where? And Theseus knew without words why I wanted him to come (though Phaedra would not and showed me the sneer of her lips); and as we'd neared the field and heard the Cretan execrations, then seen the dung and dirt and garbage and occasional knives flung at these half-naked wretches of the sea tied up on their knees, something had turned between us, he was watching me. Perides looked surprised to see the pair of us there, likewise the officers and young reinforcements I'd sent: then the Admiral grew stiffer with pride for royal presence and so did they, because their summer report of twenty-nine killed in action was now forty-one. Many of the youngest ones had made panic-mistakes or fallen for raiders' trick, a Theseus' skills could help our trainers tomorrow, their eyes said. Caught in my own web I left the Shepherd's side and let the vicious-voiced crowd watch me walk the row of eleven men already branded and condemned: my stomach was sick resolve as the kin of our yet-unhallowed dead called out glad ugly phrases, to see *the priest becoming a man* and such-like. The men bound at my feet tried pleas or cried out motives of sheer survival and, in turning my back to them, I saw Icarus before me. Daemon! Always right there watching—He'd heard the announcement too of course and had followed us out here with other boys. Well, was he not entitled, had he not seen his

own mother speared? I wanted to rip the world open, or myself, and so as Perides' second in field-command (a bearded stocky stickler for order named Pandaros) drew his sword I grabbed the greasy hair of the first prisoner and pulled him forward, stretched his neck good and Pandaros hacked his head off. It came free spouting in my hand and I swung it for the crowd and threw it towards the sea, but it tumbled to rest ignominiously close-by, among the rocks of the field. The marines were as shocked as they were impressed and likewise the crowd, Icarus, Theseus (so I thought): the rest of the prisoners died this same way as I forced myself to learn the worst things, and their corpses were left on the field for the crowd's abuse and the birds. And now I knew as sure as the blood on my clothes where Icarus was learning to the heart that there really were no rules, not anywhere, you could get rid of any god, any-body. And with such help as mine, he was going to make us pay for the lesson in a way we could not have imagined

— You look a little green, Deucalion, said Theseus along the road back. — Well, on this side it's good a man's people can see where he stands. You're the one priest I know with a battle-wound at his rib. Guess I'd better watch out for you, eh? But then, those men—It's hard to blame a fellow of no birth who takes a chance at least at a name and a rich living. So what if it comes to a poor dying. It's those golden days on the edge no one can take away. Do you want to sit a moment? Your color's better

How long, Great Lady, how long? How long will You tarry, Goddess Whose hands are never weary and Whose knees make haste? How long, One Who kills and Who gives Life, even You, Who judge with justice all doing—How long?

And how long could anybody stand this trap between

Ariadne and that old world Perides served, with his honorable life? Our meetings found him with no news of that Sacker of Cities on the roam; but Sicily and Rhodes, he said, would hear of Talos' strongest-ever show this year, and keep till next. He was pleased with the size of our shipments of tin from the west till we laid hold of iron; but, conservative as mother in his own way, Perides did not want to see military matters in Minotauros' hands any longer. I saw that I'd shocked him—It was not just his wish to keep priests out of duty's way. His delegations to this Pandaros, too, were signals that he was almost ready to retire; and as I looked ahead with the smell of branded raiders' flesh in my nostrils, I knew again how right the House had been. I was not made to follow my brother's path toward War Leader. Assisting at beheadings! *What* was happening! Even Ariadne'd made herself witness the brandings. Was it worry about next year's unpredictable resolutions that kept her from conceiving? Or had she gone back to chewing wild carrot? She did not need the pressure of my asking

I had to talk more with my father, yet the sooner he came up from the cave the sooner my turn to descend, and it was a daunting maw behind me for all the prints of priestesses and pilgrims in the mud. I tried to rest and chanted to the fire, gazed on the snow-scented beauty outside: perhaps it was *all* these things making me *one of us on the walls*, and there was no help but to let go, let go awhile. In some ways the rites of harvest had answered that need

—*Io!* —*Ay voh hey!* —*Daemon!* —*Greeny King!*
—*Queen of the Mysteries!* —*Let Them in!* —*Io!* —*Ay voh hey!* —*Come, Come, Come*

Every year a wonder, to find such exuberance just be-

neath the workaday order; and if you spent all seven days figuring out whence it came, you'd still have to shrug, It's Goddess. But you'd know why they said the veil is thin between the worlds that time of year, for there was something rising irresistably out of the heart when the valley began to echo with summoning drums, with rattling systums and chanted warnings against the profane, a response that would not be ignored, a sense that the secret of the world, the source of Everything was coming near the surface. And even if you had grief that year you wanted to go and see it, see what lived in the daemons' drumming to which a half-blind thing inside you answered, willed or not. But you knew that only those who gave themselves would see it, so you surrendered all your rights and wrongs and wanting to the rhythms and the wine, and to the *kyklos*; and they'd take you running naked through the hills if your daemon so pleased, for there was no secret, *you* were the secret, wakening to your deeds

— *Hay Ho Hoo Hee Hi!* — *Ay voh hey!* — *Come*

And that was why people lining the streets of Cnossos-town for the opening procession of the boughs each held a thyrsus rod like the ones in our family's hands, Dionysos' sceptre, a long wand woven of palm and willow and myrtle and tipped with a pine-cone full of seed: the wine would pour forth to charm the winter rains as well as intoxicate, but one's first drunkenness was properly born of the sight of the priestesses shaking harvest-boughs through the streets, born of the din of triple-timed pipes and systums and drums, as loud as the calls of people beckoning Cleite and the others (in chaplets of ivy and fawn's-hide skirts) to swing the fruit-heavy boughs across the lintel of a house where there'd been sickness or

loss or quake-damage. And they did, and took blessing back as they spun round to procession again, the boughs' pendulous figs and yellow-red pomegranates high in both their hands. Oh, there was grief within it all as people beat one thigh in rhythm with Kouretes' drums and shook a thyrsus with the other, grief for the dying of things, for the wounded trees and ravaged fields, for Bull Who was to be sacrificed when the Queen and her mother and daughter brought Him in from the water-meadow, grief for loved ones lost to kin along the streets—But there was apprehension, too, of a Promise, as Cleite and Theia and Perdix swung by waving the boughs with their dancers' tranced eyes and secret smiles, doomed, everything doomed but somehow as long as she *owned* her body like that you wanted to sway with her, and hope this unspeakable Life went on and on

And there was extra hope this year too in the sight of Aithe, Anchinoe and Kia of Athens, bright-eyed and dressed almost like priestesses as they strode along beside Tallay and musicians and sisters of the Horae, their tumbler Polyxena turning wheels or whole lines of forward-flips that made the children of Archanes scream on the backs of their ponies. People grew too wild for much care about where Athens' men had gone (only their Kapha and Geryon with Iris were here) and everybody kept striving to let the Queen hear them up in the hills; and of course the more they did so, the more they excited themselves

It was torch-lit evening, and Cnossos' leading clans had accomplished small traditional offerings in the Labyrinth, when we saw the Shepherd and his fellows again: it felt alright to drink a cup with them watching Tukato's brothers and sisters file through the central court, to share a Touch

of the chosen boughs now set in planter-boxes for the people. Uninitiated children were being removed because of what was coming when the Queen arrived, though, and (this was my own first year, being thirteen) I drunkenly neglected to repeat the general dictum about what happened to traditional orders of things these days. Besides, Theseus wasn't complaining that Phaedra'd run off with new sisters, and he must've known. But when Bull, this one as white as a winter mountain came charging up onto the court dragging our young Kouretes by His tethers, with the Queen and her train just behind crying warnings, well, I wished I had given extra cautions—Theseus had said he wanted in, but he couldn't know quite what he was doing. Bull roamed the court and chased screaming people (*Goodly Bull! Hoopsa!*) and as the priests began to regain some control of Him the Shepherd suddenly jumped His back, and as Bull bucked to throw off the predator Theseus took a bad fall. His danger panicked not a few knowing souls here, his taste offended others, yet many still whooped drunken praise of a man's initiatives. I looked to see mother's and Ariadne's response but couldn't find them as the crowd swirled and took its common turn, luck-touching Bull's flanks or one tethered horn. It was a thing permitted under rules customarily broken just now and it left people later with more awe of clergy who danced Him. At last Ariadne emerged from the west wing's deep pillar crypts, Paria, mother and priestesses with her: mother sang and touched Bull's brow, and He, winded and caressed, lowered for her. And as young Clio laid the stun-mace hard to the back of His skull I saw their whole women's circle clenching and opening fists, going up on their toes, growling as Bull's legs crumpled and He sank. I moved to stand by my father:

Ariadne prowled round them all with a stalking-gait on the balls of her feet and as her face went by us we saw her lips open with a crooked smile, her eyes glazed with drink and (as I learned) with the white-spotted toadstools that, it was said, fused this world with Dream—She looked *through* father and me and we sought each other's hands as she turned upon Bull

And The Three fell on Him, with shrieks that raised my hackles, gouging with teeth and claws into throat and white-ribbed flanks, their priestesses gripping legs that kicked out stiff and tearing the first big strips of flesh off, splattering the crowd that pressed nearer and the Kouretes who circled them, savagely chanting *Minotauros*. Oh, yes, we all knew Whom It was as they dug in with bloody jowls and hands and twisted and ripped ribs crackling loose, shrieking as they tore off and passed meat and vitals and sinews back to waiting hands, receptacles: the Queen got up (her eyes were appalling) and hurled herself onto the splayed genitals and bit them through and ripped them free in a bloody flopping piece: she help them up cupped in dripping hands, Look, See, Confess, This is what *you* do to Life every day and it is not for you to argue Necessity. *Who consents She guides, Who refuses She drags*, all these things were in the eyes of those who now stood with palms raised and faces averted, blinking as if in blazing light. The Queen now bore the Offering before the triple-shrine and, after consecrations, began to distribute raw gobbets to all who came forward. I stood frozen seeing my Queen almost out of sight chewing through His neck and growling with sounds that had me aghast, yet which told me how hard she was pushing herself, taking all of us with her toward ancient acceptance of the way The Powers had arranged the world. Huntresses of life, sentient beasts feed-

ing meat to the pride—Had not old Europa hunted new land for living, Britomartis hunted the king and his Offering every year in our first ages? I seemed to begin seeing through our family itself now, our House and Pasiphae hunters of more than priests' prey up in the hills: *to take this in accepted would be power* and I went forward with my father to consume whatever morsel drenched with It they'd give. And I forced it down against my genteel stomach and breathed bigger, guilt of the blood-field not forgiven, but dissolved—I wanted to follow these queens into realms where our rivals would not go except backwards in fear, yes, and I knew this because they were nowhere in sight anymore

There were anointings and pourings with His blood, and a great spiral-dance after, too, which tightened as it turned till our dozens of bodies were as petals of one flower to the stars, pressing together, unfolding, laughing manically, crying aloud beyond ourselves. Then our old priest Sillus put a full wineskin in my hands, I lost track of Ariadne and after that I can only recall that, next day, I woke in a bush where I'd somehow toppled high in the Ida hills. The island, the realm was running wild and I joined up with some marines and village priests who had a pithos of wine bigger than a man on a cart. Yes, yes, to let go, to find the bottom, to fill with the blaze of the sun and the moon till your flesh stood up with pleasure to autumn's chill, not knowing inside from out anymore

*Who takes my hand in drunkenness
Who carries me when I'm sated with wine
Who plasters my roof on the day of mud
Who washes my clothes on the day of slime*

And as I ran that day with these fellows a tribe of some local daughters ran into us, and lo, there were half the Athenian women with them, all of them in skimpy kilts or dappled fawn's hides, yellow-berried ivy in their hair: they hemmed our crew in against a hillside with a mesmerizing spell of chant and gesture and then demanded pillage of wine. And when they'd had their way they started backing off but their taunts and their eyes said other things: I went after the red-headed Anchinoe, taller than me, the herald's green-eyed daughter. I must've been her first Cretan because when we hit the deep clover under some olive trees she seemed to try hard to make sure she gave it all, if she was going to. My heart was thunder: An kee no wee: it surprised her too that communion didn't stop when I'd given her seed, and as we rocked and wrestled she wanted to know if she had to go home eventually. *I have not said I want to stay*, she cautioned, *but we do notice Pelasgians here and people from other lands*. She was the first that I knew of to speak this way, and later I ran with Aithe too; though to her, understandably, the love was still something less or more than what Dionysos meant by it. We just drank together till she wanted to go back to Cnossos and rest: she'd been having morning-sickness

Rites upon rites: people feasted or ate nothing to make themselves wilder as they ran in animal packs: there were rhythms within the week dictated by the body in which slow silent late-morning processions to highland shrines eschewed the raucous music for a most delicate tinkling of finger-cymbals, chimes, people's necklaces: I ran into Ariadne (with Phaedra and others) at the shore one night and we devoured each other till she and Tallay left me in a heap, and then Cordax and Podes with a

drunken crew of harbor-youth were standing over me, *Wake up you restless garlic-chewing jobber, Let's beat the shit out of him!* and they threw me off the mole. And Geryon trying to pull Iris off the road for more and her screaming *Not in there, that's live-oak, all prickles, are you crazy?* And no lack of fist-fights and injuries, of normally brittle people grazing on all fours or on child-like jags of crying, tantrums, puking—I saw Tukato and Razorclam helping Cratus find a place to sleep his off, *He was so sick with worry over your father's absence, you know*, Tukato said—I loved them all right now, even the Rajkumar though he'd not found the courage after all to make his Offering and would be asked to leave Archanes, and those clothes. I only wished Glaucus was home and if I did anything calculated these days it was to spend time with men of the line as my father counseled. No one could love them all. For some of them the world was one big reminder of genitalia-jokes; complainers, self-styled heroes and brothers who poked and laughed at my rib's shrinking proudflesh; but there was one in a green headband with a wineskin on his back and a young belly of rippled sinew that I found myself snaking up against and then kissing up and down and his toes curled up as I took him in my mouth some: that was a new thing, wonderful; and the men's village-women swam the dangerous booming autumn waves to draw their power and played at The Aridela's Rising, and they made up catches on the fly like people did call-and-answer at sea

— *Oh, when She*

— *Comes out of the surf that way*

— *And meets me in the foam*

— *I am at home, oh*

— *I am at home*

And on the last day, at the Labyrinth, when people had received communion of the figs and fruits of the boughs, and gathered to offer a He-goat as a giving-back—a youth Stepped Forward, into His place, and did so without one word, speaking only from His eyes. Some years, it happened. Had He come from a village hit hard by Admiralty losses? Out of the raped-looking fields, from The Dead with reconciliation? He refused all speech, people said; and He became Communion; but the first I knew of it reached me as Cleite and I and Ariadne's favorite young Theia were coming back late together from the hills. We'd passed some weeping townspeople with the look of that same breaking-open to the heart I'd known: they wouldn't speak either, and then we'd found the Labyrinth precincts as still as a necropolis. But there before us on the west court's running bench sat The Shepherd of Athens, alone and, for the first time in our sight, crying

He shot to his feet and said there'd been a murder, and an *eating*, that he could not believe that Phaedra—He would not touch her again, it was *over and enough* and he said he was so angry he wanted to break somebody's neck in his two hands

—His life for a goat, you hopeless children, don't you understand? What did he do it for? What was his name, the slave, the fool? Who'll remember, after a moon? It's not that I—You get me in that Dance come spring, Deucalion. You saw me handle Bull, did you not? You get me in, or by Earthshaker, he said with a menacing forefinger, —I'll show you some trouble my friend. Oh, Phaedra, Phaedra!

—Oh spare us this! Theia shouted after him, her temper rising out of the last of her wine's dark mood. —The

only *threat* here to you is that we don't let ourselves be run over by Sons of Light, and keep silent about it! Well let me tell *you* something, prince. You hurt us, you pay. And

—That's enough now, Cleite said grasping her arm, as the Shepherd took himself down court for the southeast portal and disappeared in its shadows. —Gilgamesh searching for the wind. I know what I said about sweet indifference but who can hold onto that—Don't you see how hopeless this all is, Deucalion? I know we have to try, but if we had pushed things to war on that beach—Well. What now. Shall we consider that his interview for the Dance, and the throne impose it?

Harvest home, the rains, tremendous lightning of winter over the mountains; *and we still had no answer*. Bull was tradition's inarguable guardian of our throne; but had *we* not made Theseus what he no longer cared to conceal he thought himself, the linchpin of peace with the mainland? Thus, if Bull killed him—And what about *us*, if we let him sidestep Bull, out of Necessity? That no one in Crete would accept such a king was why we had to think of killing him ourselves

I never got the chance to come near the subject with my father when at last he climbed out of the Earth, near his third day's nightfall. He'd slipped on the last slope and in rushing down to help him (the same way priests would look for me if I took too long), I think my face revealed the fall in my stomach as I'd peered down into the black utter silence. This was *not* Amnisos' mariners' cave with its quaint shrine, but a gaping world of Faces and teeth-like things coming out of the sweating walls. So, though Minos was weak and took time to eat some snow, he let me ask nothing: he only lit one of my two torches

off his own, softly singing *Out of the ages, to you, Minotaurus*; and then with all his love in his eyes he said *Just a scratch, Sweet Wine*. That was what he'd have from me on Offering Day—But he did not wait for anything more between us. He abandoned me there in the grotto with only the priestesses' instructions in my head, leaped the rocky edge and shouted his way down the mountain, calling for priests, and food, and life

Just follow instructions. Torch, a dry one for later, the oracle-pouch and a bagged kindling-kit the Kouretes had schooled me to use in darkness. Ready? No. No. *It's safe even if it kills you*

I feared more than going down in deep, and alone. There was Earthbull stamping His hooves these days. Power was one thing, burial alive another. I brooded awhile on grandmother's show of indifference, her performing extra rite these months in her villa's deep crypts to help Ariadne and me show child and gain guidance of The Dead. She'd been prudent enough after warnings from Callista and recent temblors to station a novice or two at the head of her crypt-stairs, near a window to watch for signs, startled birds, barking—But The Powers had other intentions

My grandmother. Bow-legged whip-tongued mother of Pasiphae, magpie-chipper under her lemon trees, a woman of such machinations who could be spellbound by a hope-plant aloe in the gardens—Who could read this sign, that less than one moon after harvest rites, it just happened to be a day with Phaedra as her watcher when the next jolting of the Earth struck? That this just happened to be the day Theseus came to see her on a reconciliation-visit? And as Phaedra had run to warn her, the blocks had started to let go out of the walls and one had

crashed down onto grandmother, knocking her off the stair and cracking her skull. And Theseus, judging that mortal, had held Phaedra back from the crypt and pulled her outside while more stone smashed down around them—People did say he'd made the hard decision there, and it had helped win him back no few begrudging citizens who'd been watching their interests through his fortunes. He'd found his harvest-born indignation ignored, a thing to isolate him intolerably; but thanks to her it was back to Cnossian greetings with fist-to-brow, townhouse suppers, veiled hints of a betrothal to some well-born daughter if not Phaedra herself. *A man with a destiny* was the phrase now. Raw action took him where only years of rite and study brought a Cretan

Grandmother. Daughter of Europa, mocker of kings' pride, breaker of mainland sleeps. My friend I'd never listened to enough. Her funeral had brought in women from half the island. A tomb in the bosom of Archanes' hills, filled with final gifts of gold jewelry from the clans she'd served and prospered: Tukato had made unprecedented offering of a horse at its lintel, tears rolling down his unshaven face. Mother and Ariadne holding each other through gusts of grief and anger, robbed, the two of them, of any last talk with her. Their courage before Crete's wary matriarchs would bring them power to work with in the long run, but for now—Alone before the future. Help us, each of us, grandmother. She'd noticed once what this Shepherd could do to my spirits and when I'd asked her if my moment of luck and poise was behind me with the Bull Dance, she'd laughed—*You think too much. Just give yourself, what you truly feel, do that. Make yourself entitled to be one of us, your Old Ones on the walls*

My blood beat in my ears as I began, a procession of one, down the slope of the entrance. They'd said you were less than halfway down if you could still see entrance-daylight. I made hailing gestures with my free hand, voiced everything my heart could remember to sing and kept the torch high, sliding past lumpy rocks on the path as slippery as silt and trying not to look around too much at the shapes of things emerging. This was a huge mossy lichen-green cavern, and only the first hall

Our people were guided through life by rites within caves, but this was bad for me right away. Years of pillar-crypts and Amnisos with its benign Mother and Daughter, the constant human company there had been small preparation for this, and I soft-chanted made-up words now for how this was good for me, The Minotauros, yes. Why else adore an Ariadne, who'd brave such a place for lost souls' sake? I was trying to watch everyplace at once, those fang-like things rising off the floor, the weird wet shinings off walls from my torch (yes that's it, the torch), the multicolored pillars and ceiling-spikes and stacks of solid rock that looked like wax-drips off yesterday's candle: the air was a mouldy cool of ice and tang of bats' dung and the light was fast fading to a green haze among hanging and standing Shapes, colossal ridged pillars of limestone with dark places in between them, sealstones and tiny Labrae within their labial grooves, the whole place flickering, shifting with the edges of my torch's shaky reach

Priestesses *slept* in these places for dreams? They'd said you could light both torches till you felt better, but it was neither custom nor kingly. The fear that keeps out idiots. I flashed with anger and how was that for knowing your rival, I a man who'd pulled a raider's head off trem-

bling at shadows. I sang more and thought of Ariadne pushing herself so hard, the need to keep up with her if I was to help: that helped, and maybe you could just enjoy the crooked redstained shapes. But I was starting to see—Look at that! An ooze of frozen rock-flow, the Mother's sulphurous moonblood leaching right out of the wall with hundreds of long grooves hanging down round the edge of it, each slender groove rumpled and intestine-colored, dozens of labial pairs of them—And as I kept moving darkness closed over my wake, the entrance gone now, silence pressing in to show how loud a torch really was. It felt as if the place were stripping everything away from me. What ghastly thoughts some of the Shapes had! Calling up a frenzy that if you broke would send you stumbling back up the path. Toward a lost soul's disappointed life. End up like Razorclam, who'd built himself a hut off Amnisos Road now, quite alone, *that* was death

I made myself do a breathing, and forced myself across the next hall's threshold, my eyes gaping both sides of my roaring ears. Then I looked up, and the ceiling took my breath, it was like a frozen rain of color, thousands of long stone spikes coming down and, spreading away below them, painted pillars row on row, murky sidechambers, shapes of beings wrapped in cloaks. I went on past colored waterfalls of stone, an enormous dripping horse's nose, a pair of veiny twin dwarves standing off ahead joined at the hip—And things began to change, or I did, beginning to fancy the place as only the house of the most peculiar person you could dream. Melting archways, dead-end curves with red-green bleeding bulges in their walls: when I saw red daemon eyes moving (bats) up among the ceiling's teeth

I did not panic. My breath was almost normal and I kept going, somehow walking into a larger *me*, and at last my boots touched the edge of an obsidian-black still pool that spread far away into shape-crowded darkness. I planted my torch in mud, set by the other and my kindling-kit and, as instructed, anointed my brow and lips, breast, loins and feet from this, The Lake of Memory. They'd said to call up the names of all the beings I wished to learn from here, here alone it was safe to name The Dead; and I gave that hours, chanting them slowly, doing some steps, resting, listening seated with my back (I admit) close to a wall. When you let yourself dream the ages of people coming here, you could understand why they said that stones remembered things. Seeing them pass with torches high, initiates' voices of aspiration, aches of dreams for their children, prayers that the great Wheel turn and break every tyrant's grip. Visions to age you and show you your youth at the same time. What were *you* and your fears after all in these gravid shadows of the ages? Hunger-pain roiled through my stomach these many hours and I embraced it all I could, as a purge. *Make me useful! Let them use me as a shield!* The place was clammy as a grave, too, and it needed immeasurable time to lose the vibrato in my ears that came roaring out of the silence

I repeated everything, many times, pushing myself toward that state I'd known on Juktas with slashed-open arms. There was no way to count the hours, but the pain in my gut and, soon, my dry throat began to show my mind for the interested liar it was: always with more show to offer, to hold off that hole in the ground, your grave. Well, I drove myself toward it, to see all things through it, because that'd make me more like my father

and a man with really nothing to prove. So did it matter, then, if we killed this Shepherd and squeezed what we could of our lives before the consequence? No, and yes; for there was such a thing as poisoning yourself: however long it lasted it'd be like winning one's throne against a crippled Bull, and no Powers worth communing with could smile on such a House. What murders had the Labyrinth done? No telling; but our woes now had something to do with them, sure, and I wished not to pass them on

It was powerful, being down here! Maybe old Perdix with her Voices in the tombs lived more in this world than any of us, maybe the worlds were all one world and The Dead were right beside you if you looked. I can remember brooding this a long while; but next I recall, I *woke up* with no memory of sleep, and found only a small lick of flame still on my torch. The walls and their darkness had prowled much closer, wanting something, and old fear came back. Iasu the healing moon-man, aye, who Steps Forward to harrow Hell for the sake of lost souls, abundant Life—But I could light the other torch. Or *choose* to let darkness have its way. Quickly I opened the goatskin pouch at my belt and felt inside to see first what oracle I'd been given, and a tiny round sealstone came to hand. A blood-red gem, a chunk of Earth's blood frozen, polished and incised, made to mean something

I saw the figures of two men, circling in endless pursuit of each other: one had a bull's head and horns and he was twisting round to see or do battle with the other. That one had a lion's head, and as his legs kicked with the lunge of attack they looked vaguely like a fish-tail, too. Round and round, eye to eye, seeing little more than

their combat, that was their whole world as one came round to attack or be attacked, over and over. No, no! I checked the pouch but there was nothing more. I thought hard for things to answer with or to find a way off *this* wheel. But Tukato's words about the Shepherd's bough, and my vinery—There might be difference, but not much, we were equal beasts professing Her protection but, above all, each for himself

I wanted the bottom. I got up, and stepped to the Lake, and prayed against that *second death* where selfishness looked liked service. Hang this *me* up on a hook like old Inanna in the underworld! I was very afraid of the answer to such a prayer, and felt such a spiritual dwarf amid these sentient standing stones. But I did it, I doused my torch with a thrust of it into the water, its light hissed and died, marrying the depths: the black rushed upon me and a dizzying maelstrom of spangled color swirled before my eyes like a sky of stars melting, coalescing. I fumbled my way back to the wall where I'd been sitting, freezing with sweat now, sure if there were malign things down here, they were coming; and time and sound, space and sight, all these things simply lost their meaning till I could not even tell if my eyes were open anymore, and it made no difference

Darkness seeping, pressing, fondling and insinuating past all illusion of consent, its hands as small as the last sweating pore, larger than spirit: it wanted its malice understood, the meaning of its slow dissolution of the senses that begged and whimpered, its absorption of one's melting mind. It worked away, unfolding, enfolding, gently irresistably devouring and when the last struggle ceased, when even surrender dropped away, there was only—Everything, the Shining not of the sun, the Life of

the world a flowing rocking sea into which every thing dissolved

It was an ecstasy! But it passed gently into sleep; and a dream of fear came after. A huge black Bull with a murderous stare of vengeance appeared before an altar: His head dropped off as if axe-severed at the dewlaps, and from each gout of blood that poured forth a tiny headless man took shape, and they began to run among his feet, crying with the pain of lost souls. And with that sound I was suddenly in the bright sandy ring of our Bull Dance again, and I saw us *turning on the Others* to keep our place, keep our family above the rest. I knew that it was *our own House* eclipsing the radiant Life among Crete's first generations, that Life Ariadne remembered in the blood of her wild mothers, and fought for now

Let him in then, let Bull accept him or not! When you were lost you did as The Dead before you and you'd be alright. Perides had said we might well get a war with Sicily soon. If some share of a Shepherd's mind could help us, and then—Well, that was enough to bring to Ariadne. Help her; but only she could bring that Life back to our midst. I kindled my other torch when I'd recovered some more: I felt larger, and with the best Thanks I could muster for its warning, I tossed that seal-stone into the Lake of Memory. It felt glorious having just a chance to keep my soul from an endless circle against him, Theseus, my weird, Set to my Osiris. Then (with a surprising touch of reluctance) I started climbing up and out, slowly, savoring so much stone strangeness once more, and keeping my resolve to not look behind. Yes, let them in as we had to, and prance our pride in our own life: the rest was with The Powers. Daylight and a living world awaited

Hoopsa! Lasithi's herbed and snowy heights were warm and brilliant with indeed a Little Summer: swallows were wheeling past the grotto in that crazy half-twisting flight of theirs, and below I saw a tiny Kourete (had it been days?) waving his arms atop a snow-pasted boulder. I breathed. Postcoital. Time, no time, one world: a mouthful of ambrosial snow. Ready?

Heart, we'll ride it out.

* * *

—I know your secret, Deucalion. Ariadne's, that is. About the fleet.

The last Kourete watching Minos teach more of the Dance of Changes had just closed the door, asked to excuse us in his spacious pillared reception hall. My moves had been coming along these months as the days had turned to warm windy green signs of sap-fed spring, and it seemed he and I were closer than ever as Minos helped me with everything, from foreign affairs to Icarus, to what people were calling my fertility problem. Now I tried to deflect his words with a question about one's moves through the Golden Eagle; but my father held to his serious smile as he stood with arms folded, leaning against a pier-and-door partition

—You can't stop us, I said (as if he couldn't have done so already!). —You know? Who else knows? My, I'm glad that one's word means so much to my Queen! It helps a man understand the change Achaia wants

—Since your grandmother's death I'm the only one, on my honor, Minos said with understanding in his eyes. —Now, listen, Deucalion, your priestesses and priests had to be told about the marriage because of the prepara-

tions needed. But the fleet—She asked me to talk with you because sometimes, men, with each other

—I see. It's decided, I said turning away, trying to conceal the drop in my belly: of course I'd known, or at least consented to step aside in giving her what I could from Dicte Cave. But it'd seemed to make her love me the more and I'd lapsed back toward a hope that somehow, somehow—And now I understood the months of cow-eyes all around me, beyond their concern that Ariadne had shown no child. I fought to remember that her part was harder, bitterer than my own, and for that I loved *her* more. Impossible

—In the sense of Theseus' passing a token interview, yes, that's decided, Minos said. —We're sending that little fellow Kapha, Diamat's friend back to Athens with word that Aegeus' son is in the Dance by his own choice, in case something happens. But you know it's not that simple, because this Dance itself farms out only minor offices, Deucalion, it's not for the throne. The point is, Ariadne came and told me about the fleet after your grandmother died, just before Dicte. My own question for The Powers there was whether to help you create this vision of hers. That's why we saw to the oracle-stone in your pouch, remember? Don't look at me like some naïve farm-hand, Minotauros. Hear what I say to you. I do think she has hold of something that might be the only real way to protect ourselves from this tide of change. It's hard for me to admit I saw no further than iron weapons. But Deucalion, first, if she does this, it may well tear Crete apart. From the inside, you've got a lot of what she calls practical natures around here, not least your mother's. Even Iris and her staff are none too easy on my ear already, complaining we're giving away shop secrets and

gaining nothing. Furthermore, from the outside, this is just what the hasty and stupid will take for sign of weakness. So your plan has got to happen *slowly*. Let the Admiralty do what it can to stabilize things first, out east, and with Sicily, do you follow me? You can't just move towns of people into the mountains.

—I'm listening, I said into his pause: trying to act my fourteen years

—You make me proud, my father answered. —Now, I mentioned the problem of getting Theseus from Dance to throne. That's an absolute must if your plan is going to work, you know that. So let him convince *himself* he runs the House, and the mainlanders with him. We know where the power is. The mixing of our bloods.

—Maybe we could have him dance sheep instead

—Deucalion. You know, we've been watching you closely since the day he arrived. At first he seemed to light your defiant home-pride. Then Ariadne told me you thought it'd all work out, *someday*. Then you come from Dicté saying *Let him in, he can help us with Sicily*. If anybody is letting him walk in, it's you! But Theseus will not know how royal the stakes in this Dance. He's going to have to survive, *and* shine past all the others in front of Bull. You can see how well this can turn out, though. There'll be your great heart's example before the people, and you'll be free to help Ariadne make your vision happen. He'll get what he seems to want, and the marriage of our bloods will begin. We'll have clan-sanctioned mainland channels to work with in stopping these raids from their baronies' insides. And of course you've seen the pregnant belly on that blonde of theirs, Aithe? I know this is hard for you, but—All this will even give *you* more time. To show your spunk, that is.

Warm light in his eyes: I knew my father felt his share of the weight of our women's assumptions. With less shame I'd've been telling people Ariadne wanted a child as much as I did. What was it, a curse, a natural sign to rub my face in the need to step aside politically? Now that Necessity was truly come, it hurt to foresee a mere priestly life, ciphering fleet assignments, arranging ships for Callista's possible evacuation, odd jobs amid routines of ritual. So, I'd lost her. Now could I serve with nonetheless passion, love her from afar? *One's life can be The Offering, too, brother: tell me you'd serve our people, if I had to go myself before Goddess for the peace?* I'd said we'd never let it come to that, never

I thought to tell Minos that I'd been with Aithe myself in the harvest-rites. But she'd been the only woman I'd *not* made love with those days. I asked his leave: he asked me to keep up appearance for now practicing the Dance, talking up our stout shipments of tin from the west among big-mouthed ambassadors soon under sail. Was there something he could do, the good of the realm, of the House, was there anything

I did go off (like Icarus, yes) into the hills for a couple of days while small rites were held moving Theseus from the Labyrinth to the Dancers' villa, down between the House and the ring. Goats and sheep with tail-wagging kids seemed everywhere, swirls of black-eyed sparrows chasing ladybird, butterflies twining their helices; even flowers got it right with little trouble. It was a deep humiliation. But when I'd screamed enough to the sea, the heart was there enough to wish him and ourselves a meagre best. I could not embarrass the House. I'd do anything to keep Ariadne from The Offering herself as some kind of answer. And yes, after all this meant nineteen

years returned to me, a life to help and harry him with: might even succeed him, Labrys in my hand. We'd see what scratch *he* asked for.

Within a week or so the crocus was up in its royal purples, time for Dancers to cut their Bull from the herd. The other Athenians, bound back up country for spring-sowing and its fundamental mysteries, asked dispensation because of the Shepherd's part. Why not; and in turn they kept assuring us that Kapha would carry out his mission and come back

So we followed the new team of Dancers up into the country south of Cnossos: Ariadne was there, Cratus and Yamo and Sillus had to see, and Iris aloof for one day from Geryon; and tag-along Orneus, Icarus too had come, each with their reasons, Phaedra haughty with Theseus' return to her tutelage without her lifting a dainty finger. It all came down to this:

At the head of a well-watered meadow dotted with olive and willow trees, just before midday, the Dancers were met by keepers of the herd and received the noosed tethers, the staves and the rope-net they'd need, and the rules to accomplish their capture. From our place well behind them I saw Theseus step to the group's center as they talked and he put the heavy folds of the net across his bare shoulders. And then as two keepers led a good-looking cow out in front of the group, the Dancers followed and watched them tether her between two olive trees. The keepers talked with her awhile and then they were all waved off, dispersed behind other trees or squatting at respectful distances, and things settled down among the herd: we counted seven bulls out here right now of varied stature, all of them prime-age and glossy, ruddy-brown or spatchcocked and the biggest two both

black. All of them eyeing each other. It grew very quiet. The cow, after failing to reach the grass between her too-short tethers, shifted about, mooded and switched and lifted her tail a little

The bulls started to move. You never knew precisely who was king out here, it was usually the one that on a given day best mixed speed and wit getting horns to a brother's ribs. We knew soon enough. With just his bellowing one of the two blacks kept the others from coming any farther down meadow; and his black brother, though he bellowed too and ripped up turf with hoof and horn, wasn't up for it today. Or maybe he knew he might be king if he was patient. He moved off with huffs and took up his feed again. Ariadne squeezed my hand

Bull came warily down meadow nearer the cow and stopped, rippled His shoulders and His black curls, sniffed the air, chewed, eyed the figures near the trees. Nobody moved. Then He bellowed to the world, stepped to His place, and mounted. Soon His head was out high on the air almost dreamily, lips puckering and drooling as He grunted and worked

But He'd only begun when one of the new Dancers' men left his place by the nearest tree and crept forward to get a noose round Bull's hind-leg. I saw one of the keepers wave him back, Cratus and Sillus made signs against danger too, the keeper waved again as he could and then set both nervous hands atop his head: maybe that fellow meant to be sure no Cretan would be outdone by a Blue-Eyes, maybe, but Bull was not quite lost in His pleasure yet

The keeper stopped moving with his elbows pinched in: Bull had noticed him waving, and stopped his haunches. Bull sniffed the air now. The man had got right behind

him with the leg-noose and froze. Unseen. Lucky. The haunches resumed. The keeper dared not flap a hand to signal him back, back. But the man stayed where he was on all-fours, and now Theseus stepped forward with the net, and Bull saw

He bellowed at Theseus and jerked backward off the cow

– Run! The tree there! the keeper shouted to the man.

– Goodly Bull! Hey Bull!

Too late. The man's first steps gave him away and Bull tore round after him: it wasn't even a chase. The man's legs failed as in a dream, he went down on his belly and Bull trampled him, turned again and gored him through the back. There was no scream but He dug up and flung the corpse up and down, then abandoned it and made a few charges at others

Ariadne and a more distracted Phaedra held their palms out to the Earth as we men (even Icarus, wide-eyed) placed fist-to-brow. Down meadow Bull charged, missed, back-kicked in His kind of hate. The Athenians stood silent and pale: Aithe and Anchinoe took up priestess-postures. We felt a light riffling in the willows and olive trees. Daemons drank in the shade where the man lay bleeding, nameless to us, the body looking half-crushed into the soil

It was lucky nobody else got hurt while they wore Bull down. Theseus, we all saw, stayed on his toes, but mainly hung by with the net ready as one by one the others got a noose round a horn or leg. Finally a keeper waved in the net, they'd let Bull thrash and sulk awhile, resign Himself to the game

– Well, bring the thing, man!

We saw Theseus all but dump it into his hands. Then

with the Dancers looking up after him he strode hard toward us, or rather, toward Cnossos, head high. His eyes hadn't burned like this since Athens Bay

– What's wrong? Cratus made bold to ask

– Shut up or I'll kill you and I won't care who sees me do it.

– Just a moment! Ariadne said. – What is the meaning of this

– I mean, Mistress, said Theseus stopping but without a fair look even for Phaedra, – that you can count me out of your rites. I didn't come here to get—I am here for the single reason of keeping you from raping my homeland. And if I can, to keep these my own alive and together. Mortal that I am, he added fiercely Aithe's way.

– You—confuse people, it was like a wine—Is there some penalty for changing one's mind?

The whole body of us couldn't believe

– Is there?

– No, Ariadne said.

– Then excuse me, Theseus told her and with a brisk touch to his brow he strode off past us toward town, stalwart swishes of his legs through the grass. One by one, his people followed to please him, each in a polite mask. Orneus, last, went scowling after and Iris said *See? Cleite and I were right all along*. Icarus laughed a bitter trill: Phaedra shook him for that, said the man was no coward, she was living proof

– Huh, said Yamo. – The Oak King. His mother a priestess, too?

Ariadne's eyes to me: *What now*

– More of a live-oak, I'd say, Sillus quipped

– Uh-hnhn! Cratus laughed into his palm. – More prick than prince!

— That's enough now, I said. — A man's dead. He must feel bad enough.

— Well, who is surprised, Cratus added to Iris. — Since the day he walked into this House, these refusals—Forgive me, sir. Gentlemen, a man needs rites.

Ariadne looked after the Shepherd, then followed the priests toward the body. I didn't know what to feel. Phaedra with tooth on lip.

Phew!

4

Who Teaches Whom?

*Gods alone abide forever
The spiral turns against the maker
Bringing down proud and base together
Earthshaker! Earthshaker! Earthshaker!*

Little Kapha brought this oracle of Delphi's back from Athens: it was the talk of the mainland both sides of the Isthmus this spring, he informed us, and the spreading news of Velkanos' thunder was giving it credibility. En-route to and from the house of Aegeus, Kapha himself had seen (and smelled) the mountain: no smoke, but a few of Gelania's Callistans were suffering red-eye and headaches these days, and through him she wished to renew her warnings and her request to homestead in Crete if necessary. *Things look feverish everyplace somehow or other*, this young man added

And why shouldn't they? The Lion and his pride lost no time making use of the changes at Delphi. People knew that Crete had endured the worst shares of harm Velkanos did: if the worst happened again tomorrow, the mainland had little to lose in casting Poseidon Earthshak-

er's name to the rising wind. It wasn't hard to imagine the new rites up there, a rank of eight wizened whitebeards, shades of Echion, nodding their horsey forelocks while a local priestess wandered carefully near Delphi's chasm in the Earth, their gold in her saffron sash, her body trembling with their preconfigured words. We understood this, because we'd taught them ourselves the importance of well-managed oracles. But now it was another game. Order was one thing, but to rouse up scorn and even expectation in the isles of some righteous *doom* against us—for a tyrannous *tenth* of a ship's hold? Who were these people? We'd taught them the decimals to count it with. Did they think it'd been their lie-about gods these generations, opening the sealanes from which their race had drawn its milk?

You could know little more than what people said of themselves, and Achaia's great houses said little these days from behind their walls. Through Elphenor's people we had heard unpleasant rumors about Mykenai's feuding dynasties; but whoever ran those houses now, they were not people glad to hold onto Cretan style in their supper-hall murals and golden death-masks, relics of their age of tutelage. This affable Kapha's journey had brought us two other messages, also, tokens of the new age in our midst. First, Aegeus, informed of his son's intent to dance Bull, replied that all Athens would pray for his son, a captive being offered to a beast. It seemed as though Aegeus hadn't quite heard what he'd been told. But Kapha had known his place, and people might trouble his family if it appeared he'd *gone over*. Then, soon after his return, his local elder Elphenor approached our throne with Aegeus' relayed demand for personal trade connections in the East. Aegeus wanted us to help him

market his Laurium silver. Did he think this more diplomatic than asking us to buy the yield of our own mines? When we deigned to respond, we promised international connections as one of many boons his son would acquire. But when, and the Shepherd's changed wishes about the Dance, we left unspoken

And what to *do* about Theseus? Surly, self-isolate even with his twelve, then breezily studious in customs or at a shop-bench as if he couldn't care less for his predicament or what was said of his reversal—It was lucky that Phaedra (and, we believed, Ariadne) still had weight with him. Old Elphenor was somewhat despised, too tame for Theseus and too Cretanized for his youths; but through Phaedra we were able to grasp a few blunt principles. Theseus meant to help lead Achaians to utter independence from Crete: they owed nobody anything; and strength, in the end, was all. The Labyrinth and Cnossostown, her time-honored clans and fleets, her guilds, guard-troops, shrines and forges, houses of birth and burial—All this might intimidate for awhile. But we had to find a respectable position from which to arrange this marriage. Our people would never countenance a king who'd not faced Bull; yet the marriage was a must, if anything *like* Ariadne's vision was going to serve their interests. You could not force the man from his angry isolation

And it hurt Ariadne to conceal her heart from our mother, and Pasiphae did not miss that something was afoot. Mother looked grayer and tired this spring for the loss of a son and her own mother: those unended houses of the Labyrinth smashed by Earthbull came to seem a public chastening from Below that people should appreciate her share of their beleaguements. Still, Pasiphae was nonetheless right behind us, The Lady of Cnossos,

garnering its strands of power and the devotions of her brother Perides' Admiralty toward Ariadne. These allegiances of course increased Ariadne's stature in Theseus' eyes. But to us in private it meant more, that mother was keeping alive grandmother's counsel to first carry on with *our* life, our House's custom, and from those things it appeared the Shepherd had cut himself off. It chilled more people than just me to witness the women hanging corn dollies from grandmother's trees again this year. Yet, to see Mother and Daughter stand palm-to-palm, life to The Life as ageless as the pillars in Amnisos Cave, through the rites of spring sowing—If The Wheel just kept turning, all would have to come to good. And as the blood was poured and The Dead drank Their due for our sustenance (chiefly from Ariadne's hands now), I thought I could feel the Shepherd's dread, a name that only melted back into the Earth

She turned eighteen, the woman I loved, her bearing grave and graceful as I'd ever seen it. Ariadne'd begun to worry a bit about that Libyan sister Itiri she'd so liked, but she had a strong bright company around her, Tallay and other daughters of the Horae, young priestesses like Clio and Geilissa and Theia to feed her spirits. Cleite and Iris became the dearer to her because she knew what slim hopes underlay each woman's efforts with our guests: Diamat and Perdix, meanwhile, reassured her at least with their styles of disregard for passing crises, their carryings-on with the House's ancient ways. From their shrines and offices people brought Ariadne word of diminished anger, but increased uncertainty this spring, for there was talk about our showing no child, and with grandmother gone it was important to restore the leading Triad in Cnossos. On mother's advice Ariadne let si-

lence speak that she would bear when the time was right; but she also began to cast affectionate attention on the bright seed growing between our Yamo and Aithe (their baby was due around Midsummer), and the House followed her. The other Athenian women, for their part, took well to the trade-skills and crafts before them now, Kia the architect's daughter lifting slabs to look at piping, watching rain run a flight of stairs in stone parabolic turns. The staff liked her.

Neither my Queen nor I knew if we'd reign together, but we each knew what the other was willing to give, and there was an honor and encouragement between us that felt like the height of my spirit's life so far. We visited villages to assume our parents' place over local initiation rites and important funerals, conducted offerings to Europa, feasted officers and trade-agents returning overseas: we liked to make love as often in some green airy place outside the House as within, after half a spring night's dances and music with clergy, guests of the season. Endless different faces and demands came before her, with the fealties offered in hyacinth and spider-orchid: I tried to learn Ariadne's patience but she, like our mother, could stay fresh through hours of indispensable public work. I thrived on being the man at her side, on working with Powers that always seemed to win. She was mine, and not mine, while in the sight of Dia Isle or Mount Juktas there were eternities to keep learning from

I still had that bird-eyed daemon Icarus to deal with, though, when he wasn't Page-on-errands for Kouretes or my father himself. Minos liked the boy as he got to understand the impersonal meanings of his moods, and the horror that'd brought him here: he took no offense from Icarus' surly solitudes in the workbay of Iris' shops, and

the three of us even took my boat out once, my father whooping as Icarus soaked us with half-swamped turns. If he gave my father's last months joy he could do as he pleased. But just after spring equinox and the corn dollies' rites, Icarus disappeared for six days at a stretch, and enough people worried that I volunteered to find him. It was a chance to *run* besides, as Ariadne did

We'd been keeping my boat's sail and oars in a corner of Iris' workbay (nobody wanted Icarus sailing alone), and those things were in place. So I followed the river's wooded edge seaward, knowing Icarus liked the shore-birds that fished its mouth, those bad-tempered frigate-birds he carved, the little terns. I'd started early to avoid acquiring company, and was glad for it out under the alder trees along the water. Their white spirals of buds were thick and the branches full of finches and linnets, sparrows too mixing their cries to the breaking day. The weather grew fine so that you could only think the boy had to be alright: I looked carefully but, in the quiet, among a patch of white madonna lilies, or by a whole wall blanketed with the loud purple of ice-daisies, slowly remembered many very good reasons to run off. Turn, Wheel, turn! Bees were everywhere and the scent of green leaves of dittany growing out of clumped boulders, and ripples of morning light off the water were running up the trunks and boughs of trees, as if you could see the quick of their life

Bright warmth began to draw people out, but no Icarus, not even at the tide-pools where we'd sat with Iris and Cleite. At the sea I turned for Amnisos because Creusa the mistress of port sometimes fed him. No luck, though, so I counceled with Cordax and Podes awhile, sitting in the sun between them on a ships' mole

—Runs off a lot, does he? Cordax mused. —Cousin Podes here used to do that, till we all let him know how *strange* he was becoming.

While I was there, too, the Rajkumar came down from his hut in the near hills to beg food at Amnisos, and he looked quite bedraggled and beaten-up by winter months outdoors. Razorclam's once-plaited hair was a matted mess like the fleece wrapped around him and when he smiled there was a falter of shame where before had been a crooked toothy charm. I asked why he hadn't taken up any offer from houses needing hands around here: *I don't can*, he answered with his still-poor Cretan. I asked no more. The Rajkumar had come a long way down in the world since invasion and slave-rebellion had laid his imperial, horse-breeding clan low, far to the East, and now, guilty over his year's flirtation with only the bodily pleasures of Archanes, he looked to be punishing himself quite ably with wretched living. I knew Tukato was letting him find his way for what he'd done, not done. I gave him the cheese out of my bag and told him to see me when he'd had enough of this life: in return he suggested I climb the eastern headland and look for Icarus' smoke above the trees. A fair idea, and as I left the Rajkumar swore to repay the cheese, facing the sun to seal the oath with a grip on his testicles

The headland was sheer cliff and rock-rubble to seaward, and I had to scramble up toward its back-slope of shattered stone and prickly brush through the afternoon. Up there you could see blue-white miles of surf along the green land's edge either side, and Velkanos' crater hazy to the north beyond Dia: I rested and ate bread and searched, but still no smoke, and no Icarus. I decided to spend the night up here for a good start tomorrow. The

ocean took the sun to its deep breast, the stars were a wonder; and just after dark, the mountain began to shake

It was a sudden rumbling deeper than the roots of the rock I lay on, and I stayed on all-fours, too frightened to *play* it for any of its strength. And as it worsened and bel-lowed there was a crackling din of sliding shale-rock all around—The edges of the headland were shearing off and smashing below in huge chunks of mountain—and I had to get up to keep my bones from jamming together with the shocks. The air tasted dusty and I even saw a house-fire leap through a roof down in the dark of the port before it was over: I stayed at the headland's center a good while after, away from the cracked cliff-edges, but I saw no fire or smoke rising out of the north. At last the ocean, lost in the darkness, gave a vast sigh; but just as this sound seemed unusual enough to make me get up, I heard a roaring, and a second thunder. The whole dark coast resounded with it, and then a mist prickled my shoulders, and a stink of sea-mud soured the night-air. A wave: that was a wave

I did what I could to propitiate and pray up there but I'd had enough from this strange boy, this willful dust in the wind. I made myself stay despite worries for home (they had the fire out at Amnisos but the dawn beach was soaked and littered with green wrack to the tree-line)—and before long, yes, I did spot a small smoke like a solitary's cookfire, perhaps an hour's hike straight inland from here. So I went after it; and if I was angry before I found him, I was ashamed as soon as I did

He was killing animals! I'd barged into his camp in the lee of a hill and caught him (he was naked and smeared head-to-foot with dirt and blood, which made his eyes look crazy-bright)—Icarus had a dead red squirrel by the

tail and was whacking its brains out against a tree. And worse, he was laughing, and other squirrels and even a scorched dog and a lizard hung stiff on a line across the clearing, neither skinned nor butchered: he'd just been out here killing. He yelped with fear when he saw me and after retreating a few steps, he charged me, with a knife of his own: *I want to kill you!* he said and I realized that out here alone, he could do it. He came at me like a stranger and actually thrust hard, twice, at my chest. I lost my temper and instead of drawing my own knife just kicked some dirt up into his eyes, stepped inside him and elbow-smashed him in the face: he fought with more rage than I knew he had and it took two more bad punches to put him down. I sat on him and found myself shaking his head by the hair, I was so ashamed—And a *wave* had hit Crete today

—I hate you! Icarus cried

—Why!

—Because you saved me! he said with a madness hot in his face; and then he turned his head aside, shut his eyes and wailed from the bottom of his belly: *Mm-maaaaah*

I got off him and let him cry it out, but cutting down the carcasses kept me angry. Because I'd saved him: maybe it would've been best to have let him go where his others had gone. Face it: he did not like this world, old Perdix knew it; and now others were dying little deaths for what he could not face or let go. This blood had brought no Voices, but temporary silence, a triumph of numb forgetting. But for killing each he'd found he still had to remember what it was to suffer, that perhaps he'd be just as vulnerable tomorrow; and next he knew, he'd been coming at me

—No, it's not *I'm sorry* anymore. Do you know what disgrace you bring on the House like this? Last night—You get up and help me bury these, little rich boy, and then we'll take a walk. Get up, I said!

He kept his eyes to the work as I made him bury the animals: I asked them to forgive our failures with Icarus but in truth I wanted to hale him before the throne. But the House would have its hands full today: I stayed with my first idea and headed us up the coast westward for Katsambas. At Amnisos, meantime, we saw people talking the wave as they cleaned up wreck, collected fish, righted sideways boats: there was a crowd up on the hill by the altars and the cave now, and as we passed through Cordax and Podes shook their heads at our luck this time. Yes, we'd better get busy on the Admiralty's search for safer harbor-sites

—Me and your father hunted rabbits with Kouretes up in those hills, Icarus said affecting boyish talk as he realized the road we'd taken. —Let's go home now, Deucalion? I was doing like them, that's all

—No. You're going to make a choice today, little boy, I told him

—Can't you just kill bad gods, that make waves? Like raiders, ha! he mocked back, showing the intelligence and spite he preferred to hide

—You talk too much. Just keep moving, Icarus

At Katsambas, a winter's work in clay was action now, the whole cove astir with last-moment hull repairs, roll calls, crated foodstuffs and jars of spring-water riding strong shoulders from village wagons to waiting holds. Even after the wave's bad omen and disordering of the beach there must've been a hundred young men around this day, sharing an imperturbable manner talking assign-

ments East or West, clustered round roasting spitted lambs while officers strode about in their squat boarstooth helmets, spreading their alacrity and confident strength. Chief of these was bearded stocky Pandaros who (stickler for order) remembered me well, he said, from last season on the blood-field. Perides had taken *Talos* up the coast this morning to search in earnest for new fleet-moorings, and Pandaros made it plain he seconded that. Then (not asking why I'd come) he took my page and me down beach to behold the new pride of the fleet, a surprise for my father. It was a beast of a new ship, as broad as *Talos*, and halfburied in the sand where the keel of other ships curved back out of sight, it boasted a pointed ram eight feet long, as thick as the mast and plated with sheet-bronze. Pandaros (with admiring marines gathering round us now) explained the work that'd gone into it, after *Talos'* clumsy ship-to-ship fight last season had cost so many men

—No need to lay your flank open next time, no sir, Pandaros boasted laying one foot to the ship's monstrous snout. —Now you just ram, dead-on, back yourself off and you can gaff your prisoners in like fish from a barrel. Let's see our friends out of Sicily trouble a tin-merchant this year! he added, and the marines took up his subdued rough chuckling

I praised the work—Whatever might save lives till Ariadne's moment had to be good—but Icarus' face began to fill with too much memory, so many weapons before his eyes. Pandaros asked (finally) my business and it came out of my mouth that Cnossos wished to share meat with these best of Crete's men before departure: this brought a cheer, and before long with the wineskins passing Icarus was hearing what I wanted him to hear, the men's

tales of sights or dangers that had made them men together as few rites could. Oeax was a broadchested junior officer with a bad face-scar like that old Mestor's: he told of a night at sea when balls of white fire had tormented his ship, while one Leukos said it was worse being chased by the mad-moaning shape of a waterspout, ripping up sea like a snake up on its tail. Probably most men here (with their lacklustre tellings) wanted mainly to do the tour and get back home; but there was Otus with slightly-crossed eyes who'd lost half his left foot to a shark in his second shipwreck; and one Enyo, who drew up his corselet and showed us where a spear had gone clear through his chest, and yet he'd lived. The brothers nodded and shared meat and clapped shoulders and I wondered how to help Ariadne best when the time came: expect protests if these men lost the chance to do a little maverick trade overseas, resentments perhaps over lost esteem round the village, if they turned back to its ploughs. Well, *did* their manhood depend on this life? An old Mestor's hero-days meant the more for being past, but things were not fevered here, only spirited. We'd have to stress that they need not sail away to protect their homes

—Are they bad men too? Please don't put me in the fights with them! Icarus began to beg as we walked homeward (he'd scarcely eaten, breathing big with fear I might hand him over to a crew). I tried to make him see he was growing strong, that he had to choose between a ship, or going home, or settling in better in the shops. He could run off as he pleased; but *Your mother is dead*, I said. *You made a filthy thing of sacrifice—and you think of these men who helped save you, before you shame my House ever again*

I'd hurt him, and he said nothing right away, though

after awhile on the road his hand found mine, and he said he didn't really hate me. But it took time for the sight of those hurt animals to fade. We let ourselves be cleansed by a rite of aspersion being conducted for the town by Diamat and other sisters, in the meadow just north of the Labyrinth: people seemed to handle this wave-news well, as if it weren't much to worry after last year's turmoil. Yes, and their mood encouraged Icarus to exclaim that he wanted an artisan's future as we went into the House; and as it happened, we walked in on Iris presenting Minos and Pasiphae and Ariadne with more new designs, and Icarus' looks just now and his obscure apologies caught my mother's attention. *He was doing what? Do you realize the disgrace of what you did, you spoiled ship's monkey?* She thought a good year at sea just the thing for him, but lucky for Icarus, Minos intervened, then Iris. *The fleet is not a punishment*, my father tried; but it was Iris who made the difference

How she'd hated the very idea of Cretans giving anything away! But Iris, seeing so much else fall to some kind of Achaian destiny, even to the hurting of her sweet one Cleite, had determined to turn this tide against itself if she could. She gave herself—in a dark-willed version of Ariadne's reaching out to Theseus—to this Geryon, determined to give him Cretan woman, by Goddess, and prove that he couldn't handle it. And with her artisan's visionary flourishes, the circles of elegant friends this brought her, her beauty besides, well, she had her way with the youth. But where she'd looked to twist him quickly round a finger, Geryon's own unlooked-for spirit kept up with Iris' every step: he reveled in her aggressions like a mainland baron with an unbroken horse, paraded her style and the status of her company among his

fellows until at last *she'd* backed off, finding herself too much like an exotic on *his* arm, losing herself to her own plan. The break made Geryon miserable, he'd leave pretty stones, flowers, whatever might please Iris at her work-bay or with House-staff; but it was over, and soon he was harassing her with this betrayal till Kudru could only warn him to leave her alone. And now, as Geryon cursed the House and its teachings more than he probably ever had in Athens, Cleite made Iris see the damage. Cleite's was an anger to turn inward on her own spirit: Iris' had turned the other way, and not to our good. And so, while she did not love Icarus, there was her guilt, and the reality of my father's Day beginning to work its powers on many hearts in the House. Thus, Iris, penitent at least among Cretans, and seeing Minos' concern for Icarus' future, promised to sponsor the boy's initiation to the Daedalaë if it would help the House, and give Minotauros further peace. *This time, then, the well-informed Pasiphaë assented. Talent may save him once. But he has had his mercy. No one can help you if there's a next time—Understood?*

It was a fine ceremony. Tukato came down to see Icarus' public oath, and Phaedra (spurred on by Tukato's presence too) even risked asking for something lively for her room in her own new residence up the royal road. Icarus accepted this as his first commission, a good sign between those two. Iris gave him a sealstone for his wrist (a little tern volant between sun and sea), and Minos, for the House, draped him with a great cloak as dark-blue as lapis, with a pair of wing-like epaulets stitched to its shoulders. Icarus settled in, chastened, if not at peace

—Well, his walk has become more manly, but he sleeps wrapped up in the cloak. He's a wild little fellow,

that's all, my father smiled some mornings later, as we shared the Dance (for appearances, at least) out in the grass of an olive grove just inland from Cnossos. The place was bright as a dream with crimson poppies: spring seemed to last a long time this year, as if asking to be savored, with almost windless days of cool sunshine growing out of dew-soaked mornings. It was now Willow Moon, and with scarcely two months before him my father seemed to rise earlier every day (like your old grandmother the brow-beater, he said fondly), rousing his priests to walk with him under the chittering trees in the half-light, leading offerings at the clan-tombs of leading Cnossians, bringing purifications to quake-damaged houses in the town. Minos walked more than ever between the worlds now, his life turning toward his final weeks' retreat as my own turned to the world as never before. Sometimes his face betrayed what it cost him to hold and hold to his choice to Step Forward; but as Cratus and others played hand-drums or systuments for him out here and he turned, transforming himself through the Dance, I saw the many shapes of his life, Earth-Husband, High Priest, penitent War Leader, father, and I still wanted kingship if it made you like him

—No, no, supple! he'd carp as I'd follow. —You're a snake, a river, you give yourself to it first, get the streaming *behind* you. *Then* you work it. You ride The Powers, it's simple! There, wasn't that better, brothers?

I just hadn't looked for so much bitter sadness to touch these days, what none of us could feel till now, for all the talk of his great-hearted Gift. Just a scratch, he wanted from me: I had only to consider that he could still refuse, and my heart would show itself bigger than my fear of being without him in the Shepherd's dessicating presence.

Minos flamed the world for us; and though I could hardly imagine the world without my father, I rejoiced inside my grief for the potency of death.

— Good buds on your grape arbor this year? Tukato tells me good things about you, doing what you can for that Hurrian novice he had to expel. You won't go wrong treating most people like your own offspring, Sweet Wine, Minos said as we rested, still offering comfort for my bodily childlessness

But when we'd come out here, clear of the House, he'd also warn me of things to come beyond his Day (trying hard to let go of them himself). It had to be my choice whether to keep keen skills with a blade; but clearly, father said, our military's move to safer harbor would be old Perides' last accomplishment, and he never urged me enough to stay well-connected with Admiralty men. Through his watchful priests' counsels he knew Pandaros had been chosen for both his prowess and his zeal, and this was sure to arouse militant expectation in older conservatives such as Mestor: only Pasiphae, furthermore, as long-trusted Queen of a generation, had any real control over well-landed nobles like Nomia and Virbius. And since they'd all be as shocked and dubious as mother over Ariadne's plan, Minos warned, it was vital to hold onto Pasiphae by offering something of what she wanted: continuing influence over House affairs

Ariadne was glad as I for his help, and as spring bore the season's diplomats over the seas we had to be careful not to offer mother too many little things for denying the rest. That fellow Tereus, for example, who'd led our contingent from Ceos last year was (not surprisingly) the first major embassy to beach: his island's great house was eager for that share of the tin-trade Minos had offered, but

no shipment had reached us yet this year from the mines beyond Sicily. As mother gifted the man's Queen and Consort and began to send him home with assurances, Ariadne invited him to wait the tin ships' arrival. It was true that she loved to hear of Ceos adopting our Great Year (Tereus told her they now honored nineteen figures of Goddess in their great shrine); but she meant to draw in our mother's style of treating, and it worked. Pasiphae declined to let the House be hurried on the Sicily question, on which the tin-shipments depended: unless Ceos was willing to send ships westward with ours to speed matters with some force, it'd be best if Tereus went home. Meanwhile, mother added, Cnossos might not be pleased if Ceos was contacting Athens, to make hay on Aegeus' need for old connections in the silver trade. At this Tereus blanched before Pasiphae, as if he'd been hearing such ideas all winter, and he was gone with next tide

—Just help them believe the bird on their windowsill tells you everything, mother explained with pleasure: that same day she authorized a standard patrol contingent to head out east toward Trianda. They'd see we'd not forgotten them, but no diplomatic coddlers went with the ships. Glaucus had been there recently, and with iron: Rhodes had to determine its own response to Achaian rivalry.

The usual gifts and phrases coating mutual indifference traveled between Crete and Pharaoh, via diplomats from Phaestos. Aunt Amphissa and Rhadamanthys reported no trouble at our stations along the Nile such as Abydos, but there was a souring here toward Egypt for recent faithless business maneuvers (like that Payare's —The mainland hated our shipping tithes but gladly

charged the same for his re-routed spices). Important Cretans began to lump Pharaoh together with the Lion of Mykenai, who rarely spoke, had a hand in more than one Cretan problem, and never mentioned the name of his Queen. But if we meant to follow through on the plan for a deliberate show of activity in the west, what Pasiphae wanted most this season was defense of a principle out there. Sicily's growth had been much her throne's doing and she was not prepared to begin ransoming her own shipments of tin through King Kokalos' waters. Here Ariadne's wishes flowed naturally into mother's and it was good to see them enjoy it. Ariadne (heeding Minos' advice to let east and west stabilize for now) told mother that this planned show of strength was better than eventual war, and she stood up to support a strong contingent behind Pandaros' ram. She invented a message, too, that our painter Iris and some staff were reconsidering Kokalos' offer, and Pasiphae liked this neat means of inhibiting Kokalos further. It looked as though we'd find our way through this crucial year if we could work something out with Theseus: we even arranged a soft final tour for Perides, keeping him close at hand with a crack home-waters patrol against another season's hosting by our northern friends. As for Mykenai, then, we'd play the Lion's silent style this year and send him no embassies either, let their own Cruel-Cretan stories work their charm

More and more the Moon showed Herself to the Sun in the daytime sky: He knew She was coming to claim Him before long, and the rites for our fruit trees and herds were very grave this Great Year spring. One afternoon Ariadne and I took a few young clergy (plus Cleite and Diamat) on rounds to benefit local farms' kine and

crops: we'd gone westward toward Tyliossos this day, the better to enjoy the look of the snow on the green Ida mountains and a little boy from the village came after us with an armful of red gladiolii, one fine bloom of it for each of us. We bore them homeward like thyrsus rods, and one of Yamo's young brothers, Teledamus, suggested we visit the Bull Dancers too; so we ended a spirited day there. As we watched them practice one of the women contenders brought the group's regards over to the pickets (never turning her back on this Bull, Who'd killed already), and she quipped that there was nothing behind those words from Delphi. *These tremors come from our Bull's hooves, and we're playing Him, Mistress!* she said. That was good for everybody to hear and Cleite looked pleased

—Yes dear, Diamat smiled to her. —The same old people, like these same old gorgeous gladiolii year after year—and all without our help, eh?

—Who's that? said Teledamus pointing out a blonde head and some others coming toward us under the swirling shade of the East Road's trees. Yamo knew right off it was Aithe, four Athenians in fact, his lady bearing her seven-month belly gently along between red-headed Anchinoe (my friend from the harvest rites) and Kia, the hopeful architect. Little Kapha was their fourth, looking like Diamat's protege in dressing with some style, though he'd worn no short-cut kilt or eye-paint home: that would've been worse than Anchinoe and Kia going back barebreasted, as they were today

—Look at the size of you girl, may I? said Ariadne laying her palm to Aithe's navel under her pale green shift.

—Out for a walk, as instructed?

—Yes Mistress, and more besides, since we—found

you out here, Anchinoe said behind Aithe's lively nod.
— You tell her, Kia. Or ask, that is. Kapha, you said *you* would, if Kia

— May we stay here permanently? Kia said letting out her breath ahead of Kapha. — We cannot speak for Phaeax or the others, I think they're just too afraid of our prince, but—We could be useful, Mistress, we could serve in a guild perhaps like that island-boy

— You've been kind to me. I know you'll understand, Aithe put in, — but I can't go home. Some of us are afraid because he's going to tell how we danced with your Queen and such. But for me—At home I was a whore, but they'll say that here I was supposed to keep myself—pure.

And they went on with rehearsed supplications, reasons, but with looks-around and half-whispers: the four of them sounded perfectly torn between the world round our Queen, whose powers extended clear into Crete's redoubtable military, and the world round Theseus hopelessly estranged. Maybe their Shepherd's recent demeanor (worse as he saw our ships tooling up for foreign action) had helped this along, despite Ariadne's first efforts with him: just after Kapha's return Ariadne had sent him a gift through Phaedra, a tentative encouragement of sorts in the form of a braided necklace made of crimson-dyed silk thread. It had not come to replace his royal gold but (as Phaedra was instructed) to remind him how much his own life-thread was in his hands here. That he had friends with whom he could build our peoples a future when he was ready. Ariadne was trying to show him the way out of captivity, gently, so as not to end up resented as I was by Icarus

— The answer is yes, Ariadne told these four. — But

what about your homes? We hoped to see your courage flower there. That you might teach

—Excuse me Mistress, but as I told you, things are too—fevered at home for that. I knew I'd better hold my tongue up there already, it was like a holy spell among the barons. I am sorry, but they hate you, for taking us, for many things

—They'll say we bewitched them, as well, Theia warned

—Oh but we've thought of that! Anchinoe offered.
—I've been learning viniculture with the Lady Nomia myself. We could send messages full of things we're learning for home's benefit, you see, and then—Well, if they want that expertise later, they can stop chaining our lives to the loom

—And I can't speak for my friend Geryon, said Kapha with an eye to the look on Cleite's face, that she'd not thus inspired her first pupil. —But as for staying pure here, well, look at me! I mean, is it possible to have—Do you know the way one's body goes wild when you make love? I think that happened in my spirit, if that's possible. It's so strange, but I haven't been so underlying-happy most of the time in all my life. As if for the first time I'm all of a piece. If I may explain—You see, I went to your House of Horae once, by myself when no one from home was about. I'd been, well, a little hungry for it with so much beauty in your city. And at the time I thought it'd be like—Alright then, I know Aithe understands—I thought it'd be like with the whores back home, where I'd always felt unclean about it, that I was using them and that they despised me the while. But here there was this young woman inside, beginning what you call her dedications? And I just—watched her getting ready, undressing,

combing, trancing herself, lighting beeswax candles, rubbing her thighs with scents and looking and looking at me—And I thought she was so beautiful, she didn't know me at all, and took me for—The God, as you say here. I mean she saw The God in me, and it made me feel like one, and instead of it being like at home I felt this—blossoming! I mean, *There She is*, your Goddess, giving Herself in love, and I walked outside later and that's what I felt! To everything! I'm sorry it's so *obvious*! he laughed with a blush-red face. —I mean how else do you really bring love into a town, or—I felt like family here, so far from home. I hope I'm not too ridiculous! he ended

—No, you're not, Cleite said, handing him her gladius

—My, this is a compliment, Ariadne said at last. —But again, not quite what anyone planned on. If I do say yes, still, let us all consider this further. We wouldn't expect you to sing Crete's praises. Just—To speak against blind hatred when you hear it. Alright? This is in the utmost confidence of course, she pointed out. —Now, Aithe, you go up to your rooms and rest. As your captor, I insist

Yamo excused himself to assist her up the east bastion stairs and I saw the pleasure in all our clergy's faces at the trill of Ariadne's laughter, not heard at all enough. Somehow, somehow we'd dance this year behind us, ride it out just as Dicte had said

—Well, didn't Yamo look mighty satisfied. A *third* of them! Theia said

Yes; and Cleite's face, too, could look very hopeful, at times.

With the new moon, the last full month of my father's life, Pasiphae hosted the customary feasts and pourings by which Crete's great houses honored Minotauros, and looked on his face for the last time before his Day. Mother made certain not to pollute these gatherings with people who thought some dark snake-magic danced before Minos' eyes: he knew exactly what he was doing, though his great comfort, his Queen and his family, were also what broke him down more than once in private. *This is more than The Powers demand of any man, I cannot bear to leave you now*, he'd weep. We had nothing to give him but ourselves

One evening just after sunset I took myself up onto a roof above the west court, to soothe my mind with the changing colors of the sky between the horns, the birds' settling-down. A lovely hour, most fragrant of the day, when green things sighed to be rid of the sun and people napped awhile before the evening meal. But I began to hear a lyre plucked by someone at the supper-hall windows just below me: its first phrases used a mainland tuning and then I heard a man's voice, low and resonant. *Let me go, Let me go*, he began—It was Theseus, sure—but it was not some captive's dirge. It was a prince insisting his lady not keep him from the battle, though all was lost, for it was better a man lay dead in the Earth than to hear the tears of his woman, doomed to slavery by his defeat. Eight slow flourishes ended the lay, then silence: I marvelled that he'd so long hidden such a gift and then a spray of wine-dregs splashed the courtyard below. I couldn't help going downstairs, as if I were Phaedra drawn by his startling mix of civilized skills and crudity. And there he was alone at table, in his cups with a solitary candle

— Oh! he said. — Come, join me! Long as it's not that sweat-bee Orneus.

At that I wanted to give him his profane retreat: his sour dishevelled brawn repelled me, the wine-drops in his nether-beard, his hair out in sweaty spikes and the way he eyed me from under half-open lids, while his lethal hands splayed large on the table before him. He looked fevered. Lonely. He was barechested and only Ariadne's red thread about his neck seemed to soften the sense that this was a violent man. A disturbed man. But he was looking me over too as I sat (to learn what I could) in my short kilt and lovelocks, a Labrys pendant; and drunk as Theseus was, he said it was high time princes drank together

— Your custom's to sit this side with me, he said

— Yes but let's not pretend. Shall I pour?

— Good, good! Theseus laughed seizing the jug and two cups himself. — Listen, here's something you might like to know. I was talking to that old renegade Elphenor the other day in customs, and he told me something about Egypt, why they're cooling off toward you people these days. Want to hear? He's an educated old stick, he is, like my tutor Kannidas back home. But listen. Ever hear of the Hyksos? They were shepherd-kings, like me. But Elphenor says it's a dark secret now in Egypt, that just a few generations ago these Hyksos wandered in off the deserts out East, and they conquered Pharaoh's people. He says they ruled the Nile for an age from their cities in the Delta, and now it's more than unwise to even mention the fact to an Egyptian. The point is, my friend, this Elphenor's traveled some you know, and in a city there, Avaris, he says he saw Bull Dance paintings by hired-out Cretan artisans on some half-wrecked garden walls. Ambitious slaves must be pointing out to Pharaoh

who did business with their shameful Asiatic masters. What do you think of that then? I'll wager your watchdog Cratus and the ladies never tell you things like that. No, they want Deucalion to think all the nasty foreigners the problem. I told you I'd help you sometime. Here now. Good fortune to both of us.

He smiled, and we eyed each other over our cups. This had shocked me. Why wasn't I told such things? This was not the first unpleasant likeness between us. I resented learning from *him*, too, that Cnossos had walls of a kind; but more of this might help me if the mainland did try to rattle my first year on the throne, as my father warned

—Nice to know that shepherds and *cruel Cretans* have a past, I said

—Cruel—Yes you are, good! Theseus laughed again with a bitter ring. —I heard your story, you know, at one of those suppers in Cnossos Phaedra drags me to. I like you, Deucalion, though I can't explain it much. First time I saw you with your eyes painted, too, I figured you must have something to stand up to me, I mean I'm twice your size. Let me show you something else though. Look at these cups somebody gifted me with, a matched pair solid gold. Gods, the wealth around here, Theseus went on.

—Look at this, Bull trampling people like dust while he gets away, and the one you have shows him grinning at this cow while they slip the noose to his leg. I didn't mean to hand you that one, he smiled. —What I mean is, you might think these images would shame me for backing out of the game. But they don't. They help me hold to the fact I'm smarter now. For awhile I almost lost myself. I thought I'd be the one to change this whole problem between us, even see my likeness outlive me in work this

good. But that was fool's gold, that was another cow somebody tethered in front of me for *their* reasons. The truth is, I have to get myself clear of *every* net before I can begin to know what my life's about. This thing from your Mistress I wear for plain luck, they do have powers, you know. So here, drink with me. Let's see: To the Minotaurus, is that alright? Where is he tonight, at prayer with a few young priestesses? I would be. I *can't help* it, Deucalion, I have a daemon, I think I told you. More, here, your cup

We drank. So. He could sing and court, cry and lead, listen and endure: I looked at the cups and recalled my own rejoicing at times when Bull tore free at the altars. But—Now Theseus wiped his beard and, eyeing me up and down, asked me to sit up straight for some reason. *Don't slouch like that*, he said, *It bothers me*

—Women are my weakness, Deucalion. I don't know why, but I'm coming to deal with it better. Mmm, Phaedra, Theseus said out of contemplations that lit his eyes, and then they quickly narrowed. —What I can't bear is the way women *expect* it all from us, this sacred devotion rubbish for something that—Why can't two people just enjoy things without turning them into some blasted religious rite. I know what's behind that, my friend. Think about it. Phaedra, bestowing herself on me, and she's the one who ate—I don't care, I'm going to speak my mind, Deucalion. Gods, that poor fellow never had a chance to understand. I should've known, though, girls with twice Phaedra's looks do the same thing in places up north, like Eleusis. The old religion, my mother calls it. Oh, yes, aren't they just such sweet little wagtails. Deucalion, please, it just bothers me, won't you sit up and not give me those Cretan eyes? Here, drink with me, drink

He poured again. Quite a dance of his own changes to keep up with as he swallowed; yet I did enjoy withholding the posture he wanted from me. Playful torment was better at least than standing on my toes to match him

—Women are in together to *break men*, and home with them, Theseus said with a threatening look in his eyes toward the laid-down lyre. —You can't see that because you've never lived as I have, Deucalion. But men should help each other. Now me, I'm from Troezen, in the Argolid. It's not important to Cretans, I admit. But on my honor, our clan has never mixed with Pelasgian blood, and do you know, it's still run by women? They never leave you alone! Mothers running you in herds to some gathering, and then prayers and meals with a hundred dried-up relatives, like everybody keeping an eye on each other. I can't *breathe* in her blasted ritual life. I was always wishing they'd let her do something besides raise me, it was all she lived for. Gods, is that life? I don't think so. And line up to see the royal chariot pass, this, that—All these routines from sunup to stars, and does the king follow them? The barons? No, they're free as eagles, running their horses and hunting or coming back in the ships dripping with adventures and blood and gold. And they expect you to be satisfied as some common obedient spearman, even while they fill your head with lays from the house bards about these men. Or about the outriders, the scouts and protectors of our folk in old wandering-days. To blazes the *damos*! Listen to me, brother, old things are fading as fast as men like Elphenor. We're hunters. We've settled down all we're going to. It's never going to fill the Achaian soul to go watch the corn dollies sprout once a year. How can I see your rib like that, or watch you at the blood-field, and believe you want grand-

mothers and men just like them to tell you how to live? Not me. I *tore* myself free when my mother told me who my real father was. That's what I really want you to know from me, that a man has his own life. *Let me go, Let me go*, Theseus half-sang. —That's the best line in the lay, don't you think? My throat's dry.

—One more for me, I said from my willful slouch across from him. —So, home is to break men. What about the thousand and one exceptions on the sea right now?

—*Ptoliporthos*. Yes, that reminds me. Listen, Deucalion, he resumed leaning forward with red-shot eyes. —Your Queen says to take my life more in my own hands. Well, she's behind the times. I already have. Just let me tell you about my Companions, the young men who first followed me along the Isthmus Road. You saw eight of them up at Athens. Those are men. Beautiful men. Not like these city-boys I have to nurse, little Kapha with ice-daisies in his hair. Every one of them is tied like a slave to the hearthstone. But the Companions and I, we lived a year in the wild together, and we picked up more from the villages too when it got out we were a company headed for a name. Oh, Deucalion, the smell of the evenings like this here, when we'd sparred all day and wrestled and hunted and rubbed each other down, eating from our hands every night. That was living. We felt so free, like a God singing in your chest. And they were so beautiful to me, half because they had no idea what our plan was. It was enough for them to be out there, with brothers—I did have to kill one fellow when I really laid out my Athens-plan, that's true. But between you and me? Once his objections were dealt with, the beauty of it was, we buried him and that was the end of it, if you follow. He

didn't come back to haunt us, as our mothers said men did. It took me days to get my mind round the possibilities. And when I did, you can bet I knew how to convince the others a God was in front of me. You Cretans know how important that is. And we *took* that Road. That's why Eleusis wanted to marry me in at first, the new power on the land. So there I was again, surrounded by lovely ladies wanting to plough my life under for their fruit trees. Weren't they surprised though! They don't expect a man to think his life worth something more, and—Well, here we are, I suppose. For now

—Point taken. Nice music, I said rising, ignoring his captious ending

—What? You have to go? Did I say something wrong again?

—No. I just don't want any more of this conversation.

—You what? Well, there's manners! You cruel Cretan, Theseus said with an awkward look between hurt, scorn and his moat of mannered calm. —You let me do all the talking, didn't you. But listen to some advice on one thing, my friend. These frightening stories you people spread won't last forever. If you've got Sicily worries, you'd better tear yourself out of this dream of your ladies' and hit them hard, out west, if you expect to keep the peace. That's right, I have an ear for these things. But come, sit, sit, don't leave now, one more between us. To your mother this time. We never did talk House defenses. Don't leave, Deucalion

—Jug's empty. Another time, I said

—Oh, go on, then. Cruel Cretan, Theseus repeated, and he raked the lyre's strings as a flourish to my going from the hall.

So what was I missing? That his loveless father and his

mother's imprisonment had bred a man of violent world-wide contempt? He had his own quite valid point of view and I felt sorer than ever for Ariadne—If he managed to see the throne within his reach she'd be more a nurse to his loneliness than his Queen. His world of nothing but useful and unuseful things—And now (*We're hunters, Deucalion*) Crete with so little left to placate or intimidate them

I wasn't going to trouble my father with new rumbles of danger as the Whitethorn Moon began to wane, and he entered retreat within the Labyrinth. Old Cratus said we should be dancing-glad the Shepherd's kind was out of the Bull Dance, whatever it might cost us. Cratus, of course, had no wish to find himself Kourete to a mainlander; and when I asked him about that Hyksos story, he asked *me* why I seemed to be neglecting my grape-arbor. *You've an example to set*, he scolded

I shared all I could with Ariadne in private, but like the House, we were both becoming preoccupied with Minos' comforts, while his brooding on life's last things began (rightly) to strip away some of the pomp and sheer extravagance of daily rite. Meanwhile, too, official word arrived from Callista that several hundred of Gelania's people were indeed coming to homestead Crete: not everybody was pleased to hear of their bad luck on its way. And not a single ship beached from the west. Perides knew of our waiting and came in off his last coastal cruise to oversee more worry about this. We tried to believe Pandaros was creating new order out Sicily-way. In any case our father would be gone within three weeks: so much to face without him

This was when Glaucus came home. But I did not see him right away. With Ariadne spending another night

with her women I'd gone up to my chambers and there in a corner stood my iron sword, as clean as the day my father'd laid it in Glaucus' hands: I knew he'd need his rest but I scarcely got any for wanting to see him. Next day, though, this unworthy homecoming grew stranger, for I got only dark looks for my questions about him. Cratus pointed me up the inland road to our forges, and when I got there (the buildings hotter and smokier than ever I'd seen them) I found that veteran Mestor and no few of his friends watching avidly as iron, black warty irregular chunks of ore were fed into fires and the slag dribbled out, the men's faces smiling like cats' at me and seeming to see a world of cunning in my own. They didn't know Glaucus' whereabouts just now but Mestor asked if I'd heard about the raid on Troy itself; and every person round the forge shared new rounds of laughter

He said that our friend that Sacker of Cities had tried to hit Troy; but apparently his navigators (*The pride of the Achaian fleet!* they all laughed) had landed their force a few hundred miles south of Troy instead, in a place close by Glaucus' forebears' homeland, Aeolis. The tale was all over the Admiralty already since Glaucus' initial report: *It happened back in the Willow Moon, and Oh, the folks there gave our friend fine welcome. He got off lucky beating shameful retreat back onto the sea—Is that the very medicine we pray for, sir? That'll keep the vermin in their holes, eh?*

I smiled at this ineptitude; but why were such reports, not to mention our iron operations, suddenly public affairs? At last I got Diamat to tell me that Glaucus was being tended to, in private, by Cleite and some of the sisters

—No, he's not hurt or ill, she said as we stood by the throne room in birdy sunshine. —He wanted to be puri-

fied, Deucalion, so that he can face up to you his king,
and

—What? Face up to me? For what?

And as she sought words, up onto court from the north entrance-ramp came the shoremen Cordax and Podes. Between their supporting arms walked an exhausted-looking, sea-beaten young man; and he told us that Trianda was gone

—I mean it's *gohhhhhhne!* he raged at our questions.

His name was Stheno: I couldn't recall him from the Rhodes contingent last year but he looked only my age, a broad-boned face with the tracks of a childhood pox. He'd shaken off wonder at the Labyrinth faster than any visitor, but once he'd started shouting (again), he went a little crazy, cursing the House and Minos and even Pasiphae, till we got him a cup or two and into a throne room council. Minos looked dazed, broken out of another world: Glaucus (how thin! and black-bearded!) joined us too, but he wouldn't lift his eyes from the slab-stones before the throne's dais. I saw anger at Glaucus in some of our clergy, too, as they filed in and took benches round our mother on the throne, Ariadne stony beside her

Gone meant that six days ago this Stheno had awoken to Trianda-town's alarm, stepped outside his mother's house and seen Achaian warriors, plumed, corseleted and screaming, pouring over the prows of their beached ships and already hacking their way up the harbor-slope toward the town, right through the hopelessly-overwhelmed numbers of home's men. The waterfront houses were burning and off to one side he saw what looked like their chief's group leading huge white horses down planks onto the beach and into waiting traces of chariots. Stheno ran because his grandfather would need help get-

ting to high ground back of the town, children and women and elders were getting uphill best they could but there was no citadel waiting, never needed one, just almond and olive and fruit trees, and men with nothing but swords or spears were running the other way past him into the fight, everybody panicking, people throwing up with fear, sick. He saw one woman trying to drag her best divan out the front door screaming *Where are the Cretans, Where are the Carian patrols*

As he helped his grandfather he heard the clatter and yells of a stiffening defense from the head of their harbor-slope. But Stheno was not a warrior, there was nothing but a fish-knife in the house, that was why he hadn't come with the contingent last year and no one had shamed him for that, he was a bee-keeper, and now he heard screams of voices he knew as the lines broke to pieces before the rattle of wheels, horses' hooves. *Life* was coming to an end

He went outside with the knife. The situation had decided things for him. The men of Trianda tried to keep order falling back through the streets and spearing what raiders they could by sudden lunges from doorways and nooks they knew, spearing the horses too in contempt and to keep retreat from being cut off. Men choked up blood on the streets they'd run as naked boys and up at the broken front of things he saw two beards stomping in the face of a neighbor already dead

They gave up the town. There was a pause in things because apparently the chief was against losing any more horses and there were houses to rifle and burn. A runner came down from Trianda's queen up in the orchards to warn that other Achaians, from their budding trade-station or rather that shabby little camp of tents called

Ialysa, had arrayed themselves a mile or so back of the orchard-hill to prevent any inland retreat: they weren't attacking, just holding the Triandans there. This was a slave-seizing operation. Six more Triandan men died in a rain of arrows fired against any counterattack. Smoke was twisting up from houses and shops, sounds of rage and laughter as things were torn apart in the search for valuables, but it wasn't such a big town and soon Stheno heard re-marshalling cries. Everybody knew they'd be coming uphill now. Stheno couldn't believe how many there were, it seemed like a thousand

Up among the trees with the men at arms he found three hundred-odd people broken up into groups, some just sitting there trembling, crying, some round their queen and clergy arguing what to do (you could see the ocean bright-blue and empty to the east from there), others touching soil to brow and breast. They'd already killed all their barking dogs to better hide themselves in the groves, but there was simply nowhere to go, cut off from the real forests and the harbor. The men left to their defense split up now too because some wanted to fight their way through to the woods—the survivors of that gambit were back before long—while others decided on laying good ambush and (they said) perhaps a child or two might get away in the final uproar. Of the people, though, many old ones like Stheno's grandfather, women with babies, the utterly proud, finished their little rite with home's soil and then went with priestesses farther up among the fruit trees and were not seen again: only about thirty'd had the nerve to end things that way and their going didn't help the others from crying louder. The men at arms shushed them. Now Achaians could be heard, the jingling of their body-armor and the rat-

ting wheels moving in under the first line of trees and forming a pincer. Trapped utterly, more Triandans found themselves east-facing cliffs and went over holding hands. Whole families. Panic was sickening the rest and everybody was standing up now. Triandan men moved out toward picked ambush-positions but few could help shouting curses and come-ons, which made the wait brief. The queen, and perhaps two hundred around her—his own father and mother with them—were standing together with chins out high and that was the last Stheno saw of them up close. Everybody was free to meet this as they chose and his father'd said it was all-right to run

He'd survived by jamming himself into a crack of rock just under the cliff-edge and pulling a tamarisk-bough across its front: he showed us the scrapes to prove it. Before long he heard warriors of their mop-up squads below, stripping necklaces and things from the tangle of bodies under the cliffs and waving the trinkets as an all-clear to more men rounding the harbor-point: it was then he promised everybody revenge, by getting here at least to report the raid. And though he'd never forget his rage at the bright empty sea before him, he'd known that our ships and the Carians were out there. *Just in the wrong place, that morning*, Stheno wept

And they hadn't just burned the houses. They'd brought big bronze prying-bars and really enjoyed themselves bringing down the good masonry. Too crazy with the game to think it through. And they made the queen and the priestesses and the two hundred prisoners watch, leading them around bound and gagged against curses, stripping them and arguing what prices they'd bring and spearing a few who'd decided on resistance or contempt.

They didn't even take the cattle or sheep or pigs, they butchered everything as if they couldn't fill their rage and burned it all like an offering to the sky. They'd even seemed to laugh at the fact that smoke might well bring in Carians or Cretan cracks; but by late day they were gone, headed southeast to sell off the less goodlooking or fine-boned in Canaan, no doubt, and now Trianda was rubble and scattered corpses. Stheno had sailed himself here in a skiff they'd missed in destroying the harbor, one of Perides' coasters had picked him up off Palaikastro; and now with nothing to prove to any of us, Stheno demanded a burial party, and more. Old ones, lame ones, the infuriatingly proud still lay out there

And then this youth stood up before Perides, ripped out two handfuls of his own hair and dropped them in the Admiral's lap. Clearly this was something deflected from Pasiphae and Minos themselves, for Stheno then gave the throne room his back and walked out

— I'll alert Katsambas, Perides said

— Sit down! Ariadne ordered

— Child, said Pasiphae and Minos at once

— No, she answered them. — It's finished. By the time we might do anything your Great Year will be over. The House is mine now, mine and Minotauros', Ariadne said and her eyes well-knew the palpable change in our world she'd just declared. — Have I spoken the truth or not? she asked the chamber's shock-stilled faces

— But we must discuss this, Daughter, and do something right away. I think even our other houses will want immediate action rather than delay for collective council, said Pasiphae from the throne with gentle insistence; and she rose from the palm-shaded throne and reached out to touch Ariadne before her now. But the gesture drew

mother's body that one step down off the dais, and there, there the Kouretes and priestesses saw it, and Pasiphae knew: it was over. And facts displaced even the decencies of rite for such a passage

Ariadne took mother's hand and pressed it hard to her breast for a moment: then she said she'd call another council after she'd spent time alone, listening, in the pillar crypts. When she'd gone, having shut the throne room door on me with the rest, my father told the breathless room that we'd best do like the Queen and go our own ways awhile: he took up Pasiphae's free hand, they gave me a blank inaugural nod, and they left the chamber together, Cratus and Cleite and the rest wiping eyes and shaking heads after them. Perides said he'd have House-guard stay with the man Stheno against more harm to himself, or incitement of the public

I said Hello to Glaucus then, and asked him to come with me (where I didn't know) and he looked up with an awful readiness for anything in his swollen graygreen eyes. We did not greet, I asked him no more as we went out and crossed the bright orderly central court for the east wing's great stair. Trianda. People I'd scarcely bothered to know, good families descended from Crete's own, whose almonds Cnossos consumed in handfuls

They'd be taking turns raping them on the ships. Or would've been. This had happened days ago while I'd been what. I couldn't remember. Drinking with Theseus and calling it brave. And there was sure to be one fool in a hero's thousand who'd try to force some lovely mouth and get his snake bitten off. And they'd dangle her in quarters from the mast to paralyze the others. Doubt not. Headed southeast, not for Achaia's backbreaking flax-farms this time but for Baal's slavemarkets, where

Pharaoh's agents would outbid you for the ones with birthing hips and strong teeth. My people. I knew we were one flesh because now I was numb. Kill, kill!

—Oh Glaucus, I said as we reached the stairs and I had to lean against a cool crimson pillar's wood. —She'll want me to—understand them

—And why not? Glaucus answered. —Here's a man I think can tell us all about being tight with your enemies. Isn't that so, friend? Tell us about it, go ahead now

—So you're Glaucus? said Theseus, slowing his steps as he reached the court landing with Orneus just behind him; and *I don't know what you mean* he said in his cold quaint sober way as he looked Glaucus over. With beards they looked like brothers, dark and light: in a wrestling-heat their odds would've split. Round and round, beasts on a blood-red sealstone

—Well then why don't I tell you and you correct me if I'm wrong. I've been studying this a year and more. Doesn't it have to do with how much you need each other, you charioteers? You need each other to be the enemy, so that you can tell the people they're in danger, and then you take over as home's big strong guardians of the grain. Correct? I mean your obscene delusion depends on keeping the feud going, even if there are nice vulnerable third-party victims to break it up now and then. Twice-a-moon cattle raids, say, local displays of the danger from each other. From the one who's tacitly returning the favor for *his* home, and there you are, the delusion's complete across the land. The father-land, so to speak

—You're crazy. Shut up. It's not like that

—Well, *goodness!* Glaucus sneered (his eyes ablaze) leaning one arm high against the landing's near wall.

—How *do* you explain it then, the way you charioteers get

so weepy when the battle's over? Do you mean, it's not a thanks then, for a love you couldn't speak? Isn't that about the only way for a *man* to show his attraction? Am I going too fast? You know, the *You fought well, we might've been friends* sort of tripe while the fellow croaks in your arms. You respect him, so much now—And the world burns!

—You're not going anywhere, bird-nose! Theseus yelled shoving Orneus away

—See, Deucalion? said Glaucus, on guard but only throwing up his hands with a shrug. —He's attracted to me and this is how he handles it. I've seen it before

—One on one any weapon. I'll kill you for this

—I'm sure, yes, unless I kill you, Glaucus told him as a number of white-helmeted House-guard drew nearer with their spears. —But that's no help. The world is full of attractive men, isn't it Theseus. Why waste so much strength lying to yourself? You have beautiful shoulders, and eyes like—Wait—like cave-ice, how's that. No? Ahh, well, Glaucus ended, backing off. —Come, Sweet Wine, I adore ice-daisies and they don't last forever, you know.

And Glaucus turned his back and took a few steps, casual, a giant, up court for the east garden stairs. Halfway there he turned and let me catch up to him, gravely offering his hand.

* * *

—*You people sit in this House and you don't see anything!*

Glaucus had carried out his mission, yes. But when we got ourselves alone he was more than angry, he was hateful, contemptuous as I'd never seen before. Because of

the fear we'd left to fester in Rhodes. Because when he'd beached from there among the Carians he'd found them drilling new hordes of youth for their own home guard against that raider, against the chaos of the Hittite realm at their backs. Because in front of the holy city of Hatussas he'd seen the piked heads of faulty advisors as the Hittite king was driven out of Canaan by Egypt; and they'd had no time for him, no time *for him*, a Cretan emissary, especially as their investment of iron in us had not paid off. Because after more weeks through the snow of their west-bound roads, back toward the Aegean and Lesbos, Alxiona had wrung promises from him of more cooperative intimidation-ventures such as last year's, all in exchange for nothing but advice that we should look to Troy if we wanted this cursed metal. And that was where he'd obtained the dozen lumps I'd seen, greedily-hoarded Black Sea iron they couldn't work themselves in exchange for lying promises of more Cretan help with plans like Alxiona's. It was all madness and falsehood and a bloody rush to change whole ways of life without knowing the ends, those were Glaucus' words about overseas now, not to mention the new defensiveness up and down his ancestors' coasts this spring, for a thousand and one *idiots*. He said we hardly needed spies to know they were building ships up north, and it was true we'd never heard back from those salts out of Aegina

—No matter what we do we help it along. Do you think nobody watches what we do? he asked me as we sat under cypress boughs, looking down at the river. —I was so angry at you, at the House, I—I love Antibia, Deucalion, and Praisos, and Crete and that's what I have to serve. Royal houses are—are cheap, that's all I knew by the time I beached. I wanted to expose things, whatever

happened to me for it. I told you I was a man to shake things with my heart if need be, and I shot my mouth off about the iron and this *race* we're in. That if we do follow foreign examples, we're finished. Finished. Of course there were old veterans hanging round port and they saw the stuff and even mocked my words, but—Then I saw what Earthbull's done to the House, and heard about your grandmother, and—I'm sorry, brother, but I can't be part of this anymore. Please don't take it as disrespect. But I have a soul. I don't want to be lost. I'm afraid of the Night Mare. I know you and your Queen do your best

Glaucus' voice faded, and I saw how ashamed he was, and now it was my turn to break oath with Ariadne. I told him her intentions for the military. He gasped. He gasped again as I told him that Minos knew, that we'd been trying to arrange the indispensable marriage; and *marriage* shocked him more. He breathed, and I half-joked that today at least, our childlessness looked less critical: Aithe's baby was due any time this Thunder Moon, itself all of four days off; and thirteen days beyond that was Minos' Day

—What a season for sweating it's going to be! Glaucus said. —I think your Queen sees straight through this madness, brother. But what she might bring on—I'm a fool to say this now, but I'm just not wise enough to foresee anything, except perhaps Trianda on a Cretan scale. What to *do*, Deucalion!

What to do: we risked no sun-flashed message of such disaster to other houses, nor could we give Hippeus' heralds words we still lacked. But as the sun went down this day I found my heart racing, seeing Ariadne defiant in the throne room, her pulling us into power, her pressing mother's hand to her breast: her reign had begun, her

power moving into the open, and I was with her. In a sense. No one saw her. Even as darkness fell she remained in the crypts, searching, listening as never before: Pasiphae, meanwhile, for the blow this day had dealt her, drew upon all the skills and confidence of a Great Year and kept superb order. On the public side there were the effects of Glaucus' words to deal with, inquiries as to why the Labyrinth had closed all doors: Pasiphae managed to hold these off without speaking ahead of Ariadne, but by night the situation pressed further. Someone—Cnossian kin perhaps of that Rhodian woman-merchant who'd come here last year demanding help—had recognized the youth Stheno being brought up from the harbor and told their family; so something was obviously wrong, and a kind of vigil-crowd began to gather through the night on the west court. They'd have to be told. At the same time my father, surely wishing not to make the same mistakes twice, kept as he could to the proscriptions of retreat among his priests. But now it seemed to be Cratus' turn to militate, and Yamo's despite his lover's tie to the mainland, and together they pounded on Admiralty doors, hounded Perides to make the inevitable preparations, tried to stir up priestesses to press for a line to be drawn, now and in blood. Clio, Theia and others didn't need much convincing, but would not say a word before their Queen did

In the confusion I lost track of Theseus and his twelve; but as Glaucus pointed out, Minos was leaving me alone for reasons, and I took up my throne by organizing a vigil for Ariadne in the central court. Cleite chanted as strongly as ever we'd heard, her need to keep working toward hope filling out her voice; and it pleased our mother to see me dance the Changes, trying to remind the House

that in our totems we possessed everything we needed to meet this world. She herself worked in the midst of the women for the first time, adding blood-offerings of a goat and a dove to our labors, and kept tripods of incense burning all night before the great triple-shrine. But even a gesture of support from the ever-watchful Iris and her staff (including Kudru and Icarus) seemed conspicuously lacking: perhaps they'd joined the crowd outside. Cnosians on the west court could literally smell grave trouble now, as they traded bits of rumor

We were resting in the blue darkness before daybreak when Ariadne called for mother: two priestesses went in with her and soon Diamat came out and took me aside (rather than Perides—moving cautiously), quietly asking the numbers of ships and marines at hand, their morale. I was telling her that Sicily was our biggest venture when Ariadne and mother emerged from the hall of the crypts: my Queen looked exhausted but she flashed a sustaining smile as their respective crowns were brought to them, Ariadne's roseleaf chaplet, mother's silver-horned tiara. Had she possibly told Pasiphae all? The two of them raised their palms together toward us and bade us to follow: there was more to be learned and decided at Europa's tomb before any council, Diamat told us

—Some rite is better than none, Cratus said but Yamo growled with impatience and pulled at his locks, and they bickered. My first attempt at a baleful look quieted them as we filed out through the processional corridors, our old ones' gazes from the walls putting silence to the rest of the clergy, hardening their looks for whatever might come. As we crossed the stream on the viaduct the whole Cnosian crowd from the west court flowed down behind us, Mestor and Virbius and Nomia and dozens more: I

saw wretched-looking Razorclam too but now he was once more under Tukato's arm, and *I don't can do nothing for Crete*, he later explained. Tukato was determined anew to find a place for him

Europa's tomb was not far past the bend in the inland road, and the crowd at vigil with us before its horned and pillared entrance increased with the morning's sunny warmth. Day's first cicadas rasped in the trees but people spoke little beneath their noise, for not knowing what the crisis was; yet when Ariadne and Pasiphae did come out they gave us only the briefest sight of Mother and Daughter palm-to-palm, and then Pasiphae first simply strode through the crowd and back up the road we'd come. Elphenor, Nomia and her man, Mestor and many others who considered themselves mother's circle hesitated, then followed her; but she led them, this time, not to the Labyrinth but up the west court and beyond it, up the royal road to what had been grandmother's villa, the home of Crete's retired queens, and amid some confusion a few of them turned to stay with Ariadne's numbers, opting for the Labyrinth's familiar regnancy. If this were a first reading or winnowing of loyalties, then, before even decent rites had formalized transference of high power, how could they expect it to read true, since no one knew for sure what was at stake? Friends, kin, people of all relations tried to make little of choosing one body or the other: maybe this was mainly to divide people's numbers till we did have policy (a council decision of weight would be cried tomorrow morning, it was announced). But I knew some of what it meant to Ariadne having mother wholly with her, and behind her. I wasn't going to complicate things as she brooded her position for the council through the night, and gave her only what loving

touch and encouragement she asked for. My necromancer, my sorceress: the House was hers and not hers, mother's effects still upstairs from us, father suddenly alone in our midst. Nothing felt quite right, though we did hear that Phaedra and the villa's novices were overwhelmed to find themselves Pasiphae's retainers

But lords, was anything under control anymore? Just after sunrise a terrible screeching of *Ships! Ships in the harbor!* panicked half the people of Cnossos out of their houses for the Juktas foothills, while others gathered weapons and ran in a mass to charge some enemy across our north meadows: the ships turned out to be Callistan, coming here to homestead, but this reaction to one of Podes' high-strung cousins at the harbor (they hadn't been able to catch him with his mistaken alarm) made it plain how people were suffering the Labyrinth's nervous secrecy. Yamo himself had had the Shepherd and his youths surrounded with House-guard to make them hostages against apparent siege: the mistake did not please Theseus but he seemed too preoccupied with something to fuss with insulted dignity now. As it was, the council had to be put off another day because Gelania and her people warranted thorough welcome from the Labyrinth; and even Minos came along to the harbor, hoping his presence at the seaside might *draw* our tinships closer to safe beaching

Twenty of their graceful broadbottomed boats lay drawn up along the calm summer surf at Amnisos, and they made a pretty sight after the morning's scare and after last year's gathering of warships. Red-headed Queen Gelania, most of her court and their artisans and island-traders, children and monkeys and all the livestock they could manage were gazing about themselves at the town

and harborworks and the mountains as we arrived: bundles of clothing, lambs in children's arms, gay voices singing a guest's thanks already, they'd even brought six pair of those striped gazelles out of Africa they liked for a touch of home, and it was clear they'd all tried hard to dress and look like desirable immigrants, down to the young girls' chevroned kilts and the sharp stances of their nearly naked young guard. Perides liked that we'd be gaining even a small contingent of warriors, not to mention the return of the six Cretan ships I'd assigned to help them evacuate; but once the formalities were accomplished and we began to walk these people inland toward a temporary camp, more than one aged person fainted in their midst, others had evil-looking eyes swollen red by Velkanos' breath and some could hardly keep up with the wagons, suffering angina or coughing-fits. Gelania herself moved up and down her column like a nurse, wiping seasick kids' brows, promising things about Crete's good air, its healers: she told us their fine white houses had begun turning queer red and green as if sick themselves with sulphur-stink, that offshore waters were running purple and yellow and milky gray and there'd been rumblings and tremors right up to the moment they'd left. Ariadne and mother grieved with her exile and spent the whole day welcoming them, making the most among our people of this sign that Crete was considered safe: the Labyrinth's size and wealth and color enthralled these islanders (I heard all ages taunting absent kin who'd missed it by migrating elsewhere), but Gelania insisted on staying in a tent with her people till they'd actually decided on a site for their new life. On our side, some Cretans along the road either overdid customs of welcome already generous, or clapped while their faces told another thought,

that these islanders looked Cretan enough to suggest that *retreat* was indeed in the wind

That evening, on the edge of the New Moon, Gelania and her Consort and their clergy joined an unusually large Cretan crowd in our central court, as our priestesses and Kouretes made bloodless offerings and swung the bull-roarers in Minos' honor. Was it possible that her Consort might make for two Offerings, this Great Year? Perhaps that was what The World Below wanted for these nineteen years without, why Velkanos had driven them here. My father seemed to have no thought of the question as he went down on one knee at the triple-shrine before Pasiphae, who looked splendid and terrible dressed and adorned in white: confusions about office fell temporarily to irrelevance as she anointed him with scented resin of oak and, in chrisim, made the signs of The Anointed One at his brow, breast and loins. Half a moon to live: he was shown the flint-knife that would reap his hair, the thongs of willow that would hold him in the bent-back five-fold bond, before mounting The Tree: when he rose before her and Labrys he spread his arms wide and, people said, hollowed their hearts with the fierce knowledge in his face, as Pasiphae danced the moonwise circles of his fate around his person. And for a moment, under the torch-lit night sky curving over the Labyrinth with its stars, the political puzzlement and natural unease people felt was transformed into tumultuous praise for Minos' reign, for all he'd done in healing and anger and love on their behalf, their fields', their children's. People shouted chants and stamped for him, calling him Asterios The Starry One for the way his courage, like the stars, belittled worries and complaints: the very balconies around us trembled with savage will to carry on

our ways and people pressed their palms to the court's slabs, grounding this over-abundance of power, confirming and communing with generations who'd once done exactly likewise. Retiring, then, to a private meal, we scarcely needed to talk. Minos could feel how Ariadne and I burned for him and mother let him want for nothing, touching him constantly, pouring his wine, biting him, giving back his gaze. Later Ariadne only said she hoped the meaning of his homage would hold tomorrow.

But we lost *another* day—Not because that standard patrol of four Cretan warships returned from Trianda's ruins with what they thought was first report (and of their actions as burial-party we were sure to tell Stheno, who was obliging us with his silence). We lost this council-day because just astern of our own ships came a single Carian one, and for Podes' and Cordax's attempts to keep their officers quiet, they cried the news of Trianda from the beach to Cnossos' precincts. It seemed so stupid, given their obvious guilt over having been just a few miles out of position that might've changed everything—but after Pasiphae and Minos both deferred to Ariadne, and she gave them a speech that threatened their heads for usurped prerogatives, we did understand that this raid was also a threat to Caria; and that their fear had generated orders to get Crete moving, which uproar would do more quickly than statecraft. It was only good they'd come *here* and not brought Cnossos' secret to other houses ahead of us. But uproar they got, for as the word spread and Cretan relatives of Triandans began to lead a drum-pounding show of indignation on the west court, others joined them with resurgent concerns of their own. By late day Ariadne decided to show herself at the upper windows, and she made the crowd believe we were

preparing strong response; but the silence lasted only as long as the sight of her, and shouts of *Kill the Athenians!* and *Massacre Mykenai!* resumed well into the night. *Raise more grain for what, your silver earrings?* came other anonymous shouts. *It's the prince's sterility! Get the giants back!* So there was not really much to be publicly done till this outcry exhausted itself and took more thought. There was rumor, though, that Minotauros would not leave his people in these straits, that his Day would have to be delayed: I tried to overlook this vote of confidence, and Perides kindly said that I had stout friends in the fleet these days. At least the Shepherd (disdaining protective guard for himself if not his twelve) said nothing to salt the wound. By nightfall people saw Cnossian heralds take to the roads, we had no choice now: there was a respite of noise from outside and, as we tried to eat something, Perides grilled our men and the Carians as to this raider's possible whereabouts. It was so fruitless that he could only suggest a call-up of reserves and a massive hunt

— We cannot do nothing, and my retirement can wait, he told Minos

— You should be addressing my daughter and son with this, brother. I give you one order, and that's to be ready to carry out theirs now. For all our years together, give me oath on that, Perides! our father said, and they were just concluding this when a knock at his great hall's door announced Icarus. Under Pasiphae's already-narrowed gaze the boy apologized for intruding, but he wanted to give Minos a present before the rituals grew too thick around him; and from under his cape Icarus brought out a small rough model of a House-shrine pinched from clay, with four seated persons receiving the honor of a pouring from one small figure.

— Each is one of you, Icarus told our family. — This little one is me

— Really? My, you got the tilt of that cup in his hand just right, didn't you? So natural, my father said with an arm across his shoulders. Then, as happened more and more these days, his eyes began to fill; and he said *I have two sons again*. Icarus understood the honor in these words, and kissed my father's cheek, and hurried out; but the broken smile that looked after him spoke a terrible fight to let go, to let things go

But there would be no mercy. When we woke it was to find summer's birds scarcely audible under the pounding and shouted anger of another crowd outside. We figured that people like Mestor and Nomia had spent the night encouraging outrage. But it was worse. Pandaros' ships were back from Sicily: no tin; and they'd been attacked

In a rough circle before the throne's anteroom a group of twenty-odd marines sat or stood in dishevelled dejection, tending wounded friends, calling on priestesses and House staff to fetch healing things, or not even looking up at the cleanly softer bodies of our clergy: they looked beaten men, tunics torn open, equipment missing and there was no need for Glaucus to say there'd be no hope of containing news this time. We heard people who'd seen them up from the harbor banging pots and mocking the House clear over the west wing's roofs. And I remember glimpsing Theseus coming down the east stairs to see it all as I shut the throne room doors behind Ariadne and the rest of us.

Inside, the bearded Pandaros with a bloody right arm himself was in a rage at Perides, and he did not cease even as Ariadne took the throne (not the Queen he'd left awhile ago). What kind of half-baked orders had we given

him anyway, he was saying, to have men just sail out there and wallow off Sicily's coast in sight of the walls of Kamikos, and let that king of theirs pick his targets—Oh, yes, the tin-ships had finally shown up, riding low in the water for being so laden with ore, but that'd made them slower than dung-beetles, and when they'd got themselves into convoy just west of Sicily, out came Kokalos' ships

What ships? The blasted two dozen ships full of soldiers that our little friend must've been building in secret, and they looked the work of Achaian shipwrights into the bargain, Pandaros went on with a stamp of his foot that brought blood through the crust of his bandaged arm (and Ariadne saw it drip to the stones of the chamber floor). So there they were, fifteen Cretan ships full of marines having to lag back round the frightened merchants while the Sicilians fanned themselves out dead-ahead. *And where are the blasted Libyans when you need them*, Pandaros complained, *learning dances in front of the ruined Goddess-shrines at Malta?*

It didn't need any priest to read the runes, he said. The Sicilians wanted the tin and nobody was getting past them till they got it. So they closed, and Pandaros' ram had done its work well—once. But the nine-ship advantage made the difference. They threw firepots onto our decks first-thing and got the sails burning with flaming arrows, and in handling that, fighting off boarders and trying to keep the civilian merchant-folk at the oars, they just couldn't hold things together and the Sicilians—someone had trained them, he swore it—started to wedge ships into their midst, like lions cutting calves from a herd. And just like calves the civilians from the tin mines broke convoy and ran for it every which way, catching crabs with

their panicked oars: it didn't take long after that to get the six of them boarded and the people run through (no interest in captives just now) and little Kokalos had a fat take of tin in his coffers. Pandaros swore on his life that the men had fought as fiercely as he might ask (which meant a lot, Perides put in, backing up his chosen second); but as soon as the tin was in hand Sicily's warships began to disengage, oh yes, it was a disciplined little operation with none of the usual stupid mistakes raiders made. We'd lost nine ships to the fires—Why in Goddess' Name didn't *we* use weapons like that?—maybe a hundred men slain or drowned, a hundred, and the wounded outside were a fraction of casualties coming up from port. And just as his old loved prince had done, Pandaros had brought these in to make people *see what they ought to see*. *And so, Perides?* he said: we'd killed perhaps a hundred and fifty Sicilians, sunk a good seven or eight of their ships: the little thieves weren't much, it was just their numbers and the slug's pace of the merchanters. Give him the resources and no civilians to coddle and they'd bring us Kokalos' head on a stick: one month at the outside to do it and we could believe him. *But don't send us back with these do-nothing, show-of-force orders*. And he stood there in his angry pain and nobody spoke: Ariadne's breast rose once, and fell

—Get yourself looked at now, Minos told Pandaros: the chamber was silence from crimson wall to wall as the man went out

—It seems we are at war, Minos said then from his seat by Perides

—I decide that, Ariadne answered him straight across the room

—Ariadne, you—We must wake up, said Pasiphae,

and clergy's heads bowed with their burdens of assent, of despair, deflected anger

– You wake up, Ariadne with an equally gentle insistence; but now our father could bear no more holding back, he could not safely delay his Day but neither could he leave the realm in extremity and he shot up to his feet with orders to bridge that gap, he sounded broken even in his rage

– Crush them, Perides! No bluff this time, we're going to send his head to the Lion! Just to begin with, do you hear me? Take every man and every last rowboat you need

Perides fumbled to rise amid the shocked looks of clergy round the room, for this shouting in the heart of the House; but Ariadne was up before him, straight as a tree upon the dais and higher than the nodding painted palm behind her on the wall

– Uncle, if you open that door, she said, – I will have the guards kill you.

He was not alone sucking in his breath: Glaucus covered his eyes

– Ariadne! our mother said rising

– Keep back! Whose policy was this, this cursed competition? So, your little gambit for iron hasn't played out, and you'll make Sicily our own Trianda? It was *you* who made Kokalos think the tin worth this! Are *you* going aboard to help cover your errors with bodies, mother? You, father? No. But look at the blood on the floor of our mothers' House now! It is over, you are finished! Ariadne said, and she seemed to lose words then, wavered as her high cheeks colored and she put two trembling fists out on the air. For a moment I saw her again as on that night she'd helped to rend Bull limb from limb, but there

was a sobbing in the rise and fall of her breast, a flaw in Necessity that broke any sacral spell. She looked quickly to mother's wounded eyes for that union past speech in which they'd bled together, as one; but now the tide was driving them back on old rocks, against each other

—You are my family! she told the room. —But I swear, by The Powers, I will do what I have to. Please, sit down!

Yet neither Pasiphae, Perides nor our father did so: this was simply too much for them: we were all confused by the unhallowed changes of recent days, not to mention the beleaguerment from almost every edge of the seachart. But *what now* as I watched them glaring at each other; and then I felt Glaucus tap my leg, *Do something*

—Let's—Let's take just awhile to think alone and come back, I offered. —We have to act together in some way. If we don't, it's *all* over! I said to the silence

Our mother broke off first, or seemed to with a shift of her weight to one hip and a quick look at me

—With all respect due our son, she then told Minos, —we may have to consider postponement.

I might've been angry; but with so much bloodshed now I could not obscure my lack of years to contend with a Lion and his pride. How many more did Ariadne have? A few; but she had a vision

—No, said Minos to Pasiphae. —But a short recess, yes, agreed

—You won't find me changed, Ariadne warned reassembling the throne

And nobody asked what she *would* have us do, another symptom of the confusion at our center: she waved off Cleite, young Theia and Clio, everybody, and it seemed a warning of no change to come from Pasiphae that, on her

way out, she offered to help tend the marines outside for *a match we were still going to win*. Glaucus followed our mother, and Perides: I asked how I might help but Ariadne only answered, *You are*, with her eyes to the spotted floor. So I went out

Litters and wine and House staff began to help things on the court and there was not too much rancor in the faces of marines I knew. Cratus, Perdix, Diamat began loud chants to try and answer the continuing din of protest from the west court. I'd never seen things so bad and hoped the Athenians would stay behind closed doors for all our sakes; and just then little Kapha came down the east stairs with the cry that Aithe's water had broken. *Anytime now!* he said, and Cleite asked Perdix to come assist

—There's your real hope, Deucalion, my father tried to smile with a hand to my shoulder. —Blonde and red-headed Cretans. You did well in there and I hope she'll forgive me but this is too much, too much. Now let's each do as you say, and see what happens, he sighed

We parted for our chambers. I lay on my bed awhile, ashamed of my share of ineptitude, of the voices sapping dignity from the House entrusted us. Then, restless, I took up my sword of iron, a stranger of sorts in the corner where Glaucus had put it. I was blankly looking at it (made in such hurry that the scabbard and hilt bore no features) when my door banged open and there was Orneus in his boarstooth helmet with his sword drawn. His surprise that I was so close to the door, and armed, paused him and as he saw it'd be a fight he came at me screaming, mouth and blue eyes wide, his pink face red and my stomach went weak as my knees as I fell back toward the pillared porch

He made two quick cuts at my head—The first was

from too far but the second I had to parry with the scabbard still on and as he swung his blade pulled it off for me and it sailed across the room. His screaming frightened me as much as his strong strokes and we grappled now, our arms' and torsos' strength about even: he tried to knee me but I blocked it with a side-turned leg, my buttocks slammed the table to the wall and only my backbone was keeping me up

He was really going to kill me: in my House: the priests and guards might as well have been in Babylon. I went—*blind* inside and sank my teeth in his shoulder and he gave me a boarstooth whack against my temple with his. Now our hands shoved each other away and he made a very quick thrust at my stomach, which to my own surprise I managed to turn with a down-cut parry and his sword-arm flew out sideways, opening his chest to me. But I wasn't quick enough. He got his screaming-breath back and, bite and all, he had a kind of rage-fit right in front of me: his face went purple between white helmet-sides and his other hand looked like a claw, he stamped one foot to distract me then and raised his sword high. But we'd drilled together and I stayed with him and when his sword came down it broke like a piece of obsidian across my parry. We both looked stunned: then he went wilder with the jagged bronze stump in his hand and made two wicked strokes at my stomach as he reached for my sword-hand with his other. It was either do real harm or get killed myself, I did hate him too and when he swung again my blade followed and split the back of his hand open. He lost his hilt screaming and flailing blood on my walls and then he *still* came at me and we grappled again, his knees thrusting, head bobbing trying to smash me any way he could

I forced the point of my sword, despite his wrist-grip, up between us and against his throat between the collar-bones. He bent back with bubbles of rage-spit between his teeth and I hooked my right leg round his two and pressed him to the floor. With the impact my sword broke skin and he started to clutch at his throat as I raised my hilt to thrust him through; and then he dropped his hands and waited, wide-eyed

The gorge of my real hate had not yet risen, though, and instead I smashed his face with the hilt three times as hard as I could. It put him just about unconscious and I thought I might spit up the heart from my body. I got up quick with an eye to the door and kicked him hard in the side to be sure of him: then I ran over and latched the door shut, and—Now? I had to get downstairs, he couldn't be at this on his own. He came to enough to try to stanch his wounds

Now, strangely, was when I really wanted to kill him. At the same time, I started to cry, grateful to be alive, angry, flush with power, poisoned with pleasure

—Turn over on your stomach or I'll cut your head off!
Hands behind you, *move!*

I cut the strap of his scabbard and tied his bloody arms with it so that they purpled: it stopped the blood from his hand. I—My self seemed to dislodge, teeter in some sick place, floating, connected with nothing—I thought I heard Ariadne threaten Perides again. Look at my walls, my floor. My mind wasn't right

I emptied a jug of water on his head because he was going to be my shield and I enjoyed how sopping-humiliated he looked. I shoved him through the door first: nothing: I prodded him out and watched my back, the pillars, balustrades of the turning flights, like prodding my father

out of the world in our wedding's last dance, no not like that, it—As we finally got down to the central court's sunny doorway I heard wailing and orders to seal off the House, the jangle and patter of armed men at the run. A shadow appeared on the landing and I shoved Orneus out ahead on his own. The tale of his life. I didn't care

—Orneus, what—Where's the king, have you seen Deucalion? Here!

—Here I am, I quavered on what seemed even odds to live or die as other guards jostled in from the sunlight. And now they understood and, in voices fit for the bloodfield, asked me what sign of loyalty to give. I had them leave their weapons and go back outside till I saw things for myself. And they did. But from the threshold I saw, through our priestesses wailing and arguing Kouretes and a flurry of white kilts rushing to seal off everything, the Shepherd bound and kneeling under three slim ceremonial swords held by Cratus, Yamo and Glaucus. A red thing beside him was Ariadne's torn-off thread. Icarus with Iris, caterwauling, Phaedra weeping against a throne room dolmen. And then Ariadne came round from behind them all: she was casting moonwise circles around everybody, but this was more than some daemon's futile dance of protection—for as she ghost-stepped, she was stripping her belt and kilt and short jacket off, always facing the Shepherd's bulk trussed up like Bull in the others' midst. It was sickening to see the blighted looks of our young clergy's women and men and how they were shielding their eyes, some of them, from the rage in the meaning of her body now—as if, like our brother mocking raiders with spoil, she were forcing Theseus to behold the meaning and consequence of wanting her. Or what was this, the end of her tolerant nurture, or just the begin-

ning? If she wed him, he couldn't go straight to—Wait, but somebody had to—I couldn't right my mind, because this meant that our father

Glaucus saw me, gave Yamo the blade and crossed the court. He saw my condition and lowered his eyes against a world come home, went down on a knee

—Minotauros, he said. —Your father is dead. We have the man. His fellows were with their guard at the time. Your orders.

I dropped my sword. It rang against the slabs like a wheel gone awry. Minos. Was Glaucus pressing against Ariadne, then? Through the din from outside the Labyrinth, guards told me our mother was alright, upstairs in father's hall with clergy helping her: everybody else looked staggered, dazed. Grief, rage of my own—The fight with Orneus seemed to have drained these from my body ahead of time and I felt a dreadful cool about my heart, a kind of vertigo, sunstroke. As I got Glaucus up and we went toward the others Ariadne completed her ninth circle, and then she stepped to me in her implacable determination and took my hands in the crossed forever-sign. Eyes as hard as wide, our people themselves in her face—and then a hope dissolved as she looked at me and she broke down

—Your sweat-bee tried his best for you, Shepherd, I said and he looked up at me with his calm scorn: I wished I'd given him some of the contusions on his face, the split lip he'd got from priests and guards. —Do you know what her circles mean? I said, returning his look

—Do you? Theseus answered and as he smiled Cleite broke forward and spit three times in his tawny-bearded face: Ariadne let go of me

—Short life with glory, king! Cleite said and the clergy

near Cratus (Iris and Icarus too) yelled and growled for The Day with brutal voices—I looked to Ariadne. But she could not answer now with surety. Who was king? Who was not? And with the welter of this day I seemed to forget my entire upbringing: *my life* wanted to be heard

—Oracle for us, dead man! I said with half a move to kick him over. —You're dead, that's what they mean! You'll never leave Crete in the flesh

—Deucalion, Ariadne said reaching to soothe; but now we all heard a wave-like rise in the voices beyond the roofs of the west wing behind us: a sound off the land; or as if The Dead were in clamor from the crypts

— *What is my name?*

—Minos? she tried; but there was little saving vision in her eyes.

5

End Game

Before much longer, Cnossos was in turmoil. When the guards shut the great bronze-studded cedar doors of the House on every side they broke a day's normal traffic with the town, and now puzzled people, even the most pridefully indifferent to politics and disaster, were milling in the small squares among the houses with their questions and resolving to march together up to the west court, where they swelled the indignant numbers there already. No one outside yet knew about my father but many had been out there since the Carians had cried Trianda's destruction. And as Sicily's beaten marines were seen and talked with while they dispersed toward homes round the valley, fear grew, and clamor against the Labyrinth's inscrutable stillness. This crowd would not be put off another day: a small stone or two cast over the roofs even reached our midst in the central court

Perides put his sword to Orneus' bloodied neck and satisfied himself there were no more conspirators: once the House was secured the guards' faces showed more of their shame, and they demanded the prisoners' instant conveyance to the blood-field. Iris, Icarus, Yamo—There was no lack of support for this but Ariadne (Glaucus seconding her) held it off, saying they might prove useful

somehow. And as she said this I saw her fight to conceal—disappointment, that possibilities of a realm-redeeming marriage had come to such a shambles

—You tell me to take my life in my hands, and now they're tied. I give you Cretan Woman! Theseus yelled to her over his shoulder as he was shoved from our presence: a cry to show his courage within home's code of it, more captiousness—No one deigned answer beyond a look of disgusted disbelief, some of which lighted on Phaedra now. But as Cleite and Diamat and Perdix brought clean garments for their Queen they gestured to Phaedra to help attire her. The girl had given herself to the effort like the rest. And now Ariadne, in a long rich-crimson robe and her chaplet, asked Diamat and Cratus to beseech the shouting crowd outside for patience, and then she stanced herself with raised palms before the triple-shrine and most everybody took up silent places with her, dreading Earthbull, seeking cleared minds and a move toward order

I could feel my bruises, and my luck. As I saw Ariadne's palms come down to wipe her eyes it seemed that every last shade of our family screamed in anger in my blood, and my fists and toes flexed with unsatisfied rage. Ritual! Theseus had killed my father, and robbed The Tree, The Dead, The Land—I kept looking up at the preening sparrows and finches along the four horned roofs round the court, at the bright summer afternoon as if there were some way back to—what? It was sure to be myself on The Tree now. Years of life vanished before me like water in sunshine, and I dizzied, and sickened, seeing too suddenly *through* things as my father'd said you did near that edge of the world. What a house-bred naive fool I'd been, actually dreaming that all this would

play out according to some *rules!* I looked at Ariadne again—Did I know her? Did anybody? If she'd threatened old Perides himself it might well be she'd told the Shepherd to do this, in a sense. It'd make her plan more likely by helping to force the people's consent to a king untried in the Bull Dance, though she still had to face them with that. How could I think it? Why not? Had he not given her his message, throwing that ring the day he'd come? And then I remembered the long-buried sight of him tilting his head with a thought up on Athens Bay, I'd known, I'd known but it'd been too much to bear knowing—*And I'd told him myself we couldn't risk his getting killed!* He'd seen through everything, this Son of Light, and timed himself with skill

I fetched up my sword and when Glaucus came near again I warned him off with a kind of half-frothing fit: I wanted to punish myself with the sight of my father's body and I took to the great stairs, my face livid with shame for how I'd failed my trust from the House, its Dead. And my life—from nineteen years to less than two weeks—The Offering of it might approach restitution. But there again, punishment poisoned our center; and was it not the Shepherd in me after all, crying *No, that is not Necessity anymore?* Crying for its life; and the more I listened, the more I seemed to turn those flights of stairs alone, one mortal, not a noumen of my race

In his reception hall three black-cloaked elder women from the House of the Horae were pressing my father's body with slow firm hands down into a narrow upright burial chest, brightly painted with Labrae and running spirals. Have to get him in there before he really stiffened. I glimpsed the back of his head as one of the women reached to force his left arm down and tie it with wil-

low-thong: he resembled Egyptian pictures of their king in his underworld-boat and I hated myself remembering the sun-bright sea and our laughter as Icarus had sailed us round Dia Isle that day, my father's whoops as we almost broached

I went nearer his corpse and my mother stood up suddenly from a chair against the inner wall where she'd been sitting, silent and alone. She'd ruined the set of her hair and its strands of tiny gems, her face was wet and now she actually took enough fright to cry out *Deucalion, I'm your mother!* No one could be blamed for unspeakable thoughts this day and as the three women whirled around with swift impotent signs I tossed my sword on some cushions: then, wiping her brow and touching her green summer bellskirt, which she'd rent all the way up the left side, my mother opened her arms. And as I melted into them, everything broke inside

—What did we do, mother? We didn't do anything wrong! You and he did the best—Oh, my heart is sick with hate, help me, help me! I sobbed

She knew, she knew: her own tears wet the side of my neck and we held each other as we hadn't for a long time. Cheated again, cheated of the radiant pride and overwhelming mystery of power that should've ended her reign in the presence of father's Offering before the people—Indeed, she held and caressed and comforted me till I knew she was also grieving both her sons. I felt a new depth of horror as this fact took over my being: she was not going to save me; but in the warm strength of her embrace I found that old eternity persisting, the sureness that glory still lived in our family's primeval Step Forward. Courage, as she'd shown in her ways no matter what people said of her, even my father

In her arms some of the self-hate seemed to heal; and surely his shade was still present, for besides the wish to see him and say Goodbye, I felt he had something yet to teach me, and the three women signed Minotauros' homage fist-to-breast as they stepped back. The time in Dicte Cave by the waters of The Dead served well with me now, for I scarcely shivered though so near this man neither alive nor quite yet gone. With my hands on the clammy rim of the larnax I looked down at my father's foetal posture within it, his head limp on the shoulder opposite: circles of chrism glinted on his brow and temples and plexus and somehow I thought of the circles being rubbed by midwives to Aithe's laboring loins right now. Then I saw the blood matted in my father's hair at the back, the beating-welts that swelled his face, the burst conjunctivae reddening his half-open eyes, and the while, a cold sick flame bathed my flesh, making my ten toes claw the floor within my boots. Here was the difference between murder and Offering, one to lay worlds waste, one to give them Life—and I kissed his forehead and felt him as cold as the larnax. Would his shade harry Theseus now? No: that was within the killer, or it wasn't. *You just remember this and let it make you a fool no more*

As I sobbed and touched him farewell one of the women tied what they called magic eyes of goldfoil across his own, to guide him to his place among The Dead: then the other two lifted the crown of the larnax, and my mother nodded, she'd had her moment with him, seal it up. Still they shared a look of palpable distress in doing so, that for nineteen years of power and sanctifying ritual, he could not now feed Crete's fields with his power of blood and body, for whatever had drawn murder to him might endanger the land as well—What outrage in this, beyond

the loss of our king's supreme example, and I said aloud I wanted to kill the Shepherd

—Come and sit with me quickly before we go downstairs, my son, said Pasiphae, —because now we both know that isn't advisable. Yes, she told my wide look, —he died of the beating, but he was alive enough to tell me certain things when the guards fetched me. Oh, husband! my mother sighed, reaching for my hand as the women melted sealing-wax. —One is always party to one's own destruction. Not a *fault*, my son, but we are a power among the nations, entangled with them—Or at least we will be until your Queen achieves her will

Mother waited till she saw I wasn't giving anything away

—One can work great things out of death, even wrest life from it with that awareness, she mused. —But look at Theseus now. All for his name, for power, and instead he binds himself blindly to The Tree. Alright then, Minotaurus, she said now shifting abruptly in her chair. —He told me the essence of her intentions, and his last breath begged me to help you. It doesn't matter now how I wish you'd both considered me someone you could trust with this, but—You needn't brace yourself, she mildly smiled

—Why do you think I kept myself upstairs here? Because the throne is Ariadne's now. I tell you, when she threatened my brother Perides' life I knew she was the daughter after all I'd hoped for, and worked for, putting no one above the welfare of the House. My point, my son, is that I'm going to help you. There was room for dissension perhaps before your brother's death, but now—Well, I too have Goddess to face, so to speak. I won't be remembered for limiting Her, even as I utterly disapprove these plans

When I heard that, when I saw in mother's face and her fears how much it meant that she and Ariadne not lose each other, I asked her forgiveness and told her everything I could

—I like to think it's your grandmother's touch again, working with nature to let these upstarts die off, my mother answered. —But how unfortunate for such a strong man. Now he'll never get home, and his lands both sides of the Isthmus will stagnate in their feuds. But here—I think I say without boast, my son, that only I can arrange our other houses' consent to this marriage without Bull. I'm helping you above all, though, because The Aridela's powers are at stake, and not for any virtue in what she intends, you understand that. You've been to sea, Sweet Wine. I need you to help me protect Ariadne, with the truth about the world in your wound, in your brother's death. If this marriage—Hmm, perhaps Elphenor and I can, well, *elder* the two of them along. But we'd better go down, there's a council to convene before the west court turns to riot

My mother stood up, and without a touch to any of her person's dishevelled state, without donning her high-crowned hat besides, she joined hands a moment with the women, then laid her cheek to the slanted lid of the larnax, eyes closed with farewell till the funeral. I laid my palms to the other side, and when I opened my eyes she was gazing at me

—There must be something I can do for you, she said; but I could hardly think. —You let me know then, my beautiful son

And oh, it was something now as we wound down the great stairs hand in hand, Queen and Son on the verge of The Day, that feel came back of being ancient and trans-

parent as the ages but it was at war now with stubborn hope troubling my chest, the wish to live, beyond even clan or honor. As we reached the landing with its long square of late-day gold we heard a calmer, sunsurrant stream of chant and crowd-noise from outside, thanks to the clergy, but Diamat and Cratus hurried over and warned Pasiphae how tenuous it was. Mother stepped straight down into the throne's anteroom and I did not see how she and Ariadne comforted each other, shared what they knew: Yamo and several guard-officers had come before me and they said they'd gladly take the onus on themselves

— We mean, for the executions, Yamo said. — We've been talking. We've got to let them both have it, we can't have people like that at our backs, sir. We know something's going on here we don't understand, the way Glaucus seems to for one, but Deuc—I mean, beg pardon, Minos—We're ready for the consequences. You see they've got to die, don't you?

— Tell me what you think after council. Gentlemen, I said

— It's that bad? Mother, it's like *our* hands are tied! Yamo moaned

The throne room's inner doors closed behind us. Surrounded by clergy, Glaucus and Perides at my sides, I stood at the center of the balustrade and bench opposite the throne, the wood of a black pillar at my back: then my mother, then Ariadne emerged from the sanctuary and Pasiphae graciously helped Ariadne mount the dais, and found herself a space. I'd never seen Ariadne so florid and bright of eye while wholly grave: even her chaplet's milky gold looked crimson in the walls' reflected lamp-light. She raised her palms in blessing, bade us sit; and as

she sat down we all took in first settled sight of her, Goddess on Earth, reborn

—He was raving about Cretan tyranny to his guards, said Perides in an unlooked-for breach of protocol.

—Never heard such a simpleton's pardon-tale

—Uncle, Ariadne said, —the first issue here is Sicily. What are the prospects of a blockade, to force reparations from this Kokalos.

—Blockade? Next to nothing, Mistress. Why? Well, first-off, Sicily is bigger than Crete, and it's clear he's got other ports or shipyards we never knew of. We just don't have the resources. Besides, it can take eight days at the oar to get there. We got the news of eight days ago this morning. Kokalos is sure to have shipped a good share of the tin to the Lion, just to prove his abilities as an ally. Now, Rhodes, as we discussed, yes we can keep Achaians there from doing any business, awhile at least, with Carians' help. I've got the rosters ready on that. But Sicily, Mistress—The men are ready to go in, as Minos—I mean your father, beg pardon—Just as he said.

—So the alternatives are, Ariadne queried

—The alternatives? None, we've got to go in there and cut the head off that island, now, this moon, this season. Because if you don't, he's the type to take one message from that, and Kokalos won't sit on his pillows with it. For him it's only a few days to our tin mines in the Balearics. That'll be the next Trianda, the surviving Cretans there. And after that he'll *keep* reaching, too, all the way to Gades and north to Britomartis' country and *those* mines, and for us that's a season's sail just to tell them help is coming. You can't—I mean, we owe those people something, down in those holes, in places so far from home, it's—You understand, I'm sure, Perides tried to

conclude with caution after last time; but as he sat, his foot kept tapping his coiled and ready will

—Very well. So we can sack Kamikos, or back off the whole situation.

—Back *off*? Perides almost shouted jumping to his feet. —Are you—I mean—Mistress, we could do this in one moon! And if we don't, what I told you *will happen*, and that's just the beginning! Fair enough, Mistress, with all due respects, and I haven't forgotten the oath I made your father, Goddess rest him. But—Fair enough, cut my head off, I'm going to tell you the truth. Think of it, I beg you! At the very least, Kokalos will say he sent the Minotauros home with his tail between his legs. And then what will keep him from looking *this* way, once he's got the finances flowing from the west? Have you thought of that? Why am I speaking alone here? Deucalion, I mean Minos, help me out, you've been with the men and down to the ports, you know the rules. Glaucus? Where *is* everybody!

—I'm sorry, but I second Perides, Diamat put in.

—Enough is enough

Other voices echoed her: Cratus, Yamo and four other Kouretes (though they looked as guilty as the guards for my father's death, and Cratus mightn't mind a war now if his High Priest weren't at its head): mother held still despite the eyes that sought her mind. And then old Perdix too agreed, with apologies to Cleite's restraint, a great surprise out of Perdix but she said she couldn't bear any more of our Queen's tears

—Excuse me then, Ariadne broke in, —but do you think you'll stop the weeping when our men go out there and kill and die for tin? I have no intention of allowing more Triandas. Hear me out. And then, if any of you still

favor war across the seas, let that person resign. I will respect such honesty, but we must

—I resign, said Perides still on his agitated feet in our midst. —I don't care what your plan is. You heard Pandaros. There are certain rules to the game out there and if you don't do what I've told you, what I've *advised* you to do, Mistress, he said struggling with his heart, —then you might as well sack one city—This one, because that's what's going to happen!

—Sit down! I forbid you to leave this room till I am heard! Ariadne ordered scarcely keeping herself seated. —We need you, Perides! Please!

We need you. No, he could not walk out on that: she must've planned to make Sicily look impossible, used it to see who backed what and whom; but was she now going to order some blanket retreat and disbanding after all? I touched Perides' arm and he recoiled, though he then sat thigh to thigh with me: our mother leant forward at Ariadne's right, watching

—I am going to wed the Shepherd of Athens, Ariadne said and she had to raise her palm again to quell the indignant murmur of hope-against-hope that went round the chamber. —Hear me out. This is difficult enough. We are in worse straits than last year, for all our labors

—But Athens isn't the main threat! Perides complained

—Another outburst and you'll be weeding gardens, said Pasiphae

—Uncle, you forget, Ariadne said, —that Sicily is working for the Lion, and that Theseus is a son of Mykenai's baronies. Send the Lion news of this wedding of the bloods, and he'll pounce to recognize the tie for another touch of old nobility. They take everything from our

ways, you tell me this yourselves, each one of you. And at a stroke we make the ships they're building into our ships. Allies. Yes, yes, I know, Crete will change, just as our mother's greatness and your own Great Year has changed it, by Necessity. But we will get through, and beyond, we'll reach a strength we've never known before. You don't believe me, I know that, none of you really do. But you need not. This wedding is only the linchpin in the wheel. I won't leave our people's lives to luck. At the same time, Perides, we are going to bring home every last ship

This time she needed to lift both hands

— and, *and*, she said straining to be heard, — use them to protect our coasts and our people. Glaucus reminds us, quite correctly, that we cannot simply call on islanders every year of trouble. But it's also true that the queens he treats with in Minos' name—Crete can no longer pay the price of their safety and their shipping. This House served a noble calling on the sea. But the world is such that now, in general, we are being used. So let people learn from Night Mare what they won't learn from Pandora. You see then, I do not ask you to trust anything. But I am listening, if you can say that the life of one mother's son is not worth a few seasons without new lapis lazuli for necklaces, or tin, or silks?

She gazed upon us from beneath her painted palmtree. I'd lost track of which words were hers, which our father's and others' in whom she saw the best of us, but this helped me conceive her pain at his loss, the breadth of her new resolve. No actual mention of disbanding. It'd never occurred to me she could speak it this way. Just bring them all home first. See what happens. Make others understand the world we'd held off

from their beaches. We'd be *invulnerable* here with such a concentration! Even Perides knew and agreed that we had the means to make our coasts safe at least, if not the sealanes. And meanwhile play the diplomatic strings. Things could get better. No marines killing and dying, no blood-guilt on the House—Thunder! She'd bent just enough, and could I not step aside for the Shepherd if this would work? Perfect! I admired her the more now and that made my heart lean to the bitter side, her spirit in her body in the arms of Horse-wind. But the chamber felt it, the glory of our past struggling through her to be reborn into such a troubled midst, Young Woman Stepping Forward for the tribe

But fish heads, what about The Tree? Somebody had to! I'd miss everything! The whole noble calling of The Day now just irked me like a fatal inconvenience and I didn't know whether to stand up or lie low and pray for objections—Shame pounded at my breast, she was giving *her* life, and these people all round the chamber were whispering, arguing

Pasiphae, knowing that Diamat and others had always looked to her to defend certain practices and standards, stood up to say that it had long bothered her, the way great houses overseas seemed to use our people. That there was something cursed in the transaction—witness the damage to the House—that it needed Ariadne to help us see. And were these white bulls from the sea by any stretch the first that Crete had tamed? Our blood was rich and strong for such adoptions, and this was like the fulfillment of something she herself had worked toward, these years

Not even Cratus quite dared tax her on that point, for his own years of nights expounding Necessity to my fa-

ther. A few more objections were raised but Ariadne's months of brooding made her responses shine like the leaf in her hair. Diamat remained opposed to backing off the sea but mother could work on her: Yamo threatened to resign over ending up an Achaian's Kourete (Cratus' older head had bent to it now), but Ariadne bade him invent a more cunning response. And it went on, from careful doubts to angry disbelief; but, in Cleite's words, few had the will to walk out on the hope Ariadne offered. Every eye was full of her

At last Perides, sighing with too strong a current under his keel, asked for specifics. Ariadne was ready. The fleet was to finish its season as usual, merchanter-escort, patrols, answered commitments. She denied him one more hunt not only because Alxiona was doing so: the Admiral was to sail west and do two things, deliver the curse of Goddess to Kokalos, and thence dispatch the best mariners in his group to head farther westward and tell our colonists, from the Balearics to Gades to Cornwall, to seal up their mines and come back to Crete. If they so wished, and a rich life awaited them here; but they could not expect naval protection or aught else after this year. At the same time, Pandaros (who'd go with a much worse wound, the Admiral assured her) was to take a force to Rhodes and indeed blockade the Achaians there: it was crucial that not a jug of wine or rosehips get through to let the Lion think he could profit by what had been done. Word of our action would reach Mykenai with the same ship as this wedding-news; and the Shepherd's first service as king would be to demand some form of reparation in a way they'd understand

Perides didn't like it. It wasn't enough. But orders—and his oath—He only warned that we'd better forge

some new prayers, because a blockade was a sitting target, a challenge, the edge of a war

— You will have every man you need to *do* this, uncle, Ariadne ended

— But now what about—Oh this is awful! Cleite said breaking off as she glanced at me, and my heart beat quick as her eyelids. And now Glaucus remembered, and others, I felt the love in the chamber but could not speak

— It's my fault, Glaucus said with a hand to my knee. — I mocked him that day with my own anger and let him stew with it. It had to come out someplace. Maybe, uh,—I don't know, curse it all!

— Do you see? injected Yamo. — So that beard lives and we lose our brother here, our rightful king? Listen, listen. Athens still believes he's in the Bull Dance. I say, kill him as we should, and tell them Bull

— Consider where you speak! And then we murder his twelve, to hide this? Ariadne battled back

— He cheated the people, to say the least! Cratus burst out with a fist to his knee. — Very well then, marry him, and take his seed, and then as Cleite said, short life with glory. That *is* their style, my Queen

Ariadne lowered her eyes. My shame was growing too much

— The problem there, Cratus, she said, — is what Bull has shown us already of the man. My father asked for a scratch as his first blow. Can you see Theseus asking likewise? He'd thrash and scream and curse. As it is, we do not offer goats unwilling. And in the people's eyes it would turn The Day's meaning on its head. Cratus, I see your love, and you are not alone. But how can a marriage of less than one moon serve us?

I probably was sterile anyway. She'd handle things. I'd

never felt my soul in my throat before. I loved these people because now they started a vociferous cross-talk full of hasty objections and angry counter-plans. They needed Deucalion (Minos, sorry) to help reconfigure the fleet, he'd danced Bull, been twice to sea and wounded, all the momentum of rite was behind him in the realm's eyes: someone familiar as he to the people ought to be there behind the Shepherd's shoulder. Besides, some (desperate) said, Minos had in a way been sacrificed, The Powers might be propitiated. Or why not attempt this foreign practice, and have *no Day*

When I stood up, they fell silent. My blood was shimmering but, for the thickness of my tongue, nothing possessed me, I couldn't think of a single oracular thing to say. Even getting rid of Poseidon looked childishly simple now. I hated the hesitation in my share of Labyrinth clan's blood. Who else should beseech The Powers to keep Earthbull still beneath Velkanos? The chamber waited, to see Cretan honor exceed Achaia's: my mother's eyes were full, and Ariadne's. How I loved her, and she was the one who had to live and lie with Necessity

I stepped across the room, knelt on the dais and laid my head in Ariadne's lap. Like old Juktas' head in the lap of home's mountains, yes. That was what I could do, and I felt her warm body tremble

— And what if Theseus himself refuses all this? asked Glaucus' voice

— Then he dies, Ariadne declared, — and we do take the consequence. But he'll accept. He is a boy, trying to burn what he fears from the world. Rise now, my king, she said; and as she stood with me there was a world more alive than ever between our gazes. Something, yes, to—be brave for

Pasiphae helpfully adjourned the chamber. Glaucus and the clergy went out through the anteroom, some Kouretes to fetch the prisoners while the rest offered up hasty prayer to help what was coming. Our mother then reached for her brother Perides: I'd seen her in grief but never before looking so overwhelmed, and he helped her out toward the court. Ariadne said only one thing then before her need to keep herself moving took her outside; that the love she could not help was worse now. And what had once summed up imbalance between us, my heart answered perfectly: a good enough end.

She let go and passed swiftly up into the dying daylight to confront the Shepherd and Orneus, kneeling in their bonds: I saw the latter's chest heaving what he thought were final breaths. But this *I* was floating in some other world, savoring the anteroom's pleasant cool, the cunning fit of the floor's central square of black ironstone set in pink schist, the delicate fluxes of air beneath grandmother's seablue tapestry with its silver stars. It'd be good to be near her again, see my brother too. A world was ending, and beginning, and I thought they might say *Good Man*

All I heard clearly of Ariadne's terms was her half-vicious promise that Theseus never would leave Crete in the flesh. Marriage and hanging. No smile now between his tawny whiskers. He nodded consent. Said he agreed that this was the way to peace and Ariadne turned from this with her eyes ablaze and her lips frowning curled above clenched teeth. *This is not Eleusis*, our mother warned him. And Orneus? The guards couldn't believe the Shepherd's fate and looked to me to make Orneus their sop. His blue eyes were shut tight, his bruised ribs showed as he drew tight breaths. I despised him but just

didn't know. Why hadn't Theseus used loyal youths in the plot, because they were fops? Maybe they'd refused

—Let him keep on as my hunting-dog so I don't have to trouble these priests, Theseus said as guards roughly untied him

—*Trouble* us? Sir, do you imagine yourself unanswerable to—your clergy? Do you understand the place of this office? That entire clans

—I'm talking about being allowed to hunt, in my own fashion, he answered. —You can't expect me to give up all home custom. The point is, you won't have to worry about Orneus.

True enough in my case. How Theseus' look changed, moving from Orneus to myself as he argued for the life of a fellow Blue-Eyes—How could any part of me grudge for his recognition? At least he'd reckoned me a worthwhile murder. Now he'd see me die anyway. I was too bitter for the smile I wanted. I realized I'd have to teach him the Dance. That should be fun. Bitter to let him think he'd won, bitter, but my heart had learned what kind of respect was right for me, out of him. It was only like a Bull to burst His nets. I said I didn't care, and Orneus breathed deep

—And do my others have to stay here the rest of *their* lives? What will that help? said Theseus, maybe aware of his four traitors

—First things first, Ariadne answered. —Orneus, leave the Labyrinth, now. Perides, uncle, we need you to stand with us before the people. Minos? All of you, come.

—Minos? Theseus said. —What is this

—In a few days you'll see what your new title means, Ariadne told him. —Now let's go, in case you don't hear that crowd outside.

A roil of his shoulders at her tone, at the flavor of his future as he rubbed his wrists and followed: he did have the decency not to apologize as he looked me squarely in the eye, one short moment. Then he dismissed me in stepping past, just like first day on the mole at Amnisos.

Pasiphae sent six House-guard out beneath the windows where we'd appear, to suggest the limits behind our appeal for consent: we went up the west wing stairs and through the great supper hall to the windows overlooking the court, and saw how the crowd had swelled indeed in proportion with our troubles, delay and mistakes. Word of a major announcement had brought even more people and there was a great rustle and rattle as hundreds rose to their feet, seeing Ariadne: farmers out of the Cnossos hills, townspeople, all eight of the Shepherd's loyal Athenians (the others helping Aithe as they could), many marines out of Pandaros' mauled contingent who'd been telling the tale no doubt, relatives of Triandans and investors: there was Iris too in her cropped feathers, as aloof from Geryon now as surrounding herself with Kudru and staff and tattooed Cyclopes could make her; and close by them stood Icarus, wrapped in the cape from my father as if, despite any warmth of late day, it were proof against chaos

We had to wait for stillness, and together Ariadne and Pasiphae raised their hands in blessing to encourage it. There was Elphenor and his circle of Achaian locals, down to our right away from Iris' group; Tallay and every woman of the Horae, Phaedra looking hopeless amid her sisters from grandmother's villa. When she saw the Shepherd unbound (let alone alive) at the sill, far back as she was in the throng I saw those eyes light. And there was dark-visaged Mestor with no few marines and the elegant

Virbius and Nomia either side of them, surely talking strategies: the whole team from the upcoming Bull Dance was out here, Cordax up from Amnisos to relay this matter to the harbor, Tukato and half the clergy of Archanes with no children this time, but Razorclam beside Tukato, with his head shaved. Pre-initiation. I *was* going to miss everything! Just beyond the court's paving-stones a full gallery of Callistans watched from under the trees around Gelania and her Consort, none of them too pleased to find such turmoil at the heart of their refuge: I saw even a few nobles from up-country places like Tylisos and one or two advance-representatives from other great houses, in town to arrange accommodations for The Day. And dozens of faces from my look-casual rounds, masons and midwives, quarry-men and youths of both sexes, old women quietly fanning themselves. I could remember little talks with so many—The *life* out there looking up at us, its murmurs dying down though many brows looked furrowed with father's absence, mother's missing tiara. Somehow this gathering helped against my fear, told me that if Cnossos itself were gone, so much blithe strength would go on living and people would manage, oh yes, just like the trees and the ageless land around us. Might even be pleasure for a king to sink into something deep and warm as sleep, be sown into deep red-black earth, other bits of you swallowed and finding a thousand new lives all at once. Names! There was no name big enough to marry Her Of A Thousand Names and Powers: no name for being Everywhere

Change, and tradition: Tradition and change. Those were the first words our mother gave people to ponder a moment, and a ripple of unsettled spirits ran in a whispering wave across the court. It subsided not into a calm,

but into a more expectant silence, and I knew I was going to see her and Ariadne's skills on trial today

Mother gave them the shock first, that Minos was dead, and then she pointed to me his living heir, able and already tried, as they knew, in service and by Bull. I think three people fainted as the fate of our father struck them (Iris had wisely said nothing on her own) and mother had to continue over choked-back cries of despair, people tearing their garments, dropping things their hands held. Yes, he was dead without having married his body to The Tree, and The Aridela had more change to tell besides; but *Courage!* Pasiphae exhorted, for despite all change by Necessity, the inexorable Wheel would turn and life prosper with the blessing of The Dead on the land. She did not say how our father's end had come, but Minotauros was here to ensure these things with his love, Midsummer Day

What? That was the first full word in answer from a hundred, another hundred mouths, *What?* And as people turned round in tight places or stamped their feet, it seemed our best friends out there were Tukato and his highly-held brothers and sisters, quelling the shock with words of patience, calling out lines of reassuring prayers about the might of the all-enduring hills. Icarus, his earlier wails played out, was in a crouch within the cape's blue folds, another world pulled out from under him—And now the recoil began to build in the crowd, they'd let us finish but the rest had better be brief, and strong, that was in all the faces looking up at us. Ariadne (with a subtle go-ahead touch from mother) now spoke up in sharp voice that, by her throne's first orders, people's own fiercest servants in Admiral Perides here and Pandaros were going to show the world the meaning of Cretan

might. We were going to cut off Sicily from the web of world trade and starve the butchers of Trianda till they offered our greatness reparations: the ships would embark east and west within days, and she let people hear all the rage and sorrow she shared with them. Marines, relatives of the slain and wounded, Mestor and Nomia's intimates began to cheer with some surprise and raise approving fists: less-bold people with seagoing interests and untested pride joined in for a moment, and Ariadne let them carry on, for the months and days of anxiety they'd borne

But, she said—The single word dropped the crowd's noise—Given the change that had to come now, by Necessity, Ariadne was going to Step Forward herself right beside our young king. Tallay's Horae, Phaedra's group of novices cried out with their appalled assumption that she herself was going to—*No, No*, Ariadne said (and I realized the skill in the arrangement of her words). She meant that she was going to marry the mainland, in the person of Theseus, Shepherd of Athens beside her. She spoke to them every last reason and ramification she thought they'd listen to, could hear: she announced the birth of the new race happening this moment through Athenian Aithe. But by now the crowd, to the last midwife and citizen born through their hands, had begun to scream in earnest, then stamp and shove and throw things crosswise up and down the court: even if she hadn't meant her own Offering, people pulled their hair now, tore flesh with their nails, wailed and cursed and called for war, for the fall of the Labyrinth, for anything but a bearded Blue-Eyed king who'd shown nothing of himself before Bull. The team of Dancers themselves shouted half-obscene things, Why should they risk life and limb,

then? What was it made a *king*? Their faces shamed the House with twisted-up lips, turns-away, and the crowd scarcely heard or regarded Ariadne's offer on the other side, the recall of every ship and long-missed son and daughter of the fleet for Crete's total protection. Few, now that it came to public declaration, would admit their fear that a foreigner would dare set hostile foot to this soil. But a Consort without relation to the land, to our Dead, this was to court disaster such as our grandmother never imagined. Mestor himself, not a man to overly worry the spiritual side of things, made bold to mount the bastion's running bench as if it were time to implement certain things discussed in private (and just as we'd seen at Europa's tomb, the lines *were* out there to be drawn if things went still worse)—but the guards shoved him back, and we thought the near-use of their spears would quiet things down. They didn't. No matter how Ariadne explained it all, the objections and brazen threats kept coming. Tukato's clergy did all they could but there was our own House staff, Iris and Icarus and others inciting the opposite in their anger, Kudru alone with his arms folded, chin in hand, watching. Incredibly, Iris herself now shouted out what she knew, the facts of what Theseus had done. We knew it was her piety speaking to keep a murderer off the throne but even Cleite dropped her jaw at this. Pasiphae tried to overwhelm her with appeal to the most conservative ears in the crowd but she found there were limits to her own powers after all: people shouted her down, and Icarus helped them, having stood up at Iris' words to cry that the old Queen was handing Deucalion's life away. *For a beard! For a Blue Eyes!* he yelled, not missing a chance against mother for all he imagined she'd done, not done

It was uproar—It did come through that people might bear a year or two of this defensive confinement off the sea, this cutting of foreign losses. But *No, No, Kill this barbarian* they demanded: If he'd murdered Minotauros, stolen his Offering, then he ought to have it—which sounded just like my brother's old way with raiders and their spoils

—So you prefer to turn The Tree into a place of execution! Ariadne called out, holding the sill of the window like the rail of a rocking ship. —The Mystery into a rite of revenge! Well then, if so, be sure when you come to see it that you dress your finest! she mocked, and these words with their tone brought down the cacaphony. —Because if he dies this moon, you will not have long to wait to be buried yourselves. *Take* your revenge—And be ready to die in the war my father gambled for! *Well?* she challenged, as the Shepherd endured her precipitous defense of his life, and kept his gaze on Elphenor's circle below: they were the only ones who (as ever) maintained demeanors of detachment

And slowly now, tiring out some and beginning to see their moment of choice, people gave themselves to abstracted looks, to small circles of inaudible talk, all of this studied from the rear by Callistans as if it were a rite. Phaedra swayed as if suspended in space among her friends: Iris and Icarus stood out the more in their agitations, then subsided, scornful-eyed, arms akimbo. I don't know what was said, but certainly nobody forgot Ariadne's powers and beauty out here in their midst at other times, her stubborn spirit during Athens' subjugation, her intimate influence with Moon and Sun. And there she stood now in her crimson gown and chaplet, her mother's daughter sure, defying everything but plainly in their ser-

vice with all she had: they only needed to look up at her eyes to know more about this Step Forward

—Do you love the man? Cordax called out to her

—No, but I can come to, we all have to come to and it is that simple—You must believe me! she answered, the pain in her voice coinciding with the faintest stirring of the trees above the Callistans. —Look how beautiful our son and brother Glaucus is! But would he exist, unless our wild mothers had hearts of courage to face Necessity? Are you Cretans? Have you hearts like those you speak with in the tombs, at the shrines, in the mountains? Then *show* me! she said. —I challenge you to show me, to show our Dead and show *yourselves* that you are their blood, their kin, their sons and daughters

But it still looked and sounded like refusal coming. Such a hollow joining, even with her own consent and vision and challenging lead, would be worse than politically dubious. It would be bad magic, a threat of starving-time out of lovelessness, and even if Earthbull cared nothing for such ethics it would hardly encourage The Powers to keep Him calm. But so far, only mutters. My life waited. Then Tukato raised his voice and asked if we couldn't reach a compromise. *I am listening*, Ariadne said.

Tukato said that he for one could live with this sad Necessity if Deucalion, who knew all these people as well as foreign matters, could be retained as a sort of special Overseer. You couldn't blame anybody, Tukato said getting a few nods, for not just throwing their interests into this Shepherd's hands. But Admiral Perides and Deucalion were experienced warriors he trusted (a few more nods), and these were not stupid people out here (many nods), they could handle themselves through strange waters. Tukato grieved most for his king, yes, and for his

daughter's heart of fortitude, amid troubles none could have foreseen

Ariadne looked to our mother, whose lowered eyes counseled acceptance despite the risks, and it was given. And then a great hubbub of considered opinion went back and forth through the courtyard, maybe three nods of Yes for every No. There wasn't yet desperate reason enough to drive to arms the most ardent opposition. Oh, the air tasted fine today. We waited. Mestor and that crowd were gesturing furiously as they talked but there was relenting going on: Pandaros the hard-liner *would* be in the thick of things to push for harsher, preferred responses. The Aridela, granted, had shown proper concern for tactics with the military and it would be good, nodding heads said, to avoid competition and war with this Achaian fleet on the rise. Iris, staff and Icarus looked quietly beside themselves, feelings I understood not due to my reprieve

And as this continued we saw red-haired Gelania now moving amid a little guard of Callistan men through the tight-packed crowd, her Consort, a black-curled slender young man with russet skin holding her rereward hand as she approached the Labyrinth. It was not the same Consort my father and I had met. Gelania was well-ahead of matters because just now more than one voice raised the question of an empty Tree Midsummer Day—How could we risk this with so much damage from Earthbull this year alone? A *wave* had hit the coast, and nineteen years unsanctified was sure to raise The Dead against this Great Year we'd been trying

As Gelania asked to speak, and then turned to her Consort named Pereko to speak himself, I could scarcely look him in the face. He looked less than twenty and his

teeth you could've counted against his lovely skin's tone: his walk was pure lanky grace like a prince's painted on a wall, his black irises wide and bottomless as he only said *We owe you Cretans something*, and he took up Gelania's hand again. It is true, the coward in me breathed glad for this; but the shame was more than mine, for we all knew in our hearts that Pereko could not give back what had been lost. In our midst up in the window that question of holding no Day rose quietly again; but Diamat whispered *Don't push them too far*, and none of us said any more. Yes, this man became almost a scapegoat: I could not help him amid the compromise to make the marriage work; and now we understood more of the Shepherd's pity for such men. But there was nothing of honor, for us, inside this knowledge

People understood him; and as heads bowed, reflecting too on Tukato's terms, it got through to most that no one had fully controlled the road to this place. And with the momentum, or exhaustion, of trying to follow Ariadne in all else this day, a slow grudging *Very well* became the consensus. People would see, that was all. They grumbled at even the appearance that Bull, and The Tree, in part our mothers' central safeguards against the selfish, had been sidestepped by cunning and force. The tremors. A wave. The loss of royal example for our children, except in this magnificent old-blood Callistan. I couldn't count the heads that shook in resignation, doubt, certainty of ruin. People kicked the things others had thrown as they dispersed. No justice or tradition anymore. The order was dying, young people up in high windows making change as they pleased, no depth, bringing beards in to rule by their fists. And poor Ariadne. She concealed her spite for this pity as they turned away.

Tukato did not look back as he gathered Razorclam toward Archanes again

— It appears you have done it, our mother said. — Now there's just the rest of the island to convince.

Ariadne said nothing. Watched the crowd milling, pausing, going.

— What now, Theseus asked.

— Now we honor my father, Ariadne said, turning away from us all

He looked down at his feet.

Like last year: funeral, wedding. Funeral without a body: now a wedding without a *Word that I shall tell Thee*

Late that evening, when the Labyrinth began to open again, little Kapha brought word that Aithe's child was dead. A boy, olive skin with wisps of her hair, Yamo's big mountain-man's hands. Breach-birth. Problem with the umbilical. They'd tried their best. But Aithe was alright, physically speaking, he said.

* * *

And that is the day of the New (Thunder) Moon, se-lah. Then a day to prepare our father's rites. Then the three-day funeral. After that the women announce that the wedding will be centered on The Offering Day, whether or not it appears to force two broken traditions together. So that leaves seven days till its commencement with Ariadne's Rising from the sea. It's good to let the air clear but doubts and policy-questions arise. They'll have to wait. Perides puts out for Sicilian waters with the *Talos* and fifteen ships and Pandaros takes another fifteen east with his ramming-ship to link up with Carian allies and blockade Rhodes. People begin to surrender a bit more

and praise this display of Cretan might and determination, reverting the while to especially bloody offerings of animals: as with the man Pereko, blood incurs debt upon The Dead, and with this deliberate turn back toward assumptions Ariadne tried to change, they try to forget that the islands and Crete are now thirty ships more vulnerable. Aithe and Yamo grieve for their baby. The sun goes up and over and down around under the Earth but the moon is queen forever, selah. Weather is hot. All green things begin to curl in a bath of white fire but it's still a good year for the crops, despite even my childlessness. Perhaps nothing is connected with anything. Icarus my child runs off on another likely rampage. Let him. Iris resists as she can the Shepherd's demands for House decorations a bit less effeminate (he says), a little more stable than spirals and plants and octopii with dizzying limbs, dancing women. He and his loyal youth begin to explore the uses of a well-established man like Elphenor, and things look promising to them. Resentment. Resentment. When our aunts and uncles arrive from Phaestos and Zakros for the Great Year's consummation they find nothing in Cnossos as it should be, and our mother's diplomacy counts for more than we'd imagined. Our other north-coast houses demand more of the fifteen ships left for patrol of home waters and we send them. Glaucus leaves aboard one to spread calm in the country and to see his Antibia. His love is clear and so is his disgust. He's not alone. Theseus' former team of Dancers turn Bull loose and walk out in pious protest against this coup. This enrages people already indignant past speech. How are you going to force them. So we won't have even that spectacle to balm ourselves and from this a further refusal catches on. He'll be called King Theseus, never Minotauros or

Minos. It would make Cretan spite at the name almost equal the mainland's. Selah. A change that speaks worlds of change. And before he ships out Admiral Perides browbeats the Overseer to remember that a wave hit Crete this year and to ask Queen Ariadne if we might build a sheltered port in the lee of Dia Isle. Something else to monumentalize the times. Exhausted herself, my Queen says I may go there and see what would need to be done. This will give her and the King some space after their wedding and myself a rest besides. Agreed. And as we look at each other alone in her bedchamber we decide without words to make love. It begins uneasily because this is Goodbye, I can't say how proud I am of her but the miles and miles of the realm's good will lie between us after this and she does not relish the touch of the hands to come after; but right now will be once forever, our bodies want each other's hands everywhere simultaneously, it's as if we're two halves of one being enroute to The Tree. We burn and merge, dissolve and lie quiet, tongues and fingers linger across loved landscapes; and I come to feel I can forgive everything if that will make any difference, but it won't. I want her again and give her all she used to love the most and then, overwhelmed and comforted, she sinks into sleep. I'm glad I can give her rest but I can't bear the charm of her snore, resentment, let go now, resentment, my Goddess, selah

I was leaving Cnossos with my sail and oars and a gear-sack over my shoulder when I ran into Kudru our jeweler; or rather, I stopped when I saw him at a clear stretch of riverbank below the east road. All by himself he was dancing and striking weird poses in mellow afternoon light before the water, playing some game to restore his energies after a day at the harbor expediting merchant

work. Strange people these guild-folk, incorrigible by tradition, reachers-out to The Powers for us all and yet, themselves, almost never devotees. I liked Kudru's swiveling owl's eyes, the mocker's malice often in his face not yet sixty years old: as I smiled watching him poise one arm and leg on the air, like some side-on Egyptian painted figure, he seemed just the disinterested fellow I needed. He happened to turn around losing balance, and said a crisp Hello

— Where are you off to? Dia, eh? Permission and everything?

— Yes! Why don't you come with me a day or two!

— Have you got all the needfuls?

— Trust me! I said.

Kudru made a sound like a scornful duck's quack, grabbed his boots and a cotton stole he wore against the sun: reaching me he took the sail-wrapped yard he knew I'd fetched from Iris' workbay (*You can handle the heavy stuff, Kid*) and bore it along beside me down to Amnisos. When I showed him my boat under its tarp he dropped the yard and fairly catapulted himself down beach into the water, surfaced and spouted a squirt: I got to work readying the boat and he waded in, puffing and refreshed, squinting over our supplies

— Is that cheese young? Icarus paint the sail? Nice prow-piece too, I knew it. We got some fine people out of Gelania's shops for—No, blast everything. Well? If you're ready now, I can't run the fleet myself.

Together we launched her into the almost waveless water (Podes waving from Amnisos' mole, seeing Admiralty harbor-concerns being dealt with) and we were ready. It was dolphin-weather alright, the sea turquoise and tranquil, and no breeze

– Have to row, I said as Kudru reclined up in the prow

– But I'm an old man. I'm a jeweler

– I mean, get in the stern, will you please?

– Nice little boat, he grinned as he crouched his way past me and lounged the opposite way. I looped the oars and a few strokes took us out past the shingle and then paused, a twin row of spirals in our wake

– Can you hurry it up? There's still light to get some sea-urchins

– You old crank! I laughed

– That's mutiny! I'll let it go this time though. Ahh, we should've done this sooner, Kudru went on, trailing his hands over the sides, basking

Yes: a lazy wafting of seaweed showing green through the sun-shot blue: skitters of minnows, the dip and dripping of the oars, a light slap ceaseless against the under-hull. It was easy going and without a sweat I had us far out enough to see the harbor between two curving horns of headland, the snow-streaks still high on the Ida range, Mount Juktas' profile crossed by swooping gulls above the shore-trees and browning hills. Goodbye my father. Peace to your unmarked grave. Be with me always. Be Juktas to me now, teach me the land, its burdens of death and life. Help me to help us not lose ourselves as in the terrible drunken bickerings between our men and women at the funeral, blaming each other for this unanswerable predicament, weak dances, broken chants—and for all our sakes help Theseus find better than his first public words, spoken where I'd spoken mine a year ago: *I will give you order, and strength, and by these hands the nations will respect you again!* He was trying, trapped in his own impossible position: we weren't even sure if those words had meant an oath of The Offering, and the uncertainty

robbed his power among the clans: Father, help me to help

—Look how clear the sea is today, Kudru broke in, looking up as we'd drifted. Yes, the undulant play of the light just under the waves, a mesmerizing shuttle and weave, counterweave and twist of bands of wave-rippled light, whirling helices

—Wish I knew who caught this first in some of our murals, Kudru said. —Have you noticed it? You've got your fishes and dolphins and everybody up close, and over the whole background you lay in a sort of web like this here in light light blue and yellow. All these crazy trapezoids, and the whole wall shimmers just like this. Or almost. You can't get this effect in metal and believe me I've wasted your fortune trying. Iris catches it very well. Your hands worked in? Or I'll spell you. Suit yourself

Home receded, the falling sun casting orange fire over the water in the west, and now you could see how much unsettled country we still had between the mountain ranges, rank upon ridge of hills and secret river valleys. It was good to dream of Europa arriving ages ago with our refugee-people and saying, This will be the place: no matter how unbearably naked and broken things seemed you could weep it out and try again: I'd begun to slash my arms in anger and his honor, but Cratus and others warned it might make the King look poor before the people

—Come on, get your back into it, I'm hungry and hot, Kudru said squinting at the sun. —He never quits. She has to drown him. Sing with me:

—*Hey, let's go up the mountain,
I can't abide the town—*

*Let's roll in snow to spite the sun
And spite his evil crown, hey*

He kept at it, and I rowed, and as we neared Dia Isle I turned the boat parallel to her for a better look along this lee shore. But the hills fell straight into the sea most places, there was only one small cove with any kind of gradual beach good for ships, and that'd need both land-fill and a mole to meet minimal standards: Kudru thought so too, though any ship lying up here would be safe from wind as well as wave. For now we took ourselves round the Isle's high eastern promontory (feet of the sleeping Goddess) and found the tiny half-moon cove where priestesses beached, its curve of cliffs pocked and gnarled by unobstructed winter: to our right now was smooth open ocean between here and Callista, and a veil of white summer heat-haze obscured any sign of Velkanos. We drew the boat up and made the formal Hailings that let us swim at ease and take some urchins. After sunset would be good for octopii too, which you'd find in crevices with their abalone garbage on the doorstep. Stab the eye out, flail them on a rock to make them tender. But I didn't want that kind of eating today. White chunks of pumice, wandering rocks bobbed here and there in the reddening twilight

— Beauties, Kudru said as our take of urchins piled up on the sand. — Too bad the moon's wrong for the best roe. Let's go up and camp and we'll take more fresh in the morning. Sorry, ladies. Did you bring a lemon?

— A lemon. No, I forgot our sunshades, too. Come on then

As we found our way zig-zag up the near-pathless limestone heights we met with flurries of swifts and seag-

ulls roosting in the cliffs, the old nurses and nestlings beginning their sunset din. Day was cooling off at last: I rendered an extra prayer for permission to visit as we climbed but Kudru's version of this was just to tell the birds to take it easy, only passing through. A lot of heart under his old spines. I was glad for the way we'd been taught to find fathers, if we needed them, in the various men who loved and worked for the mistress of the house. Males belittled by this were probably trying to forget who usually lived longest. You can cry if he dies, child, but here's another to take you on his knee

We crested the heights and took the sun's bronze warm again on our faces, his light mellowing all the colors of the isle stretching out before us, wide rolling meadows of seagrass, stands of willow and oak, tamarisk and male and female cypress trees, Crete's dark shores three miles to our left and open sea to the other side, erratically tracked by evening breeze. Lovely, so peaceful, lovely: down between the hillsides a few kinds of greens were still in yellow flower and there were even small crimson patches of corn poppy, all of it suffused with sun. Pellets at our feet said there were kri-kri about, and The Grove Most Holy lay out there beyond that promising harbor-cove: time to see everything; and we had bread and cheese and wine, it was going to be good. We settled on a flat space under a seaward tamarisk, its roots a good grassy back-rest and I went for wood while Kudru twirled my drill in the stock with some kindling. Yes, good to see those luminous crimson poppies survive the sun and winds out here: like a part of my father still vibrant in the world

Like uncle Rhadamanthys: of all the kin who'd come to Cnossos for The Day he'd reminded us most of the fa-

ther gone, covered in Midsummer gold, the blood-red tunic, the same forthright fierceness of devotion except that he hadn't learned father's lessons in our move against Athens. On the heels of our progress in the spring aunt Amphissa his queen had brought only support for Ariadne, but Rhadamanthys, the harsh will to see evil punished, not rewarded with a sea-king's diadem. Surely Sarpedon's trust-nothing staccato had been in his ear like never before. Without Pasiphae's private time with them we might never have gotten a genuine hearing; and when we'd forced ourselves through all the arguments behind Ariadne's plans again, well, uncle had to concede because of the need for swift action. But it wasn't enough: he'd also demanded a council of his own with this Shepherd to warn him that any further move across Cretan interests would fetch him more trouble than he'd ever seen on the mainland. And out of respect for my father, he'd stay for the funeral, but not the wedding: old fealties remained but some public gesture against this kind of accession had to be made, and Sarpedon and Titone of Zakros felt they had to follow suit. *I understand*, Ariadne'd said

The weight on her now: thank The Powers she still had mother, Cleite and the rest

*Come to your House,
Minotauros Dionysos, true of speech*

But we'd known all through the rites just where he was: a corpse crouched in a larnax, a body fatally damaged, surrounded by honorific incense to cover up the smell.

—Think that's enough wood? Kudru said regarding

the heap I'd made and twisting his knife inside another urchin. —How is everything?

—Oh—Fading away I suppose, I said taking up our good crusty loaf

—Good, cut me a big chunk of that too. Did you see those greens yonder? Not tonight because I'm tired but tomorrow I'll go pick some. My mother used to do things with them. Maybe they're bitter by now but in season they're good on the side. Or do you want to do that and I'll be urchin-monger.

—I don't care

—That's the spirit. Ow, watch those pricks, will you? I said I was sorry, he told the urchin in his hand

So we got up a fire, and passed the wineskin and ate well, and drank some more: I was tired of urchin-roe for all I'd eaten when my siring a child had mattered, and when I said so Kudru understood and bade me name the changing colors of the sky with him, a royal spectrum sinking toward blue-black night with its eastern stars. Crickets grew almost louder than the breathing of the sea and, though there were no mosquitoes here, Dia did have fireflies: we watched them and listened for kri-kri hooves, off in the meadows. As full dark came down the wine and the fire seemed to be soothing my friend toward sleep, when he suddenly said

—What do we call them, animals? If they were animals there wouldn't be a problem. I'm sorry Deucalion, if that's proper address again, but I do have a thought at times. And I tell you, this is the last thing I'll say, but you're my king. I want you to remember that. No matter what Iris and the rest gabble at you, I tell you, that's what they're saying too. You're Ariadne's rightful Consort and no foreigner with a furze-bush on his face can

change it. What I hate is how Goddess' laws work so *slow*.

And Kudru got up and went off in the dark awhile, not far, but I knew he was not relieving his body: when he came back he said to talk about anything I pleased, he'd listen though he was awfully tired now. I bade him sleep and Kudru laid himself out close against my side

Hero. Rebel. It had to amaze that Theseus was only one man and yet our entire realm had come to be centered on him. King Theseus of Crete. As if the more he isolated himself the more things came to him. Mestor, Nomia might despise his means like anybody else but they wanted to be sure to keep Crete on what they called fate's side. Watch out for them; and Powers, keep Pasiphae beside us

And teaching him the Dance of Changes, or trying to; but transformation except as convenience was not the strength of any of his gods, his Poseidon, his Achaian Zeus not a vulnerable Boy but a Thunder-Hurler high (someplace) in the sky. Who could promulgate such trash, except as it brought a share of some priesthood's prosperity, fired a host of Companions to one's ambition? I swore I'd tried to like him, befriend him, but he would not let me know him: he could sing, but not to us: he told the truth but that meant whatever truth served him at the moment. Believing only in Powers, we called Them by different Names, but the Names in the end were what conjured our bone-bred differences. I knew Theseus had done his best at his first diplomatic task with Ariadne, wording our message to Mykenai of the wedding and the Rhodes blockade, our demand for reparations. But in the Dance was all the impossibility of things which Cleite and Iris had foreseen: how could a Theseus give

himself to possession by *our* clan-totems? He'd sought a throne for purposes of some story within his head, not for communion with daemons of Cretan land and its generations. Sunflowers, he wanted Iris to paint over House spirals: the flower of Earth that turned Her head to follow His chariot's path across the sky

Well, his Aithe was no flower to follow him: she'd gone up into the hills with neither Yamo nor her sisters in secret treason Anchinoe and Kia, the moment she could rise from childbed. Maybe she felt a failure after Ariadne's months of praises for her labor—Oh, The Powers had to see how hard everybody was trying in their way to live, to get past resentments! As the night grew chill I wrapped myself round Kudru by the fire, let myself clear my heart, tried to stay useful

To her: useful to her: I could not have burned with more pride in Ariadne, her devotion and sense of honor: she'd not go to the Callistan camp to see their Offering Day because it was not ours, our presence would've appeared an attempt to appropriate his blood for the debt we'd not paid. She was worried as Cleite and Cratus and the rest about the consequence but she trusted in honor to see us through—*If you were among our Dead, would you not understand?* she'd asked me: *We have to trust to that.* She did not inquire round town how many did go to see the great heart meet the Great Year; but she meant to give herself the more to this marriage now, *I'm going to give myself with all my heart to him for you, Dionysos, for you and our people*

How I'd ached to see her rising from the sea that day, for him; but more I remembered their dance together, the dance we'd done ourselves a year ago, turning and turning in the central court among the crop-cuttings and

the clapping shouting people with their cymbals and systurms, Ariadne's and Theseus' hands clasped in the forever-sign: he'd let her turn him moonwise and she'd let him be the one to break the circle when his powers peaked in the want of his body, there was a hint of a contest in it and people laughed almost as if it always should've been this obvious, both of them so self-possessed and stubborn and strong and if it wasn't quite love at least it looked like destiny, round and round, the whole story of our peoples right there in that turning circle

But that'd been all I could bear to see; and in leaving the Labyrinth headed I-knew-not-where, I met Phaedra at a confluence of corridors, and we saw the cheat and anger in each other

— If it doesn't work out, Deucalion, remind her I offer myself. Same as we have Perides make war in Minotaurus' name

— Well here's something from the horse's mouth, I said back curtly in my old pattern, knowing it would hurt, and I told her he'd said she was really a sort of pretty vulture, bait for a trap. Phaedra flinched, regathered herself: a young person struggling for character

— All the more reason to work with him, isn't it, she answered.

I sat up and drank awhile, I drained the skin in fact, and the spirits in it showed me what I needed. That none of this mattered beside the Triandan aftermath. Our people no doubt being dragged in slaves' chains down the dusty King's Highway into Egypt behind some oily trader's cart. Little we could do except make sure Tutmoses (may his tiny root wither) paid through the nose for his next season's shipments of resins, and let him ask why. And let the Lion try to break the Rhodes blockade, let

Sicily learn what it meant to be under the Lion's paw—If we could just get everybody back to Crete and hold on a few years till these idiots wrecked themselves! Goddess' laws would be written afresh in blood, but Ariadne was right, it was people's own unvalued little choices

Sleep then: perhaps Dia gave Her dreams only to priestesses. But we woke up to weather even calmer than yesterday's, the bluesilver sea in easy touch with Dia's shores as we roused ourselves with dew off the grass. Kudru was a bit cranky with aches our bed gave his bones, but a swim took care of that, and we dove for more urchins, maybe an octopus supper tonight. Fish of all stripes shot through groves of kelp and as we hung underwater taking our time we could see fifty yards around through the salty azure, like liquid sky. Maybe there were daemons out here to minister to you in sleep, or it was the simple freshness of the place, but I felt better today. The something (She wants us to live) from the sea you felt reaching you, beneath all that tortured your mind

After breakfast we walked down to that lee-shore cove for a better look at a harbor. Kudru felt sure we could make something of the slopes and little beach with minimal manpower and disturbance, though balancing Admiralty worries with priestesses' taking offense was another question. Then he wanted to go back up the hills and change camps for a shadier spot before the sun got mean, and on the way he detoured us down into a vale to see if those greens were cooperative. But their answer, despite Kudru's gracious apology, was bitter: too late in the season

—Can't trust anybody! he said spitting and finding the wine gone, too. —See these poppies? Gorgeous red. If they're still around you'd figure the greens hadn't turned.

So we walk all the way down here, and what. Never trust a corn poppy. Pah! It's a conspiracy with the urchins because we raided their kin yesterday. Plots, plots! It's a sign of the end, Deucalion

— Try to take it easy, I laughed

But Kudru was puffing as we started to climb, so I suggested the western side's easier hill and that we come round the north ridge to pick up our camp. And that was when we saw, close below in the next westward dip in the hills, a stand of three huge willow trees surrounded by smaller ones, oak and ash, whitethorn and birch: the three willows' cascades of long leaf made them look like fountains of green, and though neither of us dared go nearer, for it was sure The Grove Most Holy, we thought we heard a faint clinking-sound in the air, a sound of innumerable corn-dollies dangling from those three willows' boughs. We backed off, and the hackles went up on my neck

As we walked away, neither of us could figure how we were going to put a military port out here. There was bone-deep dread about that place that only some woman old-past-ancient might explain, something to fear and, at the same time, something untouchable that Crete should not be without. Yet, still, Pandora All-Giver might understand. Back on the higher eastern ground of our first camp I was just gathering up our wood when a sharp vibration fluttered the air in my ears, as if in the next split-instant a club would strike my skull. Instead the sky to the north cracked open with one colossal *Boom!* whose concussion I felt in my chest as I stood there: my jaw fell aslant: I'd never heard anything so *loud*, not thunder in the mountains, not anything, and that shock went palpably hurtling past us through the air, out of the morning's

white sea-haze and overhead toward Crete, a crackling and rumbling in its wake

I dropped the wood, gaped northward, Kudru just in front of me trembling though the Earth itself was still. The sky had filled with screaming swifts, or souls, and we heard the hooves of kri-kri in the hills behind us. But I didn't see them: I was trying to say what I saw to the north and felt my knees beg to buckle under

— Smoke

For the first time in my life, and in no time too thick and black for the winds to disperse it or get through, steady billows thrusting upward, unfolding, as from some hole in the sky beyond the world's edge; pouring upward and spreading out, rich and thick, billows expanding as they rose, slanting to the east now in the mildest of air beyond the haze

Kudru cried out frozen where he stood and my blood was blanching, I don't know how long we stood there as it pushed higher and blossomed off the sea. Not a thrum beneath our feet, and the thunder dissipated into queer pops and crackling noises, like splitting trees, and now a glimpse of red-yellow billows of flame, an eye brighter than daylight at the root of this black flower

Here I am

And then Kudru pointed down to the sparkling ocean just inside the near reach of the haze, and I saw it come out into sunshine all blue and winking, a rising wall, one great flank of an unthinkable circle, the wave

I couldn't move. This just wasn't the world and I felt my head tilt like a monkey's as this slow slow thing dragged the sea up into itself, away from Dia's north cliffs: a sound like the world's own breath was building to a rumble, a water-roar

—We've got to run! Kudru stammered, rooted and shaking his fists; but we were stuck fast, in a dream, we both knew if this thing kept swelling like that we'd be gone in a moment. There were cliffs beneath the hills in front of us but it was two ships' masts high and growing, *rearing* now all sun blue green, shreds of sea-foam climbing up its cresting wall. I thought if I could raise fist-to-brow in homage my heart would open big as the world but in the next moment the wave put its mad white head down and boomed down under the cliffs: the whole Isle reverberated with a thundering rumble and wash and as the back-surge rose up it made rainbows before us in the sun, promises, the ash fulfillment's shadow looming this way, bending over the horizon

As the wave's concussion faded we turned and saw the wall of it still rolling, rolling toward Crete: Dia had hardly tamed it. Mist prickled our backs as we gaped: too far to see the panic onshore or the hit: houses there, ships, friends: it sparkled and rolled and left us behind, one vast shrug

—Your boat! Kudru squeaked. —If it's broke—I can build us—We haven't got a saw—*Oh my God-dess*

I clenched my teeth to keep my soul within my body. Velkanos kept crackling, belching behind us: it looked like a thunderhead now, anvilled out on the top, but gray-black, heavy with ash, not blue with rain.

* * *

Losing sight of the wave against Crete's shores in the distance, we saw nothing of its impact. Kudru called that a good sign; but out here on Dia there was nothing to hide or distract us from the billows belching up strong out

of Velkanos, no painted precinct walls you thought stronger than time, no trimmed trees or groomed officials on vain errands of the realm. There was nothing that did not seem petty as we watched the ash burgeoning and the vast head of it already drifting south and eastwards, toward Crete. The thing was going to have us, homage or no. I went a little crazy and started hurling our wood in all directions

—Don't, Kudru said. —With no trees right here a woman can tell we

—You must be joking! I crowed, but even as my mind staggered again that things could so relentlessly turn on us, I saw Kudru's grief as he ran about me, petulantly picking up kindling. Let the Isle be buried or sunk tomorrow, he still had this day in his hands. I began to help him though I was stifling crazy laughter, and then we crossed the Isle eastward back to the boat's cove. She wasn't bad-off, just thrown farther up the sand because the north curve of the cliffs had parried the wave's best strength passing by. But we were still on the heights when we heard another smaller *boom*, and a crackling-noise as if the fabric of the air were being rent. So we waited stonily against more waves, and just looked back on the Isle's stands of trees in sunshine, its hilly meadows, birds almost calm. A yellow-green mantis on a spike of timothy combed her toothy forelegs. She consumes the Lover Who is Herself. A couple of clear amber slough-shells of bees on the ground too, dead shells of a hive's servants, larger creatures now. And to what end? I sighed like a beaten farmer and Kudru got down and ripped up a tuft of grass; and *Here, breathe this*, he ordered, *Earth and green blood, the smell of past lives. Breathe it before you think you understand!* So I obliged him, and gave myself as I could to the

Isle's rich grasses and groundcreeper, to the sight of goat's beard and milk thistle, briar and bramble, poppies

—Feel it, Kudru said. —Feel their strong green grip over the whole Earth, Deucalion, the whole Earth, just like I learned years ago. Even under the oceans. Even where the rain's less than spit. They always win, brother, always. *Like flowers in ash*. I see how much they've been through, mountains-of-fire and worse, and look how fresh they are, and delicate and tranquil. It's—It's sure people have been killed and you can't go back angry and squander your usefulness on *why*

I thanked him for this, and we went down and shoved the boat off, and I rowed us into Dia's lee to get home. It was just so unfathomable. I thought of the stories of Goddess we'd grown up with, and felt the edges of their sense in a new way today. Goddess' play with Herself, Herself leading Her Daughter (Herself) into the underworld, breaking Her own heart

—How do I know? Kudru shrugged. —You never bother to ponder the old people's riddles till you live their years and see what life can do. Look at it, knocking down Her own shrines, killing such people as your grandmother—Huh! All you can do is keep clear of people who say they understand. I hope we do this again sometime, Deucalion. Listen, do you think it's possible that now they—might ask you to

—Maybe, I said. —But look out there. How many days since Callista's Young God? She's—This is about something bigger, I'm afraid.

—Oh I don't know, it could stop tomorrow. We all have our stresses. Or it's like a redecorating for—Blast it! I know I'm reaching now. But you remember what I said last night, Minos.

—Sir, I will. Alright, we surrender! I needed to shout past Kudru then. He saw my eyes fill: I just wanted to be with my family now. But at Amnisos—Well, here came the Overseer's work. Three or four truly stubborn cousins had been killed, drowned or smashed against rocks as the explosion had warned most everybody inland: have to get clergy down here when I took home report. Whole clusters of huts wiped off the riverbanks and shore, the first few houses of stone near the water, enviable yesterday, now piles of blocks and snapped timber pointing inland off their foundations. The main cargo mole stripped of every fixture and derrick, tangles of rope and crates and wrack clear up to the port-mistress' villa, filthy with sea-mud. Pools of briney foam and kelp stank already in the sun, and as people wandered back down the shore-hills crying whether their house was still there or not, a crowd of Syrians and Cyprians and other foreigners were pointed toward me, each demanding first assistance out of port. Their ships were tumbled or capsized up among the tamarisks and higher houses, but most were judged seaworthy in the men's fearful haste: captains even pressed bills of lading into Podes' and Cordax's hands, saying their goods gone inland could wait settlement awhile. They wanted no share of what looked like wrath against Crete. So our shoremen helped the crews work together fetching timber to roll their ships to the sea, and their cooperation petered away as each crew filled its needs. I tried not to think as they scattered for home, eyes on the spreading blackness northward

People of port, the while, kicked wrack from the common yards, mourned the family's wrecked loom or little gardens of leeks sown with salt mud. Birds had yet to come back to the drenched-ragged trees, so that the only

gay sounds were children's: *Look Elaphios, here's a bass as fresh as breakfast!* But up on the hill of the mariners' cave was perhaps the worst sign, for at the altar nearby it an arrogated rite of blood was in progress, people without clergy had slaughtered three black goats and anointed each other down inside the cave as an aspersion. And more than a dozen young men of good family had slashed their chests and arms to appease Below. I wanted to say something, that we'd done nothing wrong. But with the smoke of that thing in the sky—and the looks coming my House's way up out of the cave—it seemed prudent to gesture a homage instead. If we had done wrong, a deeper cave had told me whom to blame. *Shall we join the Callistans inland, sir?* and *Fine wedding-gift from Poseidon!* some muttered. Well, I was only Overseer now with a sail and oars across my shoulders: they knew who was listening through me

You could see the Velkanos smoke from almost any high point along Cnossos Road and a good many walkers and carts were headed inland with us to see what the Labyrinth would do. From as far out as the north meadows near customs we heard Kouretes' bull-roarers, their heavy humming on the air trying hard for rain out of this Thunder Moon to quench Earthbull's fires: there were now more people drawing blood in the clans' Labyrinth-shrines than recent years had seen, I was told, and up along the crests of the valley more and more people climbed to see the smoke, and they tore at their hair and cut themselves and wailed, or sang things defiantly gay. As the day progressed and more people arrived we could hear a droning kind of din throughout the valley, as from a funeral without a center. But for whatever talk there'd been of an Offering, it wasn't going to happen, and even

Kudru remarked the blank looks, the lost expressions, the disembodied manners of clergy and House staff. Someone complained that Yamo was neglecting House duties, scornfully giving all to finding his Aithe in the hills: Cratus himself was drinking with stifled despair. But Cleite looked the worst. The fact of what seemed the truly-broken connection between the Labyrinth's life and the land's left her silent and utterly listless, without even a sense of brooding inside her now. She'd scarcely speak, what recovery she'd made looked doubly lost behind her fine eyes and as Iris tried to minister to her it was hard to miss where our painter laid the blame. Blame! Was that what Iris wanted, to make my mother carry a scapegoat's burden for the House, rather than risk her own position by criticizing Ariadne? Granted, Pasiphae was still at the Labyrinth more than perhaps a retired Queen should be, the chaos and upset rituals these days explained much of that—but who else could do so much in the breach that, behind closed doors, still existed between Ariadne and Theseus? They'd danced at their wedding and been making all the proper appearances, but there'd not been a morning yet that found them lingering late together in private chambers. The looks in the eyes, the hundred subtle touches that reassured people about the center of the realm, these still waited Ariadne's own healed acceptance of all that'd happened. She'd sworn to give herself, but she knew the regard she'd lose on every side for anything like a fall into his arms

It was Pasiphae, then, not only filling in for Cleite's spiritual exhaustion but working with Elphenor, too, as she'd promised, to help King Theseus serve amid this new panic. For certain clergy—Cratus, not surprisingly, Yamo and Theia and other young ones—had seen Velka-

nos burst and lost no time renewing protest against his kingship, and Ariadne kept her council-word and was ready to take resignations. But through Pasiphae and Elphenor a compromise was reached that spared Ariadne the consequence of a lamed clergy at the worst moment, and which took King Theseus at the head of a procession up to Archanes, not only to the horses there but to The Cave of the Winds, Anemospilia, where Tukato could assist in blood-offerings. Most of the King's youths followed, and many Cretans who'd turned to him last time to beseech Poseidon Earthshaker: whatever one thought of that God, the point was that Theseus be seen addressing The Powers before Cretan eyes, at a powerful cave-shrine too. He just didn't know our throne's ways of winning and keeping a Minos' devotions, and when I heard of this, that he went with serious ceremony and took direction well from his priests, a hope entered my heart for him. His *trying* meant everything, like a glimmer of recognition of our right to exist with our differences. And doubly thanks to Pasiphae (as we saw it, at first), not only was he publicly at service: this gave Ariadne freedom to address people's needs in her way, placating directly those Powers a Shepherd-king might not wish to engage. She took Perdix round the valley to collect people off the hills, and by that uneasy threshold-hour after sunset we were all up in the places of the clan-tombs west of Cnosos, where Perdix led chants as old as Egypt and Sumer: speakings to a Face of Goddess perhaps not honored enough, in our prosperous age before Rhodes and Sicily. The great unfolding of ashy black was reaching farther into seaward skies beyond the tombs

Ghastly One, Eater of bodies, Render of souls, Mistress of graves! You Who order and make slaughter, You Who

chop into bloody pieces, Fire-Lover, Pure One, Lady of the Great House, Devourer of hearts! You are the Knife that cuts when Its Name is uttered, You slaughter those who presume against Your veils! Oh, make us to know our deeds! Establish for us a place of rest! Forgive our offenses, lift up our faces, Dreadful One Whom even Gods obey! Speak Your Name, and the angry God will turn back! He must! He shall! He will

There was not much change, next day, in the still-burgeoning cloud that now was dimming the whole north-eastern sky above the sea: it did look no nearer to Crete just yet, shedding its sooty burden on the waves, great strands of black ash arcing down off the thunderhead. The first runners from towns east of us said they had bad stink of sulphur out there, however, plenty of worry about the crops, and damage like at Amnisos. Then, incredibly, a ship came in, beached from Mykenai itself, as if in answer to King Theseus' and Elphenor's rightful worries about the mainland. But for my eagerness to hear what the Lion had to say, this embassy's reception was restricted to Queen and King, amid the clergy's doubled display of House-guard and special rigors of protocol. Much as I saw reason for this, it wasn't easy to wait. I made a dutiful three-day trip west to hunt for a larger and safer new harbor site in case Dia was disallowed—I found one, too—and then Ariadne summoned me. Meantime, though, so much for our jokes on Achaian seamanship, since they hadn't turned back beneath Velkanos; and it was said that their crew had seen no wave at all on the open sea. Nobody understood this. And it went right to our bones that if the mainland had not been hit like ourselves—Then this oracle from Delphi—No wonder Cleite could hardly find words anymore

I was told to meet Ariadne atop the east bastion stairs: a walk in the gardens would give us privacy in public, so I knew she was indulging her King in some ways. She wore her chaplet and that loose crimson gown so as to be noticed with her Overseer; and if our visit revealed she was up to her neck in affairs, she looked buoyant and strong with the fierce help around her, centered in duty and challenge. She took my arm as we turned down those gentle flights into vivid seas of flowers: I told her of this westward harbor and she said how pleased uncle Perides would be

—But I have much to tell you, Overseer, she began.
—First, that embassy from the Lion was standard enough. Hail and Gods' blessing on a new brother-king, may he reign long and feel good every day. Brother-king: I asked if that implied family but they said it was closer to equals-in-power. Maybe it's a start. But there was more, about Trianda—There was and there wasn't. Just as we expected, the Lion says he simply has no control over such enterprises. His word. He says he'll try to learn more who's behind the attack and debate some kind of reparations with his councils. Oh, I never swallowed back so much in one meeting! Ariadne said. —And finally on this, they say they're sending King Theseus a gift of special make, to honor his accession. It's something that needs work yet but they'll try to send it this coming Little Summer, if we get one, or sure in the spring. I know, it does sound ominous, but Theseus was very excited for the honor. There's something bright as fire about him when he's happy. I think the gift will be innocent enough. They also sent a few more advisor-type gentlemen with this ship. I've met them, and—Well, Elphenor will keep them under control I hope, he knows us, living here so many years.

—Sounds overwhelming, I said. —Are you—How can I help?

—Oh, just to talk and see you, brother, I feel so *easy* with you, just being together under the blue sky. Like Midsummer Day last, with our father, Ariadne smiled as we walked. And now she paused to savor a shrub of white hibiscus in flower, and took the scent of one cupped in her hand. Her face near the sweet-breathed trumpet looked as fresh, not a word that Achaia had sent her no presents, no address: I kept my words for the Lion to myself as she offered the blossom to me, and then she strode onward, asking if father had ever told me about the two kinds of destruction. What?

—I have more to tell you, Overseer, Ariadne said, hinting toward public concerns as she took my arm again. —Our guest Aithe came back from the hills the other night while you were away. She looked—*possessed*, Deucalion, that lovely hair in tangles, her breasts big with milk. And she told Yamo to keep his distance till she'd seen her King. And did she! She sounded like Kapha, in a way. She told Theseus for all to hear that she is not going back to Athens, that she won't be a pleasure-cow any longer up on their Rock. Have you ever noticed that quaint mocking-tone Theseus has at times? *And did you meet the Good Mother in the woods?* he said to her. But Aithe—You should've seen her hold her ground. *Here they tell me if I grow strong, and learn enough, I could be foundress of a city,* she told him. *I don't expect to be, really, but I could. You tell me, sir, that I'm your property, at least while I stay useful; and I think there's room for a choice in there between pleasing old men's eyes, and carrying sticks. I want to live!* she said, and then she ran off again with Yamo. So *exultant*, Deu-

calion, after her grief for her baby! Yamo can miss rites awhile, for me!

But I'd scarcely said I was sorry I'd missed that, when Ariadne's face darkened and she asked for patience to make her purposes clear with me. She'd also been informed, in my absence, that Itiri of Libya was dead.

—Aithe destroyed certain things in favor of something, she began. —My Libyan sister—She was a part of me, a sister I badly wanted, a part of me that fights, different as we were. But between her ways and Pharaoh's—I loved her, but I've lost the difference. I have this through aunt Amphissa at Phaestos, because Libya has asked for Cretan reinforcements against Egypt. Since Phaestos' sons would be going, I said it's their decision, but Libya sent me this news to try to provoke me. I can't let it. But—After Athens, they said, my sister was inspired to take more militant action on Libya's eastern frontier, where this Tutmoses mounts a campaign for Libyan slaves now and then. That's why she never came back here with Glaucus, she knew what mother had in mind and I don't blame her. Oh! Ariadne said, —it's so terrible! She led about a hundred men and women on a night-raid, hoping to catch this Pharaoh in his tent by some oasis on the frontier. But they were betrayed, Deucalion, just like at Delphi and Delos, and—these *chariots* were used to trap them in a low place called a wadi. And then you can imagine. They flogged and mutilated one man to send the warning-tale back to her people. But—Brother, they cut off the women's breasts, and cut out their vulvas and dried them in the sun to make pouches, to make *things* of them. And the man said Tutmoses had his scribes writing all this down, the numbers killed, *pictures* of what they did

Monstrous! Oh, I could see again that woman's slanted leopard-eyes, the serpent-sheen of her skin, the bright feathers that called her people's enemies to fight her, and the dignity she'd shown before Alxiona—But why hadn't Pharaoh just collected the usual heads and left the bodies to Mother Vulture? Why so sexual about it, why write it down and make these images, was it not a thing they'd remember? Tap of the temple, and the attacker becomes the victim: Icarus, Orneus, Theseus, myself too taking vengeance on young Tallay in the baths, all one mind, a man's core half-mad with fear. Call me Pharaoh. Exiled in his head from a painless priest-invented world that never was, like the sing-song paradise of pilgrims to Echion's Delos—driven to avenge himself on his mother, who would stay neither dead nor erased from the temple walls, as incorrigible as those Libyan *animals* haunting his frontiers. Now Pharaoh'd have something for the next time She stepped with childlike ease through his wall of invulnerable dreams, possessed his flesh with helpless wanting despite all protest, whispered to him laughing of the waiting grave: his priests to fetch the last campaign's papyrii, *It's alright, She's dead, We killed them, Here is the proof*

—The more you do what you have to, the more I'll love you, my Queen, my beautiful one, I said not daring to embrace her: *advisors* about. Ariadne'd stopped now before some tall spikes of chaste-tree and was breathing their sobering scent: then she said there was only one thing this would provoke her to, and she took my hand and led me down past the ruined south corner of the Labyrinth to—a small hole in the ground, where grandmother's hope-plant the aloe had flowered last summer

—I had quite an audience while you were gone and

mother was on an invited visit to Tyliossos, Ariadne told me gazing down. — Think of all the women you saw on the west court when I spoke. Put them together with all the matriarchs and mothers who came to that first war-council last spring. Add in others who taught me these years up country, and even the wildest ones who—very well, who told me about the moon's and sun's eclipses, Ariadne smiled with a faint shake of her head, more secrets surrendered. — While you were away, brother, these women got themselves together, all of them sick with concern about Velkanos' bursting open right on the heels of this wedding of mine. And they took the liberty of uprooting grandmother's aloe, and they brought it to me in their hands. It was a warning, for me Deucalion, and for the House. We can't just let the evildoer alone. These women are not afraid to rip anything up by its roots, to keep Crete safe. They laid it in my hands, and—with love, I tell you, I could feel nothing else in them, but they won't be pushed much further. You see, they know very well how I've scaled back the animal lives and blood in our rites. And mostly they approve, as they do the protection of their children's blood in the fleets. But the barley-fields are harvested, and the way they look fetches up guilt. If Velkanos gets very bad, or if Sicily or Rhodes become worse problems than last moon saw, there's a danger people will prostrate themselves before The Powers with what seems the sure old answer. Blood, and more blood, Ariadne said and I told her, yes, what I'd seen near Amnisos bore this out

— But we know that isn't much answer, anymore. I was told, Deucalion, that we'd better be working up new ways to make sure Crete gets through these waters. They want a new magic against Velkanos. They want hard substance

behind our own plans for military ships, and I hereby give you permission to winter half the fleet behind Dia, and half at the new place. Then people will see we're making necessary moves. But what they told me must happen above all, brother, is—Yes, they want to see my marriage prosper, but *Crete comes first*, they said. Tukato and his clergy don't want mother's arranged processions and mainland Gods coming up to Archanes. These women don't want the bad influence of more shrines to foreign Gods in our House. So what I'm driving at—You know that it's mother. Poseidon is nothing and nowhere at Phaestos, Zakros. They want me to heal and grow into the Queen I am, and that means that mother has to be wholly retired now. *She's been our Hatshepsut*, they say, and they honor her years of service and compromise with tears in their eyes. But it hasn't proved out. They want her to renounce even indirect power now, something like The Offering father might've—It's going to be hard on her.

Yes, like our brother in no hurry to find his War Leader: mother cared too much after all to let go easily. Detaching from her had been fobbed off by broken rites and her own vital helpfulness, and she'd moved hardly any belongings from Labyrinth to villa. But it was time to be what we were, not what we thought would please people we feared—Again, in a way Iris had been right all along. Did Pasiphae know of this demand? *I'll find the right moment*, Ariadne said, and in her face I saw how much she feared to seem ungrateful. But the *damos* had spoken in such a single voice that not to heed it was simply to choose our own undoing, one way or another. Women had made our House and they'd unmake it too in the name of mothers' ends

—Our Hatshepsut, I said. —The means have to honor her.

—Absolutely. I love you, Deucalion. I'll go now. Come to my rites, Ariadne said and she put a bold sisterly kiss to the corner of my mouth: I felt a flick of tongue, too, and my heart sang new songs to be—under the blue sky with her

But through that quarter of the moon, as the season moved toward its dog-days, the Kouretes got no rain against Velkanos, and prevailing winds began to drop ash and sickening air on eastern Crete beyond the house of Mallia. Ariadne secluded herself for a few days with Theia, Diamat and Perdix (and Cleite, not letting her fade into worse despair)—and then one hot morning I found myself swept up in a throng that must've been three hundred people and more, a raucous procession to the sea led by Ariadne's circle in its return from some upland shrines. They'd been gazing on Velkanos' fire and smoke, meeting with clergy from out east and closing circles of magic with them. And now all the way home they'd been pulling people out of the corn and vineyards, commanding them with drums and calls to come out of the houses, the workshops, the quarries and shrines, and it wasn't easy for many to keep up with her, especially when half-way to the sea Ariadne bore east up a different path, onward and up over broken stone and scrub to the port's eastern headland. Callistans, mending marines, King Theseus and his new-arrived mainland elders noticed that she'd gone straight to this from her typically Cretan trip away from the House, and men walked a measured pace with the King to see what she was doing: mother and Phaedra's friends, Iris helping Icarus over his grief for my father, all found their ways up the headland

And there Ariadne was, her black tresses out loose beneath her crown being lifted by an updraft from the cliff not two steps behind her, *Oh be careful* I thought as she paced the seaward edge spryly, waiting for stragglers. And in her face was a clear cruel-eyed exhilaration, she wore only sandals and a dancer's kilt, black, cut away to the hipjoints, every part of her flexing as she paced and gestured the crowd closer, closer. People edged toward her but kept a space that she mightn't feel crowded and step too far: I remembered the tremor up here and the cliff's cracked edges but I knew I mustn't say anything, this was her way of proving she'd let go of *herself* in what was at stake, and you could feel the power of it on the air. With this and her long strong kicked-up legs my snake was rising and, as Theia and the others led people in a breathing to bring us together, King Theseus stepped through the front line to join her. Yes he did have a fire at times, he looked proud in a mainland way of his unruly Queen. But she raised her palms to keep his distance, and then she began

—*Look at it!* she cried shooting her left arm out toward the vast spread of black smoke towering up out of morning's sea-haze. —*Look at it! Look Her in the Face,* my friends, and tremble for your lives!

And people did so: yes, worse and worse, the pall of it still pouring and pouring up and outward, colossally high and then falling in huge black tethered arcs and sun-broken strands into the eastern sea, raining deeper now into our coastal distances. Tallay and many with her let loose a wail and rattled systums, others covered their faces after a look and children at people's sides made mewling sounds, began to cry. And it started to catch. King Theseus, Elphenor, the new bearded brothers with them

looked on with a severe unsettled fascination, but there was something, Ariadne's spirit, her ferocity near the edge that Cretan men gave in to, some went down on one knee on the rock. And she kept telling them all to *see* what they'd already been denying, to look at it and tremble as if she'd had final word from The Powers, of No Hope. Some couldn't bear it and turned their heads to King Theseus in appeal, but his eyes were on Ariadne, maybe ready to spring if she stepped too far, or held by her beauty, as I was; and more and more people hid their faces, knelt, wept with a pleading-sound

—Look at it! she cried again with the drafts from behind her giving power to her voice. —*That* is what you shall fear! And as you see the end of things which may, which *may* come, search your hearts! Are your lives in order? Are you ready to die today? Oh, my dear ones, you make my heart burst, you fill it so

And then, above the groanings, Ariadne laughed; and she *pranced* right along the edge and my heart jumped. Theseus started: she laughed, sudden cold rills of it that raised hackles and shivered people all through the crowd. I couldn't believe the deft daring in her feet as people gaped, mewled, groaned as if she'd ripped our souls open with this striding wildly along the pebbled edge and no one could take eyes off her. It was The Offering at work here, and she was placing each of us on a throne

—Well, I don't know about you, my people, but I can read the signs. Especially that one! she said with a thumb's point back to the smoke. —What am I going to do then? Butcher my herds? Drown The Dead in blood? Say *No*? I'm like my mother. I'm a practical sort. I've taken some losses and I'm going to take some more, and

there's nothing I can do about it. Nothing, and everything! Will you come with me then, my family? Will you come with my Consort and me to new rites, to show The Powers we are still as brave as Europa's daughters and sons? Look at it, then—*And be free!* she cried once more in launching herself in a prance along the very edge, so that people screamed and pulled at their clothes, not least our mother, for the words about their differences turned to honor

—I free you this day from all restraint! Change any custom, kill any enemy, cut yourselves open till you bleed to death because you think that mountain is to punish you! For what? Can you say, any one of you? But if you become what you say you hate, *then* tremble! Me, I'm afraid of such Powers, and I'm too serious about that now to fear anything else! *Even you!*

And she lifted her palms out to us, standing still at last, her features flushed with this purge, her form as winning as that day she'd come ashore with Cleite's boat: Pasiphae was next to Cleite and crying for the growth of her spirit, a fair omen that mother might let go at last to such a Daughter. And now without another word or appeal Ariadne reached for King Theseus' hand: he actually raised his fist to his brow in the native Hail of her, and then took hers. The men behind him watched with fingers at their chins as the two of them strode down off the headland now, drawing layers of the crowd in a surge of *Oh-lo-lo* voices after them. It felt very good as some kind of new start, some purge for the self-blaming anger that could make for trouble and, as I looked beyond the crowd's exhilaration toward Dia Isle, I couldn't wait for my labors

—Whose service is proverbial perfect freedom, eh?

Cratus said crisply for a change, despite his drink-rheumy eyes

– Deucalion, I don't know how you handle it, said Yamo departing with Aithe into the crowd's descent.

– Better go, fellows, here comes the brotherhood of joy.

– Very impressive, gentlemen, pronounced Elphenor to our priests' group as he let several of his new associates file past us. – But she's so emotional, you know. I hate to prick a bubble, gentlemen, but when these emotions settle down you'll need something more to fill the sail, believe me. I mean, hard thinking, gentlemen, Elphenor said with a glint of a smile. – This sort of appeal has a place of course. But people are fickle as the sea. It's cold hard thought a man needs in responsible position. Don't you agree.

– For cold hard results, I suppose, Yamo said trying to be civil.

– We'll think about it, Sillus put in, and even Elphenor chuckled at that: his eyes ran across Aithe by Yamo's side, and then he comported himself down the slope to his waiting fellows

– How's this then? Sillus joked with his left eye shut and giving his temple a pensive scratch: he looked like a deranged eaglet, but by now the basilisk-eye at Aithe had sunk in, and she took hold of Cratus' arm as well

And so Ariadne began her new efforts, following this with processions to upland shrines to help people see and see beyond the mountain again; or she took them to the shore for long ablutions and chanted prayer, letting everybody show this Shape of Bull that they weren't too afraid, could offer themselves like royalty. Wafts of sulphur off the sea she simply answered with public burnings of dittany, spikenard: these new advisors had brought a

full pouch of counsels for her but she put them off, was closing The Circle on ourselves, fighting by making zealous progress in the good. And as news came that easterners here were getting a fair early harvest in we even heard them say the corn was *thick as the King's beard* this year. They'd try to accept him as she did, and while Cratus and Yamo saw grounds to rededicate themselves, Cleite hung on, hung on

One evening I was trying to lay out more of the plans for Dia Isle before my Queen and King in supper-hall: I estimated fitting no more than thirty ships safely there, King Theseus said *Do it* and then excused himself, with courtesy, to nature's call. Thus alone at table with Ariadne I told her some ways we might protect The Grove out there from profanation, too; and just then our mother—who had been dining lately with Phaedra's friends at the villa—arrived to see the Queen. She wanted to speak about Poseidon. No question she'd heard by now of the *damos'* audience

—No, stay Deucalion, this is fine the King's away a moment. But listen, mother bade us sitting down on my side of the table. —Just as you are overseeing some things, so should I in a more regular way. The important thing, as I've said all along my dear ones, is to keep Poseidon subordinate to Goddess, just like this Zeus and our own Dionysos before them. It's wonderful I can speak so in your presence and give no offense, my son. But I believe, Ariadne, if you were to formalize such an office, you'd have an easier time with these new gentlemen about. You could give this God's increasing devotees all the leeway they might demand. But the heart of the cult in my hands would be just the clear message people need to hear these days, about priorities. Don't you agree?

Strong magic it would make too against these waves, that threaten our ships. Now, allow me

— Mother, Ariadne began

But before she found the words, Theia appeared in the supper-hall doorway: Admiral Perides was back from Sicily.

— He's wounded. You'd better come, she said.

* * *

— Come here, boy, we tried to do what you told us. Do you know there are mountains just like Velkanos on Sicily? Why are *they* quiet? Oh my leg, don't let them touch it! Please just draw me a bath somebody. Bury me in my best tub, won't you boy? Stop, let me talk first, just the wine, wine!

Perides was fighting off attendant hands, pale and delirious with blood-loss, the head of a barbed arrow snapped off deep in his right thigh. As they cut away his bandage and I saw the sickening swollen colors of the wound that'd have to be opened, priestess Clio (whose room we were in, for her skills acquired in Egypt) did say the old fellow might not come through. So she left him to gulp wine while he talked, and left us to ready her knives, some purple looestrife and a yarrow-poultice. King Theseus arrived and stood by our mother with Ariadne: poor Perides' bulbous eyes wandered from accusatory anger to despair and simple agony

He couldn't understand why things went so badly — He'd taken extra caution to be diplomatic because of his oath to Ariadne's father. The men hadn't thought much of House orders, they'd wanted to kill a few more Sicilians for their tin-raiding and to give rest to dead

friends' souls; and Perides, feeling his grip on them less than what it should be, had beached his contingent's force on Malta this time and taken only one ship with him back to Kamikos. Ariadne wiped his face and praised the move. Perides gulped wine. Next he knew he'd stood in front of this King Kokalos' throne, a short hairy fellow of calm arrogance on a throne newly-gilded with sunflowers and solar fire-wheels. Sicilian priestesses, most of them very young and decked with more gold than the throne, had stood by Kokalos working counter-charms against Ariadne's faithfully-relayed words: Perides had added only that Kokalos, having botched his relations with Crete, could expect forced vassalage to Achaia anytime now, and—Kokalos had stopped him there and summoned in six senior artisans out of Pylos, all of them schooled in Cretan technique if not style by mainland masters. Kokalos said he was only trying to civilize his island and this was the next-best thing to having a woman like Iris in the shops. At least the Lion of Mykenai, he said, had no arrogant need to judge others' morals before he did what was only decent between great houses. That'd been all Perides could take. He repeated there'd be no more tin passing Sicily, and Kokalos would learn before long how the Lion treated for *his* needs

—Do you see now? We let him live, and he attacks us again! the Admiral shouted and King Theseus and Pasiphae shared a glance. A scout-ship had shadowed Perides' departure, and the following night—while he was still encamped at Malta appointing a half-dozen ships to sail west to our mining-colonies, as ordered—they'd been hit hard, with numbers, too. The same host of Sicilian regulars plus, this time, at least two hundred ragged little tribesmen who fought with slings

and stone spears and squawked like squirrels to each other, *very highly disorganized* Perides said laughing through his pain. And our marines had fought hard just to get out of there but these people didn't seem to care about losses so long as they saw *you* bleed and burn. We'd lost eight ships of his contingent's fifteen, more wounded coming home and the Sicilians took prisoners this time, too, mariners who'd be tortured for mines' locations in the west. And did we realize the *walls* little Kokalos was building out there? Perides wanted to hurt Ariadne and he told her the names of men killed, speaking The Dead right into her face, and I recognized some: Otus, the cross-eyed man with half a foot lost to sharks: Enyo, the one who'd survived a javelin through the chest, but not this time

—What kind of people put barbs on war-arrows! Perides shouted, weeping now, wrestling, drowning. —No! he cried. —Why did they come after us? I'll tell you, *girl*, it was mines second, this was a good swift kick for your sacred backside, that's why! Deucalion, appoint Pandaros in my place! Don't let them stop you! he breathed out hard, and then he fainted

—Better leave now. Knife. Put this cloth between his teeth, Clio told us getting started while she could. But Ariadne stayed to watch, to help, perhaps to mortify whatever *girl* still ached in her: out in the corridor my mother wiped her eyes and took my hand in her two, and giving Theseus a look of supportive kinship for maybe the first time, she asked me to render the King a fleet-accounting. I tried, still seeing the night of slaughter on Malta. Where there were gigantic shrines to Goddess and Daughter, people said, the stones each as big as a house and covered with spirals, womb-shaped tombs. What'd

happened to its people? What happens to them all. I couldn't get my mind in the traces! We'd fielded seventy-nine military ships at season's start: seventeen lost to Sicily left sixty-two: fifteen of those cruising off Rhodes with *Talos*, and maybe forty by now back with Crete's home-guard patrols. Which left all of seven here at Katsambas free to serve

— But you're not War Leader, I said. — That's not

— Oh? Then who is, you? Theseus answered my vanguard on Ariadne's powers. — It's a throne for new times, brother, you know that.

His very phrases sounded like other men's these days. Brother.

— The man's raising walls out there and alliances too, my mother said

— Deucalion, Theseus nodded. — Our realms are one now. This is crucial

— Yes and we're both going to see what the Queen has to say

— Fine then! And next year, some year, they'll come, do you hear me? And you'll be dead, and what will it mean? That you're better? Fine, because you'll be dead

His ferocious certainty withered my insides, Breath of the Ass: the blood-field had taught me I couldn't outdo him in that world. But the smells from Clio's work on Perides brought back the sight of my father's cold corpse and I said no more till Ariadne emerged. She said the arrowhead was out, but Perides was so palc, it didn't look good

— And now, mother, we need to finish our talk, Ariadne said. — Theseus, I hope you won't mind waiting for me, just awhile? Brother, council tomorrow. See to everything for Perides' men, in my name?

Theseus broke off our look, gave her a slow sigh, and left for his chambers: I did all I could organizing treatment and comforts for these twice-beaten and surely more resentful marines, and so I heard nothing of what passed between mother and daughter, Queen and King. But the morning showed enough. Because Pasiphae—before anything like the last crowd built up on the west court—announced from her villa's pillared porch that a plan for counterattack was in the works. I was asked rather than told about this, and by people who shook compliant heads. *War at last, sir; Ahh, She can bear no more now; She'll see we're her people, aye.* Ariadne summoned mother immediately to the throne room

—How could you do this, mother! All our talks, your confidence in me! Aren't they confused enough? How do I undo this promise? All my careful labor earning the trust I need to take them—I demand an answer, mother, and then you will go home, Ariadne said with her pointing-finger shaking on the air as she stood on the dais

—Because it's not working, Pasiphae told her with a deep breath under her voice's calm. —Daughter, like it and believe it or not, the ships are the proof of power now. If you don't use your strength, you lose it. Hate me then, I can bear that, but I won't stand by—Can you not ask yourself why you have to try so hard with so much ritual, why people *wait* for the blood-field every season's end? Why you have to terrify them with Velkanos? Because

—Because she won't let them stand up for themselves! said Theseus from the bench opposite the throne, mother turning to him in front of Ariadne. —If you aren't such a people anymore, he told them both, —the Lion won't hold himself bound for long by any marriage. Ariadne,

listen to me. Consider what Kokalos has done, and to how many Cretans now? To strike back will not mean the end of anybody's spiritual life. Burn his ships if not the city, now, and after that, with winter seas coming, he'll have no response. Then go in for the real kill first moon of the spring

—Attack Mykenai's ally, to preserve the mainland marriage? Something's wrong, I said, very uneasy—And again, we never had heard from our spies out of Aegina, first-rate salts who'd not have quit

—Oh, here's Overseer with his Admiralty sweats again, said Theseus

—Listen! Ariadne said now. —If we sent ships tomorrow, knowing he expects us and with his walls considered too—Forty ships, would you agree, Theseus? Deucalion, wait! But suppose we strike when he's *not* expecting it. Not now, and not next spring, but in the middle of winter. Little Summer tames down the seas for weeks at a time

—But that's brilliant, said Theseus with a peak of sudden delight in her brightening his face. —Yes, he'll have let down his guard by then. Yes

—And of course you'll lead the contingent. Being so experienced. And you won't need so many ships out of the home-guard, with such surprise, Ariadne continued, frustrating mother anew

—Ahh, Theseus smiled, getting up and turning half-way, nodding. —I see. Send King Theseus with just enough strength to die in battle. Then Crete's clear of me, and no ground for quarrel with the north. Now this is just mother-cunning

—Even now he won't believe me, Ariadne told Pasiphae, —that I want him to live. As if I'd send so many of our own to die, to kill you! Theseus, this was just to

suggest that we cannot fight a war overseas, and protect Crete too. And with Rhodes so unsettled

—Protect Crete from what! There *is* no blasted fleet up north, I say!

—This is finished, Pasiphae declared. —Daughter, I have tried, but we are not going to show the enemy weakness. There has to *be* a throne for us to protect together, my dear one, my dear one. But you all heard Perides. And it was my doing that Kokalos ever thought himself so grand. So we will do what is called for, and do it prudently. Little Summer it is. We agree on that.

—Thank you for coming, mother, Ariadne said suddenly stepping down very briskly toward myself and the throne room doors. —We'll keep you informed on our councils with other houses, of course, she added but without turning round to either one of them as she departed; and for the second time I saw King Theseus and mother share a look as she left us.

It's true, we should've known how quickly this nascent something would grow out of mutual need between him and Pasiphae. Grow it did. But in the first place, there was not one day that passed under the moon toward summer's end, which did not see Velkanos still belching smoke and sulphurous ash, so much that people wondered how there could be any mountain left before long. In the face of this, Ariadne half-exhausted herself keeping up her zealous (and now, challenged) ritual labors, exhorting our eastern towns the while to get in what crops they could as the ash fell ankle-deep wherever it reached us off the sea. These towns' skilled embassies sometimes wept in front of her, reporting the choked-off trees and the fear of a new catastrophe, and only her personal oaths (of grain, of ritual work) could mollify them. She

had Hippeus' runners going and coming in intense negotiation with Zakros and Phaestos, hoping to further prove herself as worthy of the throne as Pasiphae'd been, and to evoke against mother their houses' typical conservative wait-and-see about Sicily. But Perides, to everybody's surprise, grew rapidly better and as soon as he was hobbling with a cane he became another source of pressure for the response Ariadne was trying to change, or suppress. So between Velkanos, our clans, and the Admiralty—plus caring for Cleite as she could, and holding back Iris' less than subtle pressures—there was almost no time for Ariadne to try as she wished to with Theseus, to try to fulfill deeper meanings of the marriage in the name of the *damos*. The eyes of our women looked on from every station of our life and saw the King officiating with her at rites, at public audiences; and I know that within the House she tried all the tenderness and discreet encouragement she could, that he might accept the ancient limits on Crete's Consort, even arranging feasts meant to foster connections that might mature into trust. But for the immediate future amid these crises he'd be without much tenure on the throne: he lacked blood-cousins to speak people's own language for him, and he lacked the name *Minotauros*. Once Tukato'd officially forbidden any further processions in Poseidon's name there was little Theseus could do to assist Ariadne's agenda. So he looked for ways to show himself King. Elphenor and his new company knew how to help that; and it was they who built the bridge between him and our mother.

Now surely, Ariadne let her hear what voices of our women that she had not heard herself, and Pasiphae well-knew their gravity, and power. But that was just why Pasiphae grew more powerful in her own and people's

eyes for defying them: after nineteen years of being the center of the realm she must've seen herself still as *the* insider on every problem, the protectress of the brood. She couldn't let go now, there was some failing of her heart's faith that Ariadne's visions could bear us through. Pasiphae couldn't let go the future of all she'd built, and King Theseus wanted his first hold—And as days, a week, then more days passed now with sometimes no word at all between Labyrinth and mother's villa, it was the relatively amenable Elphenor whom Pasiphae would summon for word of developments. The new advisors off the ship from Mykenai which had promised Theseus' wedding-gift—their names were Teucer, Porthaon and Acraeus, all with gray in their neat beards—these men would go up to the villa with Elphenor, told by him that she'd been the Queen working all these long years for Achaia's welfare under Cretan power. And they impressed her, not just because they were erudite factotums culled from houses both sides of the mainland Isthmus, to ease the conjunction of the realms; but because they too had a vision. Like Elphenor they came of priestly clans, born administrators, improvers of our ciphers, agents of useful arts; but they were also what you might call the mystics behind a Shepherd of Athens' naked deeds. Always ready and able to convincingly ascribe a God's will to their scion's acts and achievements; to interpret the signs he prompted from living and turn them into meanings by which the young would be improved. And if they needed King Theseus as he (for his immortal name) needed them, Pasiphae seized on all their skills

It was through Phaedra, who still loved Ariadne more than she did the King, that we heard what was going on. These men, basing their talk of how to help Crete on the

sudden achievements of Achaian houses and the mistakes of old Egypt's, would explain the benefits of change in land-tenure, say, to get not only more exportable wealth in hand but more loyalty from nobles besides. It cost a Labyrinth nothing to promise to cipher people's names down as owners-by-reward of a given (more productive) piece of land. At the same time, commoners sharing it since Europa's days cared little for the claims on a piece of Cnossos clay. Let them stay so long as they worked, and they'd appreciate it more, too, if then the titled nobles *cleared* a good piece of that land to pasture horses rather than grow food. Thus one's nobles gained intimidating status on the land *as* they held loyal: Crete kept pace with new military times by way of chariotry, and such rigs themselves had a promising way of drawing young men toward the soldier's life. Fellows like Orneus would be there to prove that out. *This is the future*, these men said: *Look at our own barons' power, even their independence at times in business-ventures*—These were things a Nomia and a Virbius could hardly resist, with their inglorious trades in oak-moss and wine. And a Mestor just had to approve young men facing *life's hard business* as he had, in *his* young days

Pasiphae had to know how these things ran against the ages. But she'd left that quake-shattered part of the Labyrinth unmended for reasons, she could not rest with the danger she saw in Sicily. She needed some link beyond her brother Perides to put royal sanction on her intent. It clearly enraged her to see her throne's generous mothering turn against her and the anger helped her believe she could outrun the consequences. By the time I had a fair berth for thirty ships under way behind Dia Isle, by the time harvest first-fruits began to add their

hope to Ariadne's rituals, Pasiphae had been inviting King Theseus himself to her villa through several evenings. Ariadne, preoccupied, not wishing to limit him beyond custom, and trusting mother against extremes, blessed his going the first few times. Then, one night, he did not come back, and next morning Phaedra and nearly all the young women of grandmother's circles came down the royal road, and requested new duties at the Labyrinth

They told Ariadne that a bull from our own water meadows had been offered to Poseidon Earthshaker by mother and the King and certain men, that they'd announced some alliance-arrangement which, in Pasiphae's words, *would see to Crete's welfare as a new people, born of new Necessity*. That quite a crowd was building at the villa, returning soldiers, merchants, some nobles, people sick enough with Velkanos-fear to hear anybody out. And then Phaedra herself, aloud and before the throne, offered to kill King Theseus for what looked like betrayal and rebellion: Ariadne looked away, then tried to shame these words so much like an Orneus', but Yamo and Cratus and Theia (hearing this out along the chamber's benches) suggested we kill this Elphenor too. *And where will we stop? Has the mountain made us crazy?* Ariadne fought back, but then she looked at her hands in her lap and we all seemed to feel what'd happened up there. Mother taking on The God, not just a King or an Achaian: a God for Whose sons there *was* no fit limit on desire, making Him (for some) just what was needed to answer this world. Power, voluptuous, determined, fearless, past control

Cratus begged leave to summon Iris in, that the Queen might understand how this event had many roots. We heard him calming Iris down first out in the anteroom: I

feared for Icarus, too, still grieving my father, as I heard her stridency. And as Cratus brought her in he looked perturbed himself with some new development

— My Queen. Mistress, Iris began from a deep-breathing pause before the throne, her goatish features dark with Cretan resentment. — I know I have seemed at times to obstruct your will. I have tried to deal with this so as not to trouble yourself. But these beards, these men I should say, they talk and spread talk of deposing me. They want to see a new foreman for the Daedalaë. Let me admit their grounds. I will not force our staff to use this fast new potter's wheel they brought us. Vessels are more than the oil they hold for shipping, and I tell them, hasty production in lots will corrupt House styles, your very Images, Mistress. Also, I believe your King hates me because I've been slow completing his redecorations on our walls. But—Mistress, the truth is—like our sister Theia here has said to me, *I won't stand by silent* like Cleite while they run over our lives! I'm sorry, my darling, Iris told Cleite and nearly breaking down looking at her distractedness. — Forgive me Mistress, send me back to the White Mountains if you please. I have been harsh against your mother, but—Have you seen the sign somebody scratched on one of your north precinct walls last night? May I show you? Mistress, it's a *trident*. No lover of Goddess like our old Triptolemus would cut His sign into your House. This is their Poseidon, unfolding Himself from that cursed shrine we built Him years ago—And I'm sorry to speak against your mother's greatness, I helped her build it! But—Mistress! Iris cried clutching Ariadne's hand

Ariadne took that hand, and had Iris guide us outside, and sure enough there was the scratched-in trident, on a

House bastion near the royal road's mouth. *So much for keeping Him in trim, mother*, Ariadne said under her breath: yes, it was all blurring together under that sign, the moves for new status, for mercantile leeway, for force. What now? Ariadne walked up that road, alone, and it was like a sight of Inanna heading into the abyss, *If you do not open the door I will smash the entrance, I will break the lintel*—and later a few people came back with her, too, moved by her courage and the sorrow in her face. But we saw the anger burning in her eyes as she gave new orders now

Theia wanted her to break this hopeless marriage and throw the King cleanly out of the House, but Ariadne was sure this affair wouldn't last, because she was sending this day for soldiers from Phaestos and Zakros, to rout whatever this was at the villa. *This is to our shame*, she said, *but you may tell me what I have not tried*. As this shock was settling on the throne room she ordered the final clearing-out of mother's belongings, then turned to me and said we had advantage in the fleet, too: I was to arrange safe delivery of any condemned prisoners off the sea this year to the Labyrinth instead of directly to the blood-field. Perides must've told her what I'd tried to do there last year, though she didn't explain her intentions; and I was grieved to see her turn to something like our brother's strategy, *using bodies*. But she had so few choices

Ariadne turned back to the placation of Velkanos: her words to the crowds and her apparent toleration of rivalry won her almost as many proclaimed adherents from Cnossos as there were curious, scandalized others going up to hear this talk at mother's villa. But as we put out traditional announcement of the season's justice to be done, as we let the angry kin of marines and aggrieved in-

vestors know where to find the offenders this year, these people lent themselves mostly to mother's gatherings, for that was where they heard plans for massive action (as if Sicily were the source of island-raiders!). Many grew eager for it with the heady sight of so many soldiers back home now, bruised but newly determined. This in turn brought others to the Labyrinth to see what such developments might bring to pass, Cnossians, Tukato and clergy from the hills, Podes and Cordax up from shore. No troops arrived, though, only reports of councils concerning our situation: the very hesitancy Ariadne hoped for was applied far more to Cnossos than to foreign parts

Perides was nearly off his cane when some of the last ships put in with prisoners. There were sixteen this time, and six of those showed the brand that now meant death, lean-faced men with the usual motley of skin-colors, tongues and cuts of beard, stripped to their loincloths and led by connecting ropes to the Labyrinth's west court. Several were bleeding already from fists and missiles from the crowd along Amnisos Road. It was mid-afternoon with the end of summer's cool in the air and people from both Ariadne's devotions and the villa began to gather in clusters flanking the knelt-down prisoners: their voices themselves were like an overture of contest, phrases from chants about justice mixed with catcalls of doom in Trianda's avenging, Sicily's

We were appraising this from a supper-hall window when we saw our mother and King Theseus emerge, hand in hand, from the royal road, and mount up Labyrinth stairs to the west court. She had on her finest saffron bell-skirt and her silver tiara, all the symbols and paint and presence of her Queen's days, and he beside her wore a long Achaian-style kilt, but red-colored, red, a gold belt

and sword and a hefty necklace of gold-linked stones. Hand in hand! I even saw some Cnossos people of Ariadne's crowd make halfway-gestures of royal Hail; and behind their pair came Elphenor, Nomia and Virbius, other nobles of surrounding houses, the new advisors, Orneus, Theseus' loyal youths, Mestor and marines both wounded and well. We seemed to be somewhat outnumbered because they were here to claim foundations for a new world—And Perides whispered *Treason, Treason*, even as he grumbled about holding executions here

—Cleite, Ariadne said. —Cleite! We need you. Bring me the best sacrificial Labrys in the House. Deucalion, your sword, and have twenty House-guard follow behind when we go out. The rest of you come, we can't wait for soldiers. This is it, this is *it*

And heeding no questions Ariadne (in just her chaplet and the blue-chevroned bellskirt she had on) led us out the north entrance to the court: she herself bore out high the pure-silver Labrys Cleite'd brought her to rival mother's presence and, as we came out, those half-gestures of royal Hail completed themselves, led by Tukato, seconded by Amnisos people standing with Kudru and some artisans, Cnossians loyal to Labrys. But as Ariadne stopped between the west court altars twenty paces away from mother, and lowered the glinting axe-head and rolled its haft in her palms, twirling the blades, there was palpable separation amongst the people, staking their lives (for all they knew) on some settlement, but fearing to strike or suffer the first blow. And as Ariadne said *Well, Good day, mother!* I found myself facing the Shepherd anew, his eyes light as ever on me

—What blasphemy is this, said Pasiphae regarding the turning blades and the rank of knelt-down prisoners:

she did not like even their wonder-struck eyes upon her.

— We were coming ourselves in honor to speak with

— It's the blasphemy we've all been at for an age. You're both dressed strangely for coming here in honor of custom, mother. Was it only our father, a man, who knew how to let go? And you, King—Allow me to thank you for such long devoted effort at our mutual duty. We do not play at kingship here

— Stop that, Theseus ordered the men behind him who'd made mocking-sounds. — Ariadne, he said with his best respects, — the Lady Pasiphae knows what that office has to be. Some people say the whole world understands, except for you. But let's not talk before this scum of the sea. Give way to the Admiral's men, and have done.

— You all pray to Goddess, *Make me to know my deed*, do you not? she answered by addressing the crowd.

— Well, that is why I'm here today, to show you what you pray will stay overseas. Right here. From now on, let the blood of our greed fall plainly on this House, on the center of every life on this court. And as our custom dictates, Ariadne said with a breath and her eyes fixed back on Theseus, — let the King's blood run first of all

She was going to—what, fight him? He stared with only half a smile as the crowd both sides let loose a murmur of frightened amazement: even Theia was too stunned to come to her side

— This is your real world, Theseus. Once in private you told me to come down and meet it. Well, *here I am*

— Ariadne! our mother said, and we felt her life in that one word, her lost son and husband, her fight for power to protect unnumbered children. — Do not do this, daughter. Don't make us say

—Go and lie with your white bull, Pasiphae! Iris cried out unlooked-for from the window behind us, and she was dragging and holding Icarus to her side. —Do you see this boy, born of our ships on the sea? Do you want to fill Crete with *this*? Let go, Pasiphae! Iris demanded as Icarus gave her a wounded look. —You won't force this God on another Great Year

—Enough! Ariadne said lifting Labrys and clacking its haft on the stones. —Mother, acknowledge the throne here and now, or I won't answer

—*You* will defend your people as Necessity dictates, or be—You've made me say it, daughter, you will be de-throned, perhaps even exiled

—And—And which of you will see that! Ariadne answered out of a catch in her throat: she'd been pushed to an unthinkable implication and it cut the crowd like a dagger's stab. Where were the women's voices now? This had outrun anybody's vision—There was dreadful noise as many backed away, looked away as they could in the press of bodies, while others growled more angry than ashamed, seeing Pasiphae staggered by those words

—No, look! Ariadne told them strugglingly. —Look at these branded men! Why are they here again? Didn't their fellows' heads and their branding do any good? No, it brought hate and blood back thicker, and this has been poisoning our life for an age. And for what! Imported gemstones for your nostrils? So you want to learn from the mainland now, for your problems? A Thunder-God, endless raiding and vengeance, endless pain for every mother's son?

But it seemed too late: there rose a murmuring almost clearly against her, it was too much for such a young woman to ask after all, and in the shadow of Velkanos.

And now Ariadne's hardened features broke, she realized what she'd not have done if soldiers *had* come, and a kind of contempt took the hard look's place. She'd not wait to be told

— Very well! she said. — I freed you that day on the cliff, did I not? Then be free, as long as you live. But talk to *me* of dethronement and exile? she said now lifting Labrys and swinging it round, and around, moonwise till it hummed like a bull-roarer under her voice. — Goddess and Powers, I free myself before You! So take this, my people, take this and begin your new Crete with no curse from me, because it's already *in* you! Here then—Kill— and *dig your graves with this!*

And she turned round and hurled it against the white bastion of the Labyrinth so that all of us and the guards behind scattered as it flew; and the head of it struck stone with a dead clang, lightning-sparks too as it fell, broken off on one side. A host of voices cried out her name as she strode away for the southwest portico's entrance, but she didn't turn or answer, not even when all those who'd ducked and screamed fearing earthquake joined in—*Ariadne—No*

— But you can't! our mother called. — The marriage! Your own

— You marry him, mother! Ariadne raged, stopping so that now we saw the ruined visions in her face, dry as it was. — He's the perfection of their ways, is he not? You marry him! It is not my throne to defy the choices that *children* make.

And her whole body flinched, moved to go, but held for hope: there wasn't enough, though, murmurs roused by her flash of contempt rose up again, even some shouts of *Let her go*. The realities and fears in our midst were too

much, for all people's love of her: her heart was in no place to call upon The Offering; and there was too much old-blood pride here that this place had ruled the seas time out of mind, too much fear of what might come of following her. Still, I saw shame in many faces already, as the soul turned away in fear and selfishness from something; as the world, for that turn, dimmed. Cleite's and Iris' voices blent now in a wail, and the sound broke Ariadne, who wiped one eye and said *I am sorry*. And then she tried to take her leave again

—And you, Overseer? Tukato called out. —Are you going to leave us too? Who'll see to the new harbor and our protection

—He wants your ships in Sicily because there's a war-fleet building up north! I found myself bursting out, seeing little to lose anymore and pointing straight at Theseus. —But—Sicily *is* a threat, too! I don't know! I labored on like a fool, mother and Ariadne looking at me with worlds in their eyes. Suppose we'd all gone too far? I had only blankness in my mind's eye, could only look to our last stalemate

—What good can come of this? I tried. —All I see is strength and love of home that doesn't know what to do except bite its tail. I say, call a truce, at least till the harvest is in, and the rites done. Then we'll see, for Little Summer. The truth in wine—That's all I can say, I finished

Murmurs: some sighs for any relief: time, possibilities, labor of thought in every face

—We—can accept that, said Pasiphae, her eyelids beating waters back as she looked at Ariadne, stifling the motley of backers behind her

—And these condemned? said Perides. —Pardon is highly irregular

—Let Goddess decide! Phaedra said from the window, beside Iris

—A worthy suggestion, our mother said. —We can bend.

—Alright, Ariadne said after long pause. —Let her take the oracle.

And, to my amazement, almost none of the deliberately-come seekers of vengeance protested too strongly. Perhaps they wanted no more share of the unthinkable things so nearly done, nor the pollution of Cnossos' precincts on their hands: surely not with Velkanos already pouring poison into our midst. Phaedra, with something of Pasiphae's quickness, fetched a bronze bowl from the hall up there. She held it out and set the terms of its fall, and then with a call upon Goddess, cast it tumbling high. The prisoners weren't the only ones gritting their teeth as it struck the court stones: Ariadne won.

* * *

But in the days after that we moved among each other like different people. Dazed, half-unable to admit what'd almost happened. The truce did hold through the autumn equinox and rites of harvest, yet people both ends of the royal road would pause as they crossed the west court, as if seeing over again the past two years and what they'd come to, and they'd curse or cry, shake heads, scold the child. Some point in the loss of a world had been crossed and we tried to say that the one overseas had come home. But it was ourselves, regretting with our mouths what we let ourselves do with our bodies; and if we couldn't wake up to that, what unthinkable things were not just a matter of time?

Velkanos grew more frightening for awhile. There seemed no limit to the hurled-up ashy smoke, now a thick low-hanging pall along the northeastern rim of the world: Crete's coasts out that way saw their beaches buried with the pumice floating in. There were just enough people to manage whacking the ash from trees but no few fields were hopeless with it. Wells tasted bad and reports said that even breathing was an irritant in places. The change came, though, after a few most peculiar days when we saw balls of bluish light shooting up over the horizon where the mountain stood. These began just before the new Harvest Moon and looked as if the sea were trying to throw new stars into the sky, they shot up and winked out in mid-air or fell back in a weird blue-plasma glow without a sound. Crowds of us watched in silence from the hills. Then one morning we saw something like the ragged tail of the ash-cloud risen free from the point of its source in the distance, and two days' autumn wind lifted the whole vast pall slightly farther away. The lightening space between sea and sky said that Velkanos had stopped. And though people turned immediately to making quiet, bloodless forms of thank-offering, Crete mostly held its breath, not daring debate which faction's doings had brought this about. *Ah, when you're toothless in the shade like Cratus and me you'll tell these days to thrill children*, Perdix said.

We dared not celebrate. Yet I knew a quiet exaltation through these moons that was double for awhile despite all else, because Ariadne came back to me as a lover if not her king. For her (and the more patient women of the *damos*) any hope of this marriage would have to work itself out now, but she wasn't going to let Crete's Dionysos be forced underground, so to speak, as He'd been at Del-

phi. She did nothing to flaunt our affections, we just lived and ate and worked and slept (most nights) together as before and she seemed to revel in having a private life without public consequence in its detail. The undramatic reunion meant the more because it told me she thought of us as normal life, and I never asked about her time with the Shepherd. I did notice her resumption of chewing wild carrot, though: the world she saw just ahead promised little for a child. Right now she wanted a chosen companion rather than a king by compulsion of custom and it fed my soul whenever she turned to me. I was made for her, that's all. It was Little Summer—if we got one this year—that was going to decide worlds of things.

I worked hard on the fleet's winter disposition and there was no lack of help from both marines and merchants, for those crowds had heard the Overseer talk of a northern fleet as a surety. If you walked about three hours east toward Tyliossos and then turned dead-north for the sea (avoiding the coastal route past the bloodfield's bones) you'd find the new harbor within a great curve of rocky cliff: it was like the beaching-end of Dia, protected merely from the full brunt of weather or wave, but such was Crete's coast and a move much farther west would defeat the purpose. The people I worked with called it a good sight, though, thirty-odd ships drawn up to the head of this wild beach in good battle-ready order, tarped for the rains to come and with a guard-rotation set up on the clay in my hands. The other half of our ships nestled under Dia's lee, and I think Ariadne's very strictures about the Isle helped to win more men of the Admiralty to our side. This would've pleased our father and I loved to gaze back toward Juktas, feel him watching. The officers and young men liked that her stubbornness was

bending even as she threatened against profanation of The Grove out there: we were not to go *near* it or even leave the south cove where the ships lay. They wanted a place whose inviolability helped them hold onto Crete's own, and it was not my priestly idea to build a crude altar of rocks near the ships' prows and drift-lines. We worked flush with a fiery joy, the youth's elation when he finds he can put all his fierceness to the aims of honor and beauty

And as the autumn winds lifting Velkanos' pall made the sea a little wilder every day, our fifteen ships and the *Talos* beached, home from Rhodes with word of ash-covered seas out there. They'd had not a sight of anything like that *ptoliporthos*, seen no attempt to break the blockade, though Pandaros admitted to making a threatening pass or two near the Achaian station just to show that we had evil thoughts. Ariadne had won the season: we'd see what more the Lion without his rosehips and wine had to say come spring. Our Carian support out there, however, was respectfully withdrawing from the operation till further notice. Pandaros said it was because that young man Stheno of Trianda had gone with him, and joined a Carian crew with his warning-tale; but they'd got no share of the promised iron, besides, and they had their own coasts to look to. But if we'd need more ships off Rhodes to resume blockade in the spring, how would that affect the whole Sicily question? She kept negotiating for crucial backing from our aunts and uncles, but despite their threats at our father's funeral, well, they'd rushed us no soldiers, they had their ways of following matters here and saw no sufficient reason to put their sons in front of others' troubles. I told Ariadne that clearly they had great faith in her, that our strengths would rise to this, battling things through on our own. But it was precisely mother's

experience and comfort she missed now, and she looked for it with people near at hand

As she and mother conducted nearly separate public affairs, the honor of the truce and the subsiding of Velkanos kept things civil. Priestesses and lay devotees of the Labyrinth began to do wild things with their hair, to keep the seas wild all winter and the ships home, while Pasiphae's women like Nomia bound theirs up tight. A group of older women, mothers of the fields as they'd dubbed themselves, came before Ariadne with their seed-aprons freshly anointed with moonblood, and asked her to bless their walking of a vast seeding-circle round the whole central region of Crete between Ida and Dicte, to help next year's crop and add to our protections. Ariadne wasn't sure anymore about such spells, but lavished praise on these women and sent them off with a rite that attracted the town. Theirs was a world we knew: Poseidon the Shaker of Earth needed other kinds of help with matters-fruitful. A few days after Ariadne's rite mother's advisors at the villa invited everybody they could to a sea-side field, and they demonstrated a wooden contraption based on some method of farming in Egypt these days. It was an upright frame of olive-wood with a heavy bronze plough-blade and two curved-back wooden handlegrips, and between these was a tall stem with a funnel at the top through which you could drop seed neatly as you ploughed along. Thus, these gentlemen lilted, where before you had half the clan seeding one field a day (if that), now one person alone could do more than the same. And *that* meant people free for other work. And more production!

Not, of course, that Teucer, Elphenor, Acraeus, Porthaon cared for such work. But they wanted us to like

it. They were all so queer. Cursing the sun's heat but praising it in figures as Life-source and symbol: the merciless sun to which, if they died here, they wanted their corpses sent by funeral pyre. None of this clan-grave or womb-like burial jar Cretan custom. Something about the spirit freed from the sludge of nature, I think they said, rising to a supramaterial life kind of thing in the regions of imperishable Light, the halls of the sun. Or something. It tied up (they said) with why the father should be held higher, his relation to the child (they said) being virtually immaterial. On the way back to Cnossos they talked up nice baths for themselves, cool grapes served by a sweet young thing.

Cleite was still of the closest to Ariadne's heart. Majestic in Crete's name at Athens, then exhausted working with our guests; revived by a consent to mystery, then staggered to silence by events in the House, its broken linkages—Since Ariadne'd turned to her for Labrys Cleite had been trying, trying to keep her heart alive and to work in her Queen's interest, pressing her face to the flowers of our gardens and trying to rouse that wicked joy of hers in ritual. But if Cleite'd been finding her dear one Iris too militant now for the kind of comfort she needed, there was Tukato for her, who thought of himself as everybody's father in some way. He seemed to understand Cleite's depths and rises. I remember him showing around a ritual-plaque of stone he'd received from brother-priests up north, sent him as a kind of specimen and warning, and he shared it with Cleite: it bore an image of that northerners' God Apollo, once a patron of mouse-oracles, now with a wreath of daphne on his brow and a raying sun on the rise behind him as he sat on a—*Hatching the World-Egg!* Tukato laughed. *Divine male mother-*

hood, *Cleite, what can be next, I ask you!* She gave him more words than she'd spoken in weeks

—I fear the more absurd, the better, brother. Diamat and I went to watch this seeder-contraption, you know. Our new friends were describing for us how a woman is really like a field. Plough her as you please, you get no fruit till the man plants her, they say. She lies there, like the field, and bears what man sows. *Well sirs*, I told them. *In Crete you may meet one who won't just lie there*

—Wonderful! Tukato laughed with her. —Cleite, we must have more such speaking-back. Why don't you come join us up at The Cave of the Winds, we're having a quiet little children's sing at Archanes' town-thanksgiving about Velkanos. Good for the heart, Tukato nudged her, —with so many other moods about.

Cleite knew Tukato's respect for those others, Theia, Iris; but it was his own imposing yet fineboned stature, his gynandrous tranquility with dreadful strength underneath it that she needed these days, as so much world pulled apart. So she did go with him, and helping Cleite gave strength to Ariadne: we owed Tukato more than he'd own to himself

But this civil wrangling could not last and we knew it. The fear of what might happen next made everybody eager for the seven days' rites, eager to throw off the futility of *thinking* so that a resolution might come. And so when the wild summons broke forth and the drums and systums thundered up and down the valley, when the boughs were lifted by our priestesses and swung through the streets in raucous-spirited procession once again, yes, people wept for the glory of *the same old same* amid such anxiety, wept with joy to see the fat figs and pomegranates, the pears and quinces and lemons that'd

survived Velkanos' terror, they reveled in the strength of the priestesses between themselves and The Powers, in the throb of the Kouretes' drums. Obviously Mother and Daughter, though, let alone any Sacred Three, were not running in the hills together, Pasiphae had gone with Callista's Gelania and Ariadne remained in Cnossos with the procession this year, perhaps deciding (for her near-defeat on the court) that she needed to show a more cautious demeanor for awhile. Well and good—But it was Ariadne who tampered first with the spirit of the truce, in favor of calculation. In a public audience and healing held for sailors and marines she began to harangue the crowd to remember that trade-routes were not any part of Necessity, that it was not our young men's deaths we were to sanction with consent to the universal *doom* within harvest mysteries. For perhaps the first time I knew of, she offended even her clergy, with this appropriation of eternities. Yet our mother from her side did likewise soon enough, when she brought Bull into Cnossos for traditional sacrifice. It was great-hearted of her to bring Bull to the Labyrinth as in years before, but in His devouring she made the reverse of Ariadne's point, that this bloodshed-embraced, this Step Forward by *all* Crete's best men had made Crete mistress of the seas. Ariadne, I saw, held her own offense on her tongue now, but it boded badly because even clanspeople with sons already killed gave Pasiphae their praises. *Perhaps the more absurd the better*, Cleite'd said: a place, a construct, within which to abandon one's own will. Were we so desperate that the comfort of what was familiar could entail the wasting of one's family? But there it was, as plain as a trident on a wall, praise for this bloody intention overseas from people still cherishing sealstones sent by mother

The women who'd come to Ariadne were right. Maybe, just as we'd failed to keep the business of our two harbors separate these late years, so the blood of sacrifice and the blood that we shed on the sea began to seem one comfort in people's minds. Blood in answer to guilt, to fear—I only know that by the rites' third day many people including myself had found their ways to Archanes, where dedication-offerings of several young priests of Tukato's house (including the Rajkumar) were proceeding. All of us looking for some shade of the Cretan Offering's old glory, the peace with The Dead which only that could bestow upon the land. Iris and Icarus were there: mother and her day's troupe descended on the place. And people chanted and held hands in circles round the altar as Tukato and sisters of The Mare led the young men down from The Cave of the Winds, trembling, all of them, the beauty of Archanes' hills red and golden with the fading of the vineleaves, the long-lashed ponies of the herd trotting up and down their paddocks: Razorclam had been holding his shaved head as high as the Cretans' around him, he couldn't have looked more determined this time, as one by one the initiates lifted the flint-knife from Leukippe's altar and danced, slashed themselves into that world where The Powers made prodigious feats possible. The din of the flutes and drums and cymbals, the smoky scents on the air, the clapping and the rhythm of the bodies of kin all around—These initiates took you half-way into that other world as you watched and prayed with them; and then, as with Minotauros' Offering, you learned the size of *your* life's pains as they stretched forth their genitals and laid the knife to them, tearing and showing and shaking their courage and love on all of us, till they crumpled at the altar. Blinding agony, transport,

union with the sentient land, *I bleed from the thighs now, like woman*: only One Who Stepped Forward gave more. But with the gore and the irreversible wound before his eyes now, the Rajkumar fainted, and when revived, he broke away from Tukato's arms and ran into the woods, more self-judged than ever. A trance of hundreds was broken, and Pasiphae, notorious welcomer of strangers for a generation, seized on this as an emblem, a foreign cowardice Crete must not accept. That brought Iris (never much a friend of foreigners) to a reversal of her own, and *We'll find a way to stop you!* she warned our mother before the crowds. This in the heart of Archanes' hallowed hills—Without Tukato's presence it might've been blows and blasphemous blood right there

Something had to be done, and I tried what The Powers put in my hands. Next day, that is, quite without any ideas, I was at Amnisos with some young men just riding the surf, soaking up its booming autumn energies. A small boy with us named Elaphios—he tired more easily than his fellows and had a delicate blue color always in his lips and cheeks—he tried, as such boys will, to be brave as the rest and he swam out too far, so that a wave breaking over him lost him to us and, for all we could tell, he'd been dragged out to sea. His family were frantic up and down the beach and it looked hopeless with all that thundering wash and rip-tide. But as I offered my boat's help, and realized how useless it was without sails and oars—Well, so was a warship, so was a fleet! If I could hide away every possible sail and oar, just till Little Summer had come and gone, there'd be no way to force Ariadne's hand. It was like drunkenness without wine, a share of grief for the boy while my heart beat to try what he'd shown me

I couldn't do it alone, though, and this was where my father's counsel on the fleet repaid attention. I found Cordax and Podes who, besides our long friendship, saw their interest in helping because they lived where any raider's foot would fall first: besides keeping ships home, neither of them minded helping to *dismast* this Shepherd in the bargain, as Podes put it. They did doubt we'd either finish or get away with this, but they fetched tools and we headed west for the new harbor

The few people we met were too inebriated to think much of our passing with shovels and things, but the new harbor's guards were as sober as skypriests and had to be cajolingly dismissed, on my House authority, to go join the rites. Then I brought my two helpers down from hiding and we immediately despaired at the job's enormity. Still, we had days to work with: we pulled nearly a thousand oars and thirty sails from beneath the ships' tight-lashed tarps, spent one whole day digging a pit about a half-mile inland and burying everything, then had to rest as well as cover every trace of ourselves on the ships and on the soil. That still left the thirty ships lying up off Dia: so we waited nightfall to fetch my sail and oars from Iris' workbay, and slipped away out to the Isle. My boat almost capsized twice on those waves, and then there was the entire job to do over again, worse because we had to shuttle back and forth to each moored vessel. With these seas themselves doing guard-duty we had no trouble getting rid of other men. But we saw how easily on this grassy little Isle any digging would be spotted before even spring growth could help the cause. Maybe plants did always win, but for a man—I thought of The Grove. We could store all this gear within The Grove in the Name of that One we meant to serve. We argued this and the three

of us shared the same near-sickness of dread of profanation, especially with war-gear in under those boughs, where the corn-dollies hung. I didn't want even to see those things, they chilled and appalled me like nearness of moonblood. But we saw that such feelings were just what kept people away. This need only work till it was too late. So they brought me the gear, and as priest I did the work within The Grove. It was near dawn of the rites' seventh day when we finished. Our bodies ached like old men's, and such weariness convinced our hearts that we'd dishonored the truce. But there seemed a further defeat in saying that it was a different world now. That was what we'd come here to oppose. As we waited for dark to row ourselves back I told over Kret's tale: it helped to think there was room yet for that kind of warrior. We got the boat back in though the surf nearly smashed us to pieces, and I reminded these brothers that I was going to forget their service to the Queen

—If it works out well you can tell everybody we helped, Podes smiled as he rubbed cousin Cordax's shoulders. And so having rested, and put my boat back in place, we let ourselves be drawn by the scent of roasting mutton among Amnisos' houses. And Elaphios was there! The drowned boy just sitting there eating off a spit at the family's table under the trees, with a blithe elfin smile at my exclamations. He said the current had swept him down the coast half-way to Mallia before it threw him back toward land: he'd floated fine once he'd given up struggling, and *Somebody bring our guests meat!* he ordered, enjoying his back-from-the-underworld status while he could

I took this for a sign of how things could turn when hope had faltered. And I shared it—though not this deed

with the ships—with Ariadne: it seemed best to let no calm smiles rouse curiosities

So the season moved on, uneasily toward the heart of long-nighted winter. Stupendous thunderstorms descended out of our mountains and soaked and scoured the lowlands of ash and pumice, even as their lightnings cracked with a sound like oak trees splitting crown to root, as the thunder shook the House till pillars and floors trembled and we feared Velkanos again. Whole fields began to fill with waist-high oceans of yellow daisycousins, like a dream to wade through with snow on the peaks around you, the strawberry tree nearing flower and bunch-narcissus, the roar of the wild blue sea. But as troops of youths began to be seen heading out to the olive groves for that harvest with the long branch-hitting poles to their shoulders, Theseus (we heard) began to press for what we'd once called blade practice, and he had our mother's authoritative name to bring those harvesters down to prepare for Little Summer. In response, Ariadne and I asked Perides to renew his oath to us. He was Pasiphae's brother but I think he'd have served wherever he most saw our father's spirit, his own heart's refuge as a man of war; and he found it most in Ariadne. Years of violent duty had infused his piety with sentiment, the way mariners as they aged dreamed the more of Happy Isles; and though he'd raged against what he'd called her naivete amid such a world, the Admiral's healing-time had made him rethink some things. He was an old-blood Cretan, and for him there was little worth fighting for in a world without something of such a young Queen. At Ariadne's request he counseled Theseus and his share of the fleet's men to wait for the blossom of the almond trees for drill, which most men were willing to do, if not their Shepherd. And

while Perides convinced us that Glaucus would have to regain Crete's Carian help around Rhodes come spring, Ariadne worked on hopes of her own concerning mother.

She invited Pasiphae down to the Labyrinth just to look over crated works that had been coming in from other houses' workshops; and though Theseus came along and trouble nearly started, this afternoon by a warm brazier in the supper-hall was the last time I saw Pasiphae and Ariadne together as they wished to be, simply feeding each other leisurely bites of honeyed fig and watching Kudru lift the wonders from the crates. Tiny libation-vessels of rock crystal with beaded handles of green malachite, big-bellied vases swirled with the natural colors of the stone, pendants of granulated gold or with filigree fine as a baby's hair: Iris' conspicuous absence at such a presentation didn't seem to offend our mother too much, she took a bite from the sweet Ariadne proffered and a gooey tendril of honey stretched between her lip and Ariadne's hand. Their fingers caught it and they laughed licking up the remnants, touching, letting things go between them, fearful, hungry for each other's eyes. *Taste. No, it's your bite. Just this one.* Mother relented, and nibbled Ariadne's fingers clean

—Don't you like it, Theseus? Ariadne asked as the Shepherd handed one of the last pieces, a small vase of black steatite, back to Kudru, and folded his arms along the table with a shrug

I took it and turned it in my hands, *Turn it and watch*, Kudru said. A long-locked foreman in a quilted jerkin led home a double-rank of strong young hands in kilts and caps, all of them highstepping and shouting song as they followed with olive-poles bouncing on their shoulders. Halfway back along the ranks another man shook a sys-

trum and a second group pressed on behind him, keeping time, free hands on their fellows' shoulders, mouths wide with a tune at the top of their lungs—and there a buck-toothed yeoman had stumbled in formation, you could see the down-forward-flop of his fall and the fellows in front of him turning to laugh

—All as drunk as a fish in a wineskin no doubt, said Theseus

—Oh, come now sir, Kudru cajoled, —can't you just see it? There's your artisan moping on a stump by the road at dusk, and she can't think what to do with this next piece. Thinking and thinking, hmm, blast it, and then this annoying racket comes by up the road. And then it happens! And she runs home for the toolbox, and here you are. The *sensuousness*, the affection

—You're all quick when the work suits you, Theseus said as Ariadne sat back, half-nestled into mother's chair and side. —I'm more interested in now these things play into your fleet's—into our fleet's setbacks this year. I think it's men's pride, not their skill. Look at Egypt. Don't roll your eyes too soon, Ariadne, I regret your friend's death too. But like it or not, Tutmoses is the greatest leader they ever fielded, and I know, because back home we used to thrill for news of him. You see, because his artisans serve him as they should, he knows that he can fall and yet not fall, every time he leads the vanguard into battle. Why? Because his name and his people's deeds will burn the brighter for that risk, because of the images. They take a man past time, and what's worth fighting and dying for here, like that? Not so much as a stone set up in honor of all your marines lost at sea. Nothing a young man can push himself for

—Puh!

—Deucalion, let me speak. War, ladies, shows forth a man. There's no touching that one moment that strikes the truth out of you about yourself. I can't explain it, it needs a bard, an artisan, and that's my very point.

—I think my mother has been good for you, Ariadne said. —But—Don't take me wrongly, Theseus, but that moment of your own in front of Bull. Is that *the truth* of you? I suspect that a long, quiet, normal life tells more about a person. **There's** something magnificent about a man who dares to saunter downstairs and ask for a loaf and a pot of honey. Do you remember that wonderful song, mother? Gilgamesh finds himself before Goddess after all his questing for life-eternal. And *Go home*, She says to **him**, *Go home, Gilgamesh, and enjoy life's goodness while you can, your lady, children*

—*Make each day a festival*, yes it is pretty, Theseus said. —But I know the story too, and he did find what he was after. So it exists. Even if a serpent stole it away

—We should be going, I'm afraid, Pasiphae's prudence decided, and she reached for Ariadne's hands as she rose: they smiled; and then mother's face grew grave. *Somebody has to*, it said.

—Thank you for coming, Kudru said, as a gray drizzle hissed outside.

When they were gone, when she was sure they were well-gone, Ariadne seized the rock-crystal piece from the table and she smashed it against the north wall.

The secret of the ships was clearly worlds away from what she wanted. But we each of us held on, and the almond trees budded out white as the mountainsides, and Little Summer did come. Sweet green grass as thick as the rains began to heal the harvest-ravaged farms around us, Diamat and Perdix said it was an extraordinary year

for certain herbs, enormous winter roses bloomed in amber and red, even lizards turned themselves out for the sudden sunshine. The sea a mirror. After three days' such weather the challenge came down to the Labyrinth—meaning that parties of men were marching westward to tool up half the fleet against Sicily, and by the time men and ships were ready this respite of winter should prove itself sufficient for operations. Now that she (and only she) knew what I'd done, Ariadne's Labyrinth simply waited for the outcry of discovery and doubled the House-guard in number and readiness for trouble. They were sharp for a chance to redeem themselves for our father. In the afternoon we heard that Theseus himself had gone from the villa to the ships. And then Podes showed up from Amnisos, with more than a message for me

A good month ago he'd taken some boys after rabbit toward the west, in order to check our work and deal with any last signs of trail. All looked good, and Podes had even managed to toss some corn-poppy seed round our spot. *Sure these rains have helped us too*, he said. These things, which would cost him so later, this good man whispered me; but there were three ships from Mykenai at the harbor right now, he then announced, and something monstrous-big was lashed to one of their decks. He'd been sent to ask Cnossos' royal ones to grace the presentation of this gift to the Shepherd of Athens

Pasiphae joined our party for the walk, and cordially greeted her former House-guard marching behind us with helmets and javelins bright in the sun. Very little to say to ourselves: she must've heard what had called out Theseus. He was there at Amnisos ahead of us now with his loyal youths and more, and mother stepped directly down beach to join him. There were two black warships

with unsettling eyes painted on their prows and a stouter merchanter between them, hauled up on the sand with its tarp-covered gift nearly half as high as the mast. Theseus, with Elphenor, Teucer, Orneus near his sides, was in animated chat with the ships' captains and embassies from Mykenai: that itself made a kind of poison of fear run through my veins as I saw, too, the Lion-heraldry on those ships' warriors' shields. In their bright-plumed helmets, leather corselets and greaves these bearded young men looked any Carian's match, standing straight as their polished ash-spears, whose heads caught sun as only new ones did. The Lion had copper of his own, but there was some of our tin, no doubt. These were the *men* Theseus wanted and lived for. Companions. Perides barked our men into crescent-formation along the beach and without orders they beat on their bullhide shields, a quick three-times-three and then a shout, deep and crisp. That felt good, but Lion, Bull, this seemed a fulfillment of that sealstone in Dicte Cave, and the clear sky and stillness and our own sheltered ships to the north had lost some of their reassuring power

Theseus' eyes said he knew what we'd done. Yet he let himself enjoy the sonorous formalities, surrounded with his kind. Almost jovial he was, no longer the hostile crude captive but a smooth well-dressed Cretan with an imposing Lady near him—If only it'd been a matter of his need to be free, to be his own man and yet belong! This thing beneath the tarp was one more sign that they would not leave *us* alone.

A fair crowd began to gather from the inland roads, even a few Callistans, though these had come down to take a needleboat home this day and see if their city was still above ground. The Achaians' chief embassy then

pulled the tarp from the gift and the whole formation of their men gave their shields eight practiced beats: it was a burly statue, unmistakably Poseidon, in ash-wood polished to dark honey, the shaggy head painted sea-blue and streaked with fixed-on locks of gold. The high uncommunicative face looked out on Crete through ivory eyes, with pupils of lapis: it stood naked as a stallion with right foot slightly forward, in its right grip a tall trident of ash with three gold prongs leaning forward with the step. And from its outstretched left hand hung what looked like this God's great gift to men, or so legends said, a bridle, studded and bitted with more gold

You could hear the sea breathing. *He followed us!* one of the Callistan men not far from us gasped to a friend. Almost no one could find their tongue beneath the gaze of this thing, the largest statue we'd ever seen: this was not an image like Apollo's on his egg that you could ridicule power from. It took more than half these Achaians to offload, and to get it secured upright on an ox-drawn cart: the chief embassy spoke some things about the goodwill fostering Crete's and the mainland's conjoinment, and then Ariadne, with a swallow, took herself down to them and offered these embassies and crews hospitality. Mother had already done so. And Theseus, for that earlier quick look of knowledge, was quite civil with her but explained that these ships were putting out almost immediately for home: those were orders, and who really knew how long the sea might lie so quiet. Cretans raised eyebrows at such needless haste, but the dauntless seamanship impressed them

—Now you see what I was talking about, Theseus smiled to us

—Tarp it over before it moves inland, gentlemen, Ari-

adne told Cratus and our priests. — And where, mother, do you propose to—put this?

— We won't let it taint you, oh keeper of sacred truce-words. People! Theseus shouted past her now. — Don't be afraid! He brings us strength, and blessing! Come near!

— He's too tall for my house, Pasiphae said, — and weather will ruin Him, or somebody might

— Some vandal might harm it, like the one who scratched that sign on my walls, yes, said Ariadne. — Well, as I hear you worship it yourself now

— I ask you for a simple, personal favor! mother snapped, and Ariadne lowered her eyes: so did the many around us, mariners, clergy, all

— Very well. So long as there is no ritual before you can—arrange some place for it. And your *people* take it back

— How gracious. Now, daughter, you will return the equipment that

— Come and see me tomorrow about it, mother. Or the day after.

And Ariadne excused herself with a bitter glint of eye toward her former king, whose brothers had lavished such care on his wedding's honor. Mother would say no more this moment, but for people back down-beach it was otherwise, and Ariadne sent me back. Cratus and Yamo were forcing the tarp down over the statue as ordered, but the Shepherd's advisors protested against superstitious fear. *Say what you like to hear*, Cratus told them: he knew as Ariadne did that the sight of this rolling up Amnisos Road would be trouble, an unmistakable sign of that same triumphant transformation the Shepherd had made

Still, on it came, huge and rumbling along in its blue shroud. For all their cautious silence the people of mother's and Theseus' faction stayed with the wagon in a kind of procession, some of their share of marines forming an honor-guard and others heading back out to resume the search for gear. And seeing this, and the protective signs being worked by the indignant hands of Theia and other sisters with us, worried people along the road (some of ours, some of *no* side) begged Ariadne not to let it in, covered their faces, tore shawls, dragged children away, and even a clod of earth or two struck the tarp as if one huge captured raider were underneath. Everything was under better control than people might guess, Ariadne said all she could: she reminded them that those black ships leaving port now were *our* ships, allies, *Don't you see, now your sons can stay home*. And then Iris burst through the ranks along the road before Ariadne, Icarus' hand in hers: he was holding a lump of earth

— You know this is planned! Iris protested as we walked. — Everywhere He goes it's trouble, He'll make us fight ourselves! Burn it, Ariadne, you can't think now that anybody can control Him

— Who says you have to worship? came a voice like Nomia's from behind Pasiphae. — You're the one sowing confusion, Iris! said another. — Burn it? — Professional jealousy?

— You should spend less time with this Icarus, you sound so annoyingly alike these days, my mother deigned to say at last, and Iris would not even take the hand Ariadne offered in recompense

— Get a hold on *yourself*, woman, Elphenor advised

— I have one thing to say to you, Iris, the Shepherd

put in with finality. — If you don't like it, do something about it. Do you understand what I'm saying to you?

His blue eyes pierced her near-black ones: there it was: He was come, and only something to overmatch Him might turn the spiral again our way. Heads back of Theseus nodded like a rank of Delphi priests. He was stymied for now without sails, but those hours with mainland men had fed his soul. Iris tore herself away from us with a sweeping glare and shoved past roadside people, dragging the boy in his winged cape, who tossed the clod at the tarp as he left with her and heard the advisors' chuckle. My son. Unable to bear the separations forced upon him, full of rage at his own humiliating need, finding no Voices, no comfort in his own numbing rites of silence—Rejected, used, alive at all against most of his own will, he was hunting something more than an animal now, to make it all up

It was our last glimpse of the two of them, that ripping-away, that glare: that and much else would weigh against Iris when the accusations rose. I don't know the truth but I don't believe it was in Iris, any willing part in what Icarus did that night. Only he with his branded brain could've crossed such a line. But she must've felt she'd had a part in it, known how bad it looked for her, how in a way she'd guided Icarus' mind toward whom to blame and who had to be stopped. Guided his hand toward the realm's one unforgivable act. Only Iris' taking up the blame would explain why she flew with him, leader of the Daedalaë, to the house she'd wanted least to serve but needed most as a refuge

That night our mother came down the royal road, alone, to the Labyrinth: she wanted to talk with Ariadne but was asked to come back next day, a standing order to

drain away Little Summer's options. But the guards did let Pasiphae go down past the workshops to a hall in the northeast wing where orders were expedited and, for now, the statue was stored: she thought she'd just check on its proper disposition, and less than an hour after the guards' last sight of her, there was a shout of *Fire! Fire!* through the House

It was the statue. Somebody had torn off the tarp and doused it head to foot with oil and it was burning, rippling with flame as we pushed through the smoke-choked corridor and in. Just to start doing something we had to throw open the outer porch doors and we saw that the ceiling-beams had started to catch: Yamo used a chair to shove the statue over and then we tore old weavings off the walls to smother the flames. I was up on a crate killing flickers along the ceiling-beams when Cleite screamed from the smoky other end of the hall, and then everybody was screaming

My mother lay on her back in the far corner, in a wide ellipse of what looked like red silk. White, still, eyes stark-open, her mouth a rictus above the wound ear-to-ear, her arms splayed and her right hand clutching something despite her hacked-at fingers: mother

Cleite fell to the floor and struck her skull. The smoke was thickening again but we coughed no more than we breathed, we couldn't seem to move till Yamo did, turning to deal with the kindling statue

—Let it burn! I said and the words loosed me, and I began to smash things, I broke a chair with six or seven slams, hurled crocks, whatever came to hand. Let it all be waste. Cratus and others managed to bear Cleite out but I knew mother was gone, I dared not stop even by the time the uproar reached Ariadne, and she saw

—Stop it Deucalion! Oh please tell me it's not—Not you, Not *you*

I could find nothing more, and beat my fists at my temples while the statue burned, and its smoke obscured vision. Burn, burn: Yamo told her what he could; and then I heard her, a soft moan pouring forth as Ariadne sank down on her knees.

III

The Offering

6

End of the World

She was sitting on a rock beside the sea, comfortably seated on the side of her hip with her feet tucked up beneath bright saffron flounces: she looked both casual and enthroned on an old pocked rock beside the waters. Her skin glistened dark with oil as she basked with her back to the sun, strands of carnelian sparkled in her hair, and now and then she turned her chin and lifted her closed eyes up to the light, leaning on one splayed palm, her other hand in her lap beneath bared breasts. The light was caressing her. She was the young Queen. She was my mother. This was the first I could remember of us together, not my mouth on her nipple in the quiet gloom of the nursery, nor even how we got to the shore that day. It was as if we both just came into being beside the ocean. She basked there in stately ease, and looking up at her (I was squatting along the shingle naked, finding her rocks and shells, always sure where she was) it seemed that the day's white glare came from within her: it hurt my eyes to fully look at her: she was the Queen, so big; and the blue alive ocean beside us was bigger, bigger than anything, shining too, but it only lapped and lapped close by her tucked-up feet among the priestesses. It worshiped her, like the people when she rose up out of the great stairs

onto the court, or sat in power on the throne with the nine waves of the sea in its shape, enfolding her. And the throne looked like the lap of a mountain; and here she looked like a saffron flower taking sunshine. Sea-waves, mountains, flowers, all shapes were within her and returned to her, belonged to her. Even the monstrous bulls who lived in the mountain woods and our royal meadows, nodding their heads down beneath her hand when she softly sang the prayer. Oh, yes, bulls and the ocean could be very dangerous, but with her they were calm and nodded their heads down, lapped her hand

It was an easy day in the moon when the willow trees greened and we'd come down here by the sea so all the people could see mother and her new one. I was finding her pretty things, strange melds of rocks in all shapes and colors, shells I laid by her feet one by one and the priestesses taught their names. They knew enormous words like *periodic oscillation* but mother wanted to hear me say *auger*. Say *spindle*, say *turrid* and *whelk*, say *triton* and *turban*, *murex* and *moon*. Could I find her a cowrie? What about a cowrie?

—Look under the seaweed, Lusus, she said: my milk-name

The seaweed lay salt-smelly green, damp and tangled in heaps where the waves stopped, greasy with bubbles in a green scum. It had a smell like the rooms in our House where mother and the priestesses balmed and took care of The Dead people, a smell like the edge of that awful other world that clung to the handlers of the bones. *The Earth that fed you now will eat you*, they sang for the people embalmed in the great jars and for the families, and they fed everybody magic seeds and The Lady Within The Seed passed through their very bodies. Everybody

ate everybody: I was a fish, they said, before I came out Lusus from under mother's skirts; and before that, maybe a butterfly, that got eaten by a mantis that got eaten by a frog by a snake by an eagle that fell from the sky and fed the grain, where The Lady and The Seed came from. So it was alright if something under the seaweed jumped and ate you. You'd come around, because of The Circle. Smell? That was why they called it the smell of past lives: it was alright, so I lifted and looked where she said

How did she know it was there? How did she know? It was their Mystery. Goddess left it there Herself, she said, it was a pretty thing She left us, just sauntering by, just going along: like the Moon She knew everything and that was why everybody raised their palms to bless her, hers the most wonderful shape to be, Woman. This time Goddess had given me a snake instead of a cowrie like Ariadne; but a snake could do things too: it could change and stand up funny when she washed it or, sometimes, just when she was near. See her: up it goes: how was that? Her power; and when I brought her the cowrie it made her eyebrows and lips go up, like my snake

— Uh-oh! she sang. — Look Lusus, I think somebody's in it!

Who? Somebody: a tiny row of tawny claws inside

— But I *want* it, I whined, and her eyebrows and lips fell then, like the people's in the awful rooms. Maybe only the empty shells had the power to make her body do things, as she could mine without even trying: I wanted to take out the somebody

— But this is his house, see? she said. — Oh dear, look, he's afraid! He needs a house to live in, like we do. It's the nicer thing to put him back, Lusus, she suggested, watchfully. So I whined, and put him back. And that

made her face go up, and all the priestesses'! Mother called me up to her lap then, and the women cooed. It was better, it was the nicer thing to stay inside The Circle. How big and warm and round she was, big as the sea and warm like the good warm barley-bread that brother and I brought Ariadne. There was death in the bread, too, the ashy savor of the chopped-off grain, but The Seed was there, and The Lady; and *Holy, Holy, Holy* the House sang, sustaining our Sustainer

And now as I helped Diamat and Perdix and Cleite collect mother's things, under truce with the villa, it made my eyes burn in their sockets to see the rubble of her regnancy, her flounced kilts and high tiara, pyxes and censers, clay tablets and gilded ostrich eggs, the plant-hanger from Callista. Over. Finished. I looked a long time at a cone of tiny multicolored sea urchin shells her hand had stacked by size in some musing moment: I did not know why they held me, what I was brooding: her vast graciousness maybe, She Who Shines For All. She'd certainly lived the name. She'd seen before anyone the need for a try at a mainland marriage, and gave and gave to Achaia's merchants and barons to help them grow into something worthy a Cretan mistress, while our own less daring people including myself had tasked her for it: she shone for all. And even as her pupils took and took from her to rise in the world, they smiled about her cuckolded Consort, who seemed not to understand what her offices made her in their eyes. Giants built their citadels. She was the giant, Mother Kriti, Strong One, and she was too big for them. She'd made her mistakes. Giving those long-gone scribal students a touch of her own high style which they'd refined into contemptuous nicknames; but that went to show they did not know how to take from

her, they had their own way of taking, and wasn't it strange, was it not curious the well-counseled rivals we faced now, everywhere those scribes had migrated. What men said of her later was what they needed to hear, for their own having needed so much from her. Oh, you could see them, just rubbing their hands together to help bring down the whore

The four of us passed back toward the Labyrinth along the royal road, a paltry procession retrieving mother's things, the faces innumerable before the houses both sides of us, and silent. Warblers and goldcrests and buntings hopped and babbled ever-on from the rooftops and trees, lively with the Little Summer weather holding mild and warm, and we seemed to feel none of it. Faces of people from both factions, and from neither, stood still in a kind of blank terror for the unforgivable thing perpetrated in our midst: no one was going to touch us as we carried out this merest formality, not even myself as the execrable one who'd hidden the fleet's gear, for if any shade ever had power to come back it would be Pasiphae. Theseus and the core of his company had cleared out for the morning in their kind of deference, gone to resume their search. It was, perhaps, a hunter's way of honoring the great lady's wishes. I myself had already sworn to drill a home-guard of marines for spring deployment along our coasts: overnight I'd lost any faith that spring would bring peace. Mother! *Let's have it out, then*—I wanted an end to our shame for the world slipping through our fingers, an end to the downcast eyes like these as we walked: how pale we'd grown after last Midsummer night along these stones, the smoking torches and music and her dance! Raucous arousal of our souls reduced to these wooden casks, these things in our hands

Diamat had scoured fashion's paints from her face and made herself ghastly with streaks of white ash, her clothes the worst ripped rags she could find. Cleite—Most of Cleite's hair had turned gray in this one night. There was a livid bruise the size of a fig above her left eye and still she'd fought her way up and down this road, without a word, to perform this for mother. Her Iris gone, too, her sweet one, her goat-eyed darling born of our White Mountains' watery light: to what brightness could Cleite reach for comfort now, Iris' gryphon-glance beneath her cropped-feather headband stolen from Cleite by blind events, her lover a pariah now, perhaps a criminal. And Perdix at sunrise had smashed open her partridge-coops and told them all to fly, fly, to give their lives to someplace better; and that was when the wailing had begun from the crests of the valley's hillsides, the sight of the old Queen's soul rising up with the flock and then their scattering, like the start of a new doom's vigil. As we climbed the road into Labyrinth precincts we heard the cries more clearly, harsher than the last time bewailing Velkanos, and the same broken animal sounds grew audible from the House, too, the central court where mother now lay. Every face knew there was going to be blood soon

Theia and Yamo waited us near the pillars of the north entrance: they had the whole House-guard of twenty stand down with their spears and drawn swords, and their captain named Ridius hurried men down the steps to help with the clumsy burdens. You could feel the angry shock within these two youngest of our clergy, dreams of a Great Year's glories turning sour in their hapless hands: Theia came up close to me, her eyes black and sharp as Iris', and I felt something like a charge of thunder off her body

—I wish we'd killed them all, generations ago over Pelasgian Lerna when we could have and should have, she said: what talk had gone on in our absence? Theia watched guards help her elder sisters up through the entrance hall and gave Ridius a fisted signal to keep back the people following out of the royal road's mouth, and this the men did with leveled spears shafts tip-to-tip across the north yard

—Truce is over. Your own iron, sir, said Yamo presenting my sword: he had a bronze one's scabbard slung across his chest for the first time, too, a real one and not the thin blades of Kourete ritual. —Oh, look at our sisters, Theia. *Take* it, Deucalion, put it on. Fact is you know, he smiled suddenly, his cat-like features lit with a subtle satisfaction, —old brother Cratus had all those prisoners killed at sea, it's true, after the Queen released them. Told me just this morning, Yamo said as my mouth fell open. —Of course he had to, they'd only have gone back overseas with talk about—how things are.

—About our *rot!* Theia said. —Do you hear that wailing? That's your people. That's your Queen. I'd like to hunt down and kill those Bull Dancers, too, who walked out after your father—People can't just walk away from The Dead. And we're going to hurt Sicily for this. Hurt them bad, Theia swore as she settled the blade along my side: Yamo agreed, and when she noticed the return of a runner from the harbor Theia strode out to hear him amongst the guards

I had to step back from Yamo's side. Madness rising in this talk of butchering Achaians even in the past, in hope of a vengeance-raid on Sicily that'd play us (I believed) right into mainland hands—and I stepped back because too much of my own heart was beating *Good, Good*

enough for them right along, as I heard of the prisoners slaughtered behind Ariadne's back. Cratus. People's features had a wrenched look, as if every stomach felt the wrong; and felt wrath rising higher against the House for it; and still people shouted for blood. Mother's death. Say it. *Matricide. Your mother is dead, Icarus. Be a man now.* And where the enemy? A painter, and a boy? A boy whose torn-away sealstone we'd pried from mother's hand, *he'd* done what this whole mad tide of the world had been leading to? Achaia, it seemed, was only the opportunist amid something more. It was too much for my head and I could not lay hold of my tears, let alone revenge

— Where is Perides?

— He and Pandaros took about thirty loyalists out to be there in case the Shepherd's men find anything, Yamo said. — That could touch off the tinder itself. That old wretch Mestor knows his way around places west of here too, sir, he's with Theseus' mob. I hope we cut them to pieces!

— We were right, Theia said coming swiftly back up to us at the hall's threshold. — Your boat is gone, just like the sail from Iris' workbay. Scout said the drag-marks were fresh, two sets of prints with them, a child's and a woman's, likely. And where does she think they can go, oh Iris! Theia exclaimed, wrapping herself with her arms. — There's an officer named Daitor leading local search, Deucalion, quite a fellow they say, one of Perides' chariot-drivers and a cousin of that shoreman Podes. But Iris has to know no one in Crete will hide them. Maybe The Grove, Yamo, sanctuary out on Dia. We can take a Calistan boat and search there

I said quickly I'd do that myself and check on my ships

besides; for yes, any part of the gear they found could touch off the worst. Why was I not frothing for the kill? Such a priest that no matter what, my rage as a man could run only one way, within my Queen's dictates? When it came out of my mouth that we'd better help Ariadne bring assistance from other houses here, to crush this villa-faction for good, it not only pleased Yamo and Theia but woke my mother herself in my heart in some new way: she'd never do as I thought right but she'd never let her heart forestall needful deeds. Maybe, like our father, she was still close-by, and helping—I wept a little at that, to think she'd only been trying to help all along, and I wept the more to feel so alone with Ariadne. Our family disappearing. I told Yamo to put out a runner this day to fetch Glaucus back, too: action seemed the only way to keep control but my body felt like a shadow beneath the drowning of sense in my head

Ariadne had covered mother with a broad purple pall, and yet the shape of her remains lay for all to see, not in the customary larnax but on a bier in the middle of the court amid smoking censers, much as our brother's best things had been laid out. For all to see. Because this *all* included The Powers, and therefore the threat of wrath by way of Earthbull and Velkanos again, many labored at the same time to soften Ariadne's gesture and the rage of mother's lingering shade: the sisters led by Diamat draped the court's great shrine and its pillars with black, covered the crypts' and clan-shrines' small ivory-and-gold statues of Goddess with it, that no Presence might gaze too long on our House now. *I want people to see themselves*, Diamat snarled, *not some Mother who understands*

Sillus had been mother's favorite musician among the clergy, and he, plus a number of priests and priestesses

immediately down from Archanes in their long vestal robes—torn now at the hems—were chanting, *Ahh-ooo, Ahh-ooo* and breathing the softest flute-pipings they could, while our own sisters fed the censers and rocked with supplications on their knees along the edge of the bier. Still others, Kouretes and priestesses from Teledamus and Ion to Sinope and Myrto, were circling the whole of Cnossos valley with the sprinklings of a single Bull's blood as a desperate mass aspersion, an attempt to quiet the people wailing all round in the high places: the fear was very bad, so that slowly I saw better of Yamo's and Theia's savage defensiveness, even of Cratus'. Or, at least, nobody could help that those men's lives he'd snuffed out, in favor of our own, were scarcely palpable to us anymore, gazing on the body before us and hanging there waiting Ariadne's choices

As I stood beside her while we all had locks of our hair cut off and burned along with Bull's offering, the two of us were one heart pushing away the comforts of shared rites: we wanted to cry this crime aloud and to seal up the House in silent shame. Ariadne did what felt best for herself and disappeared for awhile when we did let people in, file past, behold what we'd done: then, late in the day, Cleite, who'd been listlessly burning cedar in a tripod before the great shrine, stopped as I watched her and placed the heels of her hands to her temples, and walked just that way in rigid silence down into the throne's ante-room. She seemed to be looking for something in there, grew more excited, then frantic, looked again, cried out: she tore down grandmother's sea-blue tapestry and wrapped herself in it head to toe, and threw herself down on her knees before the empty throne, sobbing, writhing beneath the islands and the silver stars she clutched

round herself. When she felt our hands trying to soothe her she tightened her hold on the wrap, rocking and sobbing: then she cried out again—*Goddess dropped her digging-stick! Eight fingers and you'll see the new sceptre, you'll see, my wild mothers! Eight fingers, eight!* We tried to ask what these dark words meant but it did little good, and we sent for Tukato

I think this decided Ariadne, showed her her own wound and told her she could not let herself succumb, not now, as the first step in healing it. She let Cleite cling to what comfort there was but put herself straight to the task of wording her demand for soldiers and our aunts' and uncles' help: only with Hippeus and others on the roads by nightfall did she let loose any of the depths of what she felt. She did weep, and wail with us, and she held our hands in great circles as we chanted to soothe mother, soothe The Dead, ourselves: *Ahh-ooo, Ahh-ooo*, the evening came down so tranquil that the censers' smokes rose straight toward the midwinter stars, and I'd never seen such obeisance to our Queen as the women of Cnossos rendered now. Men seemed to fear there was no violence she might not order, seeing mother's body so. At the same time women of all stations begged to press her hand to their brow, they knew their own shares of the pressure for mother's removal and *Oh, let us not lose you, too, Daughter* they said to her. She did not spite the *damos* with its demands. Ariadne held it in, held in everything, making strength of it, and already it began to flame her eyes as some new life where the broken life had been. She stood chanting and gazing on the pall and then, at times, reached out to lay hands on, at the breast, the hands, the wounds, the belly, still speaking and treating with the body she'd known and wanted so little separa-

tion from, source of our lives, world passing. *Ahh-ooo-ooo, Ahh-ooo*: we held ourselves together and tried to sing the whole night, and as we began to falter I saw Ariadne's features ageing in the torch-light. Mother, herself a world slipping away and a woman who'd helped it to do so, trying to save it. But let men talk of the seed. This night before the bier was the true birth of something in Ariadne there was no word for, except perhaps *loyalty*, repeated through a million lives. She stood before mother's body, and forgave: she put her own name to all that had happened, and placed it all on the bier, and it was accepted, everything. And out of the brokenness her life returned new and deadly-strong to her, and now that she felt such flame there was nothing to come that could be said to have defeated her. To feel what she felt was to win in this world, and as she pressed my hand in hers, I shared it

Toward dawn, Ariadne rested, sitting crouched on a stool beside the bier with her head and arms laid against the pall. We needed rest too, but found ourselves just looking at the two of them a long while under the lightning sky. And I found that with what this night had given back to me, I needed to speak with Cratus; yet when I got him aside and demanded explanation for those men's lives, demanded to know how his deed served Ariadne, he answered, sincerely, as if the only important thing were the fact that he'd purified himself and the Cretan hands involved. Nothing of this, for Cratus, could come back on the House because he'd been ritually thorough and precise: I walked away, and I never told our Queen

When she woke, she called to be adorned with her own crown, and she ordered mother taken out now, laid to rest in the hills within grandmother's tomb. Perdix led a

gentle protest: what about proper funeral rites, respect, the comfort to be had for the people and herself? Ariadne asked them to do as they wished, but her answer was like our father's forced choice between angering The Dead and serving the living. She saw to it that our priests took up the bullroarers today as they never had swung them, to close off Little Summer with storm and rain. She had summons sent out as if it were spring to mobilize every loyal marine we could, for home-guard drill and to cut off the villa. *We'll starve them*, she said, *until our cousins arrive*. She wanted the search carried on for Iris and Icarus; and she ordered Theseus brought before her. We might anger The Powers whatever we did, but she'd not wait a three-day funeral to learn the Shepherd's intentions, and to see him state them, looking her in the eye. When Perdix surrendered to so much will, she assured Ariadne she'd see to every reverence in mother's rites: Ariadne faltered then and wept and the sisters closed round her, assuring her that mother and the people would know she was at their service. *And you'll see me laid there with her*, she told them, and *Yes of course, someday, someday* they answered

In fact they pressed us both again to go with mother, to see to things-proper, but Ariadne refused and I wouldn't leave her. I don't believe she was punishing herself but she must've felt she'd missed something, somewhere, to bring us to such straits; and if she had to leave the wound open in order to best confront her rivals' world, that she would do. And so, in the warmth of mid-winter morning's sun, we stood together and watched our mother borne out through the south corridor of processions, under the troubled eyes of our forebears painted on the walls, with their jars and their fealties. *She knows*

what They know, Ariadne, we are where we should be, I offered. She said Goodbye and, for a moment, laid her head gently on my shoulder.

* * *

Theseus did not come to the Labyrinth. Orneus came for him, in flawless dress of the Cretan fleet, a stand-in for marines backing up the villa. Orneus. He came just before dark and suffered the chance of meeting the dead Queen walking the dusk, though he may have found the looks of our clergy more a threat. Even the guards sneered at Theseus' sending him, this boy who'd made our problems his home, who could obey only those who outdid his own grasping

—My lord Theseus' message is an offer, Orneus said, speaking carefully as if watching himself meet a challenge to his nerve (and avoiding the word *King*, at that). —He offers you, Lady, and sir, the opportunity to change your minds.

I saw Ariadne's fine brows lift but that was all, no little poise considering the spider's glint in her eye as she watched him from the throne. Was Theseus crazy? We'd been spying out their strength this day and it lay in spirit, not numbers. Until mother's death the Shepherd might've had a chance—at something—but only the most determined nobles (Nomia, Virbius), convinced the more of this new world by mother's death, could be found still with the villa, reports said. Many others had departed, wanting none of the contagion of matricide. Behind these few, then, the advisors and loyal Athenians, something more than a hundred marines were holding out in rage against Sicily, plus Mestor's circle of older veterans im-

pressed by those Achaian squads with the statue. Where people were determined there could be blood, but Ariadne was Mistress of the Double Axe now

—If he's tired with his search, she said, —have him come here in the morning.

—Yes Lady, Orneus answered her. —But I am instructed to assure you that—that he will have the ships for Sicily before long. He took a certain shoreman into custody today, Orneus explained with his eyes moving slowly my way, —a man name of Podes. He was seen out near the new harbor more than once

—Who? I smiled. —Sorry. Tell him it was others helping

—Yes sir, I will. Be that as it may, however—Lady, my lord wishes—that this will help remind you of what Sicily is doing, right now, to your own captured miners and mariners. People we can save, my lord wishes to say, if we see reason and take action. But he does not expect this Podes to last very long, being questioned. My lord will send me back later with

—But he doesn't know anything! I insisted and Ariadne told Orneus to get out: her standing up sent him scurrying

—Subtle as Earthshaker, said Sillus

—That cursed statue we burned, Theia put in. —Nobody touch it. That's what we should be making of this God of theirs, locks of his golden beard in a charred heap of wood

—But we can give them gear now, Deucalion, Yamo said. —We've had what, six days' Little Summer? We never do get more than half a moon of it

—I know that shoreman too, from his help with our boat when I went out—Years ago, Ariadne said, still

standing on the dais. — But I don't think mere futility is going to stop him, let alone weather. We have to hold out just a few more days, till the sea convinces the last of his ships' captains

— And do you see how badly he wants our strength out there? I told the chamber, sick with my share of Podes' predicament

— I begin to agree, Ariadne said. — Maybe they think their *own* help is coming

— I'm going to help organize drill and coast defense, Cratus told Ariadne even as he knocked thrice on a pillar against her words; and to the amazement of many in the room, old Perdix volunteered too. Cratus had been moving toward deeds as un priestly and ruthless as our situation; but for Perdix to let anything take her from her life's otherworldly stewardship of the clans' tombs—*We'll talk*, she told Cratus and myself. The smoke of mother's last rites still clung to her: maybe she'd just grown too sick with burying Cretans through all this tumult

— And to think I almost felt—*Tell me about your home, Theseus*, Ariadne began to intone as she shoved her black tresses back in exasperation. — *Is it hard becoming a man up north, Theseus. You play so well. Tell me about your mother, Theseus.* Ohh! she growled, — I think I could make curse a potent thing again! There *is* no right answer

— Let me take some men and try a rescue, Yamo said

— And kill how many. Don't you think I know? Ariadne answered him; and Cratus, secret blood in his eyes, did not leap to aid Yamo's defiance this time

She had to rest, but she suffered the night with little sleep for the man caught between her and the Shepherd. Dawn showed a few promising gray clouds above the sea and the mountains: at Ariadne's word the Kouretes, first

thing, swung bullroarers louder than the cries from the valley's heights, while I took a needleboat out to Dia so that nobody else need look there for Iris and Icarus. Marines I'd worked with combed the Isle while I went to the Grove to see the fleet's gear secure as I'd left it, under the willows. I met the officer Daitor of whom Theia'd spoken, every bit a protege of Pandaros' duty-eager ways, while the ferocity in his eyes (he was Podes' cousin) reminded of Yamo, a seething build-up of foreign insults answered, by his lights, inadequately. This Daitor wanted more useful assignment than a hopeless search, because my boat, after all, was gone: what kept him at it was Ariadne's name, for this man, like Perides, saw in her the things for which every Cretan crack did his years at sea. By the time I got back I found that Cratus and Perdix had brought most people down off the heights, having gone up there to demand better things from them in the light of what might be coming. These people, of every age, needed time to rejoin this world, though, they'd been smearing themselves with ashes, blood, gypsum dust, rolling on the ground, raising welts with self-dealt whippings, all of it to punish themselves before the world's own wrath could do worse. But in turn their goings-home helped our summons to bring out numbers of men for drill and deployment: the Admiralty seconded Ariadne and used them straight-off to isolate and starve the villa, which began with its loose encirclement this day. And, since morning, Ariadne'd been trying to get through with messengers in Podes' behalf, pointing out the clouds our priests had conjured to end Little Summer, the fact that troops were coming from Phaestos: nothing. No answer. It made no sense

Near sunset, the Earth gave a shudder. Just one, and

nothing after, not enough to still the birds. After days and days of Velkanos this was too slight a temblor for either side to claim much by, but Cordax came up from Amnisos to report no waves or damage. Built heavier than Podes and with a bearish presence slow to anger, Cordax heard Yamo continue to press for a rescue by any means—and *Podes knew what we were doing with Deucalion*, he told the priest. Cordax understood the things at stake, while Yamo could only bite back on baffled priestly power. Cordax touched my shoulder and asked that we keep his kin informed

In the morning, early, Orneus returned, with three of Podes' fingers wrapped in a cloth

—And what do they expect for this! —What can they want! our priestesses cried when they'd got rid of Orneus: I heard the word *weakling* out of Phaedra's tears as she waited Ariadne in the throne room with the rest of us, and then Yamo (who was yelling too) stormed up through the anteroom, leaving the clergy to its talk. Theia, seeing him go and expecting the worst, took up the bloody cloth and tried to hurry out with it: *What they want is to break the Mistress any way they can*, she told Clio, but as she spoke she charged straight into Ariadne, coming in with Cleite on her arm. One of the fingers fell to the floor and we all saw Ariadne waver, not with the grisly sight but, we thought, with too much knowing her lack of acceptable response except for the soldiers coming. Theia begged forgiveness; but when we turned back toward Cleite she was—hitting herself, punching her own thighs with all her might, the oracle fulfilled on the floor beside her, striking herself again and again

—Stop it Cleite! Cleite, this isn't you! Tell us what it means! Cratus said through his tears as he helped to hold

her, trying to calm everybody around her with his other hand: only to him had she let go the island-tapestry, and still nobody knew why Tukato had not answered our summons the other day. I offered to see Cleite brought to Archanes, if that would help, and by the time she had calmed down enough to walk, no one had any better idea

So I helped her up along the inland road, past the tangled winter sticks of my grape arbor which this life had not let me tend. I thought my skin would burst open for anger. I was guilty, too, leaving Ariadne even for this while some other part of my soul grew elated and grateful just to get out, to get outside, to walk upon the Earth under the sky and imagine we'd left behind this ugliness seeping into our House's heart. It was getting too much now. Yamo and Cleite were only breaking before the rest of us. I looked at Cleite and saw her ten years younger waving her arms to the sea on Callista, exultant she'd been retained. A woman to light up a town with her tongue and her swinging of the harvest bough, pounding herself. And when I turned to these pastures and tranquil groves of olive there was no avoiding the trail of meager winter flowers that still lay along the road from mother's last procession. Torn open: I put my arm around Cleite awhile and felt my being beg that she tell me some never-heard story of mother's years before my own, that she might seem more alive than the memories I'd exhausted; but Cleite was elsewhere

I showed her the rainclouds building to the east above Dicte's mountains, the storms coming back, of course they'd let Podes go. Cleite trudged. It was too early for hyacinth but I found her a sprig of rosemary with its lilac blossoms open, good for memory: she let me put it in her hair, whose particular gray was not an honorific, her face

was yet too young for it. How it pleased me just that her weary eyes brightened when, a little farther on, we saw a rare bluethroat with his chest's striped winter plumage, passing through southward with a *hweet?* for her. Cleite followed him part-way across a meadow and called me to see the single crown-anemone he'd found her, a very early lavender bloom of it with an elegant ring of dark purple round its eye. I said it made me think of those older women, mothers of the fields who were walking a circle of moonblood's power in the Queen's name: *The Archanes road meets another one up ahead*, was what she answered. *Take me up to Anemospilia. It's good to see the land from there, Sweet Wine.*

Indeed, Tukato had brought her there not only to share offerings. We climbed this road up onto a green promontory jutting out from the northern edges of Mount Juktas' roots; and while the shrine that stood there was a fine stone house with three well-appointed chambers for rites within, we did not bother the young woman attendant but only sat in the sun before the place. Partridges' cooings soothed the air: the mountains east and west of us looked strong and invulnerably ancient in their stony winter grays below the snow, while before us a grand green vista of fields and orchards rolled northward to meet with wide sweeps of blue sea, Amnisos and Dia Isle dappled where some clouds had cast their shadows. Small wonder that Ariadne'd used to run off for places like this. I couldn't have said when I might want to leave, the place seemed to wish you to draw great breaths of air off the land and sea together; and though the sights included the place of the distant blood-field, somehow here was that old, simple correspondence of world and heart the body craved, as it craved breath. Cleite's eyes were

full of the horizon, where the ocean blurred with the sky in a blue forever. As if the only peace for her now was to become the world, enter its suffering and exaltation till she lost the shape of either in both. After a while she mutteringly sang a couplet I'd not heard before

*— I think I see my darling fool,
my flower floating in a pool*

— Look, is that snow on Velkanos? I asked pointing out toward a white flaw in the blue beyond Dia's feet. — People say mountains grow bigger after smoke. Sleep forever! I told him for the two of us.

— Ahh, you have found my place, Deucalion!

It was the Rajkumar, scrambling down the rocks behind the shrine-house and showing us his crooked toothy greeting-grin, while averting his eyes from Cleite: almost no one had seen him since his failure at Archanes' altar. This time he looked not degraded with self-punishment but—settled, somehow, in his clothing of rough fleece, his brow wrapped in a Callistan-style cloth headband. Settled if isolate, in a tent he'd pitched himself out of the winds up here. As we greeted (Cleite managed a smile) he spoke as gratefully for that cheese as on the spring day I'd given it him: Razorclam said he managed enough harvest-work or shepherding for nearby Callistans and others to keep himself fed now, that he was alright. But if he had come here as refugee of another Aryan conqueror-race gone to dust, I found I could admire his spiritual strictures: he'd not let himself live where he felt he'd offended people's sanctities. All that time of his sliding along between Archanes' discipline and sympathies, wearing priestesses' robes without the ancient offering,

had been for him more agony of heart than fleshly pleasure. Now he was working out an end to the punishment, though his shy smile said he felt our judgments still, a man repeatedly failing to do what his own inscrutable soul dictated

—I believed I don't can be happy until this place, he said (his blue eyes glancing off Cleite with an urge to cheer her state and avoid women's censure). —I have a good warm tent from Tukato's brothers. Oh, Deucalion, you must come to watch The Gods of the Storms above the sea here! And there are partridges to sing for me, and Archanes children come for my songs of the horses. Good! he exclaimed. —Ahh, but do you know, my friend—We take water together from a well down there near the town. And the little boys and girls, they always know how many pulls on the rope to bring the water up. But Deucalion, the number has been not the same. Three days now it is up, and down, and up. You should tell your House. I don't can understand, but Tukato says it is your Earthbull.

That slight tremor; and maybe he'd had other signs, kept to himself till he knew more? Cleite had seemed to lift with just hearing someone's chat not obsessed with Cnossian affairs: now as Razorclam spoke his thoughts, still grateful for asylum, still wanting to live for something, Cleite reached out her hand suddenly and asked would he take her the rest of the way down to Archanes. Trying to heal the tracks of Iris' stridency, perhaps? Razorclam looked startled, then honored: he knew of the moves afoot against him. So I was free to go back to Cnossos. I said no more of that place and kissed Cleite's cheek: she touched my shoulder, looking out from the miles of her thought between us, but with half a smile. I

left them holding hands as Razorclam helped her down toward the road

By late day when I got back, Yamo was dead. Orneus had come trembling with this news, Ariadne told me, and with three more fingers. Sillus himself had wanted to rip Orneus to pieces with the rest and I began to see how thin had grown the thread of Ariadne's control. Yamo had simply gathered the few marines he could and they'd snaked their way near enough the villa to take a fellow-marine hostage; but Theseus, stepping outside to hear Yamo's demand for Podes, had merely ordered his loyalists to charge the priest, and they'd cut him down when he failed to back off. Orneus hadn't said whether Theseus' Cretan marines had hesitated much against the person of a Cnossos Kourete, but Yamo had let his hostage go before the fight, and now he and his fellows in rescue lay hastily buried somewhere on the high ground beyond the villa. Yamo, Yamo. No one could doubt a man who'd danced Bull twice, who'd stood up strong for the realm as he had with his life, and Ariadne's hammered-in conviction (This is not the way to fight Poseidon and win) was virtually the only thing holding back full battle now. The Shepherd knew the rains were coming. Foiled for now as to Sicily, he could still try to force some compromise of throne's power as he had at Eleusis. *Think how he'll despise you for giving him what he wants*, Ariadne told the clergy. And if she did order all-out attack? Fine with Theseus: he knew she'd have to order his personal safety, and then when she hated herself for the killings, there he'd be to teach her about new Necessity, his so-called real world. The House was choking on anger, feeling him out there coolly honing the bloody edge of his ambition

People in Cnossostown knew there'd been a killing

against the House again. This time they shut their doors on us. Ariadne did what she could for Aithe, whom Yamo had manfully left without a Goodbye's opportunity for protest: as Aithe's self-blame turned her devotion to something as unsettling as Phaedra's, Ariadne sent first word to Yamo's clan in the Ida Mountains, too, so that perhaps their revenge-demand could find a place in spring's operations. We were meeting with Pandaros and Perides over how to deploy the numbers of marines who'd answered early summons—we now had the men to cut off the villa's last supplies coming in from the lady Nomia's house at Vathypetrou—when an advance-runner reached us from the south. Soldiers would be here with the dawn, close to two hundred of them, and our aunt Amphissa of Phaestos was herself at their head. Three days since we'd sent them the news about mother: on that they were ready to move

We could not lose now and we sent the villa word they could not win. Thunder began to rumble down the mountains, seeming at once for the first time the voice of a God's impotent anger and a judgment in Ariadne's favor. The rain followed, heavy and cold and wild with wind, and the marines outside in it cheered themselves by cheering each rolling roar. At that sound, Ariadne found herself recoiling from the somberness around her and got us out in the plashing courtyard, priests and priestesses, House-staff and Ridius' guards and everybody she could find, started to clap the ancient three-time from the center of our circle and we started to turn in the rain and lightning, a great *kyklos*, the least we could do to honor Podes. We knew he was going to die soon and this turning and clapping and chanting had nothing celebratory in it, but something not grief, either. It was refusal to be

broken, almost as pure as Podes' own and as the tears and the rain mixed on our faces it was Perdix who called out a vision, seeing in our midst now Europa and the common oarsmen who'd made her Crete's mother. —*Lead us past the enemy again!* Diamat let the ash wash from her face, Phaedra was crying out with us in Cleite's place, Kudru took up Yamo's this once. We'd not forgotten Yamo: it was Podes' actions simply most *with* people, as we turned

Just before first light—whatever the villa had heard of our shouts, or of soldiers—Theseus sent not Orneus but an elderly man of Mestor's veteran-friends to us, with the last bloody cloth in his hands. They wanted us to attack. It was not a finger wrapped up inside this time. Podes had to be dead, and we who had rent Bull limb from limb, cut raiders' heads off and eaten the flesh of The God Himself, were sickened by the fulfillment of Cleite's words

It was finished, unless the villa's men were ready to die for their Shepherd. The rain and thunder poured on through the arrival of Amphissa's *three* hundred, for she'd gathered several more squadrons passing through mountain towns, and they streamed across the viaduct up onto the west court, rank on rank of steamy-breathed marines with the teeth of their helmets glistening white, spears and shields, their colored cloaks drawn shut against the weather. Perides and Pandaros drew the lines up before Labyrinth altars and, with them, I took in the men's grim faces, which showed something just short of resentment: they had lives, homes, cares of their own and had come here to resolve what we could not. Three hundred more witnesses, or proofs of what Ariadne'd had to fall back on. Not a person from Cnossostown out here

watching now, not a Callistan: even the birds, rain or no, had looked away

Ariadne and Amphissa had embraced with quiet force and stood together now with the tips of their rain-cowls touching under the southeast entrance portico, shapes of disheartened speech. Talking first things. Touching. Nodding. Ariadne turning away, seeing the weapons arrayed before her, back to Amphissa. I thought it bespoke what a rage Rhadamanthys had to be in, that Amphissa had come at the head of these troops. Before long they took themselves indoors to continue talking but Ariadne gave me a nod as they left us, and I helped to deploy the men all around the heights where the villa stood, from the royal road and grandmother's lemon trees to the western side where the edges of fields and orchards looked over Cnossos valley and Juktas. Up here father had stopped our running-troop and it was viciously satisfying to set things up so that a dog could not have got through, our advantage maybe six to one; and when the rain stopped in the afternoon Cratus had dry firewood brought up from the Labyrinth, with more than men's warmth in mind. They were roasting mutton and other good things before dark, the more to torture Theseus' spiritual visionaries, and not a marine but liked his evil. Eventually the men at arms in the villa's courtyards called hello (here and there) to brothers on our side: —*Hey, we could use a sheep or two up here!* —*Looks like you have enough of those.* —*Well, what do they cost?* —*We haven't decided yet*

Back inside to report I found Ariadne and Amphissa up in the west wing's supper hall, seated off by themselves on a divan with a brazier of their own to warm them, away from the clergy. The way they sat together had grown comfortable but as I came nearer and greeted my

aunt, whose warm eyes shone with comments from the Queen, I saw the same dimmed look on Ariadne that aunt and Unana had put on her at Zakros, during our trip. They asked for the situation, and then I heard it from them: Ariadne was going to have to try again with Theseus. Oh, her face when Amphissa repeated that, the weariness, the disbelief of a young woman who'd really wanted not to marry anybody. Options she had. Give up and let Theseus go home; put him to death, and Phaestos and Crete would stand with her: Amphissa's proof of that was the fact that these three hundred sons of her *nomos* had committed themselves to this side of the mountains through the spring, to make the home-guard along our north coasts quite invincible. They understood, that is, the likely consequence of anything Ariadne did except try the marriage once again. Free him or kill him, only her offering of a bed with him could cost Crete fewer lives. So the choice was no choice, but the honor of her in this gesture by three hundred people, not to mention their clans' consent, the *damos* they came from—as Amphissa spelled this out for me Ariadne lifted her eyes and said *I'll think of it as marrying three hundred and one*. My weary one. She looked to have lost her life and not yet found it again within that mystery of The Offering

My familiarity was to help marines around Theseus believe they could slip away from him, now, without blood to pay: awful things had been done, a Labyrinth priest had been killed, but that was the way the clans behind Amphissa wanted Theseus put down, and through him, Poseidon. Amphissa's eyes were warm ones, yes, but cunning too and I saw how she (and others, sure) enjoyed this, in a way. Let this Shepherd and his God do their worst, but above all, absorb them, keep absorbing them,

let them learn they were fish who could never swim out of Goddess' sea. Their crimes, like their heroics, were nothing Mother Kriti could not absorb

But, Amphissa went on, there was no question about the matricides: she used the word with such unhesitant clarity that we felt the whole island's readiness for executions in the matter. However people outside of Cnossos had talked of Pasiphae's affairs, Icarus and perhaps this Iris too had to be found and punished if it took a Great Year; and till home-guard duty required them come spring, these three hundred men were going to comb all the country they could. *You understand the weight of the matter*, Amphissa repeated: *Whatever it takes, do it*. And where I expected to hear her now repeat last year's ardent talk of eastern Crete's interests and the need to blockade Rhodes come sailing-season, instead she reached gently for Ariadne's hands and pressed them together to her breast. I excused myself to duties and Sillus and Clio gave me blurry nods of confidence as I passed

So that was what we did, find ways to let his armed support trickle away out of hunger, shame, fear: it was delicious, watching this foolishness falter and die like a horse beneath him and the world going back to thought about its next good meal, and whom to nap with. Once we had a few of the villa's first guard-post deserters and then some officers shouting up the hill about safety and home we had three-quarters of the marines, the real threat, out of there within three days. It wasn't hard for our men of the line to make brothers understand a warning about any next time. As they cleared out past our sentries we let them know we'd not forget about the shoreman, and that much would be expected when the trouble with Sicily did come. Mestor's stubborn older fellows and the naively ar-

dent old landsmen, who trusted mainland methods if not its leaders, took longer to come out, but when they did the last squads of marines came with them; and that left Nomia and Virbius and the nobles with invaluable pride at stake, plus the Shepherd's advisors and his loyal Athenians. All of these, by agreement, met Ariadne at the Labyrinth end of the royal road on the morning of the fourth day. Soldiers surrounded her in an open-box formation a good ways off, in stand-easy postures, her wish over Perides'. She waited them in a long embroidered robe as purple as iris-flower, the waist belted in, her hair out over her shoulders and dark as her brows: the stairs she stood on, watching him lead them toward her, were wet with drizzling rain and there was a smell on the air of worms drowned in puddles. Theseus, without a sword but wearing the crimson kilt and the gold our mother had bestowed, stopped at the stairs' landing, granting her his upward gaze; but his face was hard-set, as stony as the day against my father at Athens, when he'd had equal reason to look for death

He said he was ready to face the consequences.

—I'm sure that you will, Ariadne said. —Nomia, Virbius and the rest of you Cretans, go home. Go, she said having turned all her presence upon them. —Were you listening to me that day when I said you were free? Go and think what you did with it, she ordered, and they backed away thumping breasts, some red-faced and choking back useless pardon-tales, scattering

—You gentlemen with Elphenor are also free to go, come sailing-season. And so are you Athenians, with your friends in the Labyrinth, Ariadne said, and not a one moved the lash of an eye because they felt more coming from the Queen before them. —Yes, you can believe me.

Unless, that is, you think you can be helpful, or have more to learn in the service of your own, which is why you told us you came here. That is all I have to say to you. But you, Theseus. I want to know if—if you and I can, can learn, from so much ugliness. I want to know if you think we might still lead a way for our peoples. You and I, together.

I saw the color in her cheek, the long slow near-imperceptible breath she took through those words, wanting the calm of that air more than she'd shown. And she waited; and though I stood a ways off with the clergy I thought I saw all I knew of him, and his thought that his alternative might be death. Remorse? If he felt it, it was contained within his vast reserve: then a look up and down Ariadne's beauty, woman his weakness, and a near-break into a smile. No, regaining himself, and a flash of scorn for her answer to a blood-proven foe; but wanting, wanting life, possibilities, now a boyish diffident tilt of the tawny head, the ash-end of a prodigal wandering, the very surface of shame. What was it all, some shell-game to feel out which Theseus might fare best—I tried to say to myself who he was but, blood of our friends on his hands, nothing persisted in my eyes except his will to break her

—I know you don't love me, Ariadne said. —My feelings are not love, either. But if we each meet our duties first, Theseus, she reasoned (and then she took a breath again to reach for strength she'd never known, and showed the slightest smile), —then—You never know.

And from Theseus' beard to his belly, a sudden laughter

—No, no! he said with palms raised to her jestingly a moment when her face darkened, —it's because you're —I don't think there is a word. Amazing! I called you *lit-*

the goddess, and before I know it I'm wondering if you're going to chop my head off. And then—Lords, I'd have to *be* dead not to love you in some way by now, wouldn't I? Maybe I never will get home myself, but—It's the Cretan heart in her, he said, turning to shrug in helplessness to his fellows

But Phaeax his blond ever-wary lieutenant, the male youths, Orneus—There was no such dissolved resolution in their faces. The women with them, Nereis, and Polyxena and the others showed a grateful relief, but this pointed up the youths' cool as their group stood flanked by Elphenor and his colleagues. A wiser eye than mine would've said that they knew something of him we didn't. Most of them lowered their gaze to the stones as their Shepherd reached toward some kind of peace. Yet the decorum said plainly that nothing more than numbers had decided this. Theseus alone, turning back to Ariadne, raised his fist to brow before them all: last time he'd done so, on the cliff, he'd seemed to mean it. Some feeling he couldn't hide, at least a relish for his twice-remanded life, possessed him for the moment; but where would we be when it passed, gentlemen?

* * *

Blade practice; running the roads of the north coast fully armed to the spear and shield, and fighting or setting up ambush against some raider when you got to the town under mock-attack—This was part of how the home-guard grew so strong as the moons crept toward spring. With young officers like this Daitor rising under Pandaros and Perides we hardly needed Carian trainers anymore: Daitor, like many men he looked up to includ-

ing Mestor's old brothers of the line, believed the mainland was not to be trusted in anything and drove the men accordingly. He was low enough in birth and rank to own the faith of local-born marines, and seasoned by enough action in the islands to win it from the three hundred men of Amphissa's: we drilled and wrestled, tightened up our signal-system using flashes of the sun to move men quickly, scouted out new defense-points over the sea and laid caches of weapons near the roads, most of this now without the bewilderment and anger of two years ago. No, we could no longer keep our military separated off, but where we'd found poison and numbness before, at least we knew clearly what we were doing and, at times, the pains of practice were laced with a joy, for we were doing it at home. The men understood very well Ariadne's wish to make them less the slaves of trading-needs, and as the effect of her policies proved out on their lives for the first time, spirits rose even higher than the sight of men's own disciplined strength could make them. If I myself had lost her once again as lover, well, this was a good way to work off the resentment and turn it to her service still; and in my feelings for her I was anything but alone among young men. Two years ago, they'd raised their blades and voices when our father arrived on the field: now under Daitor they raised them in her name

The almond trees dropped their white blossoms and put out the downy kernels of their fruit. We saw the chevrons of cranes high-flying back from the west, flying above a sea that, daily with the wind, was taming down toward sailing weather. Theseus—slowly making his way back toward something like kingship—did come out at times to watch blade practice, or to approve the ways we were setting up coastal defense. We were nearly a thou-

sand-strong just now, and whatever men thought of the Shepherd, they wanted the skills he might offer as a warrior. To everybody's surprise, though, he was never much with us. This made Daitor and others suspicious of something they would not name. Numbers of us reasoned that so much weaponry aimed northward was an insult to Theseus' word of honor: a hundred others said with pleasure that he was only treading softly around Ariadne (and her formidable aunt) these days. Probably everyone was right. He did busy himself with pressing for Cretan connections this season for his father's Laurium silver-trade, but that was hardly up to the level of last year's initiatives. All I cared about was getting the ships back to their patrols when the sea allowed; because with them, with our troops based on home-earth now and Amphissa's reinforcements together, we had a palpable answer for our fears. We'd be ready to back Ariadne's diplomacy, and ready to do it as a stronger Crete than the mainland had ever seen.

Amphissa tarried on our side of the mountains through the winter rains and more. Before long she and Ariadne had public rituals smooth between them, which was a world of comfort for my Queen, and the delicate Egyptian flourishes Amphissa shared from her houseways made them the lovelier. Bringing *King Theseus* back into the life of the House was more difficult, and our aunt encouraged Ariadne every way she could, not letting her forget the descendants who'd bless her for taming these bulls from the sea. In gratitude I offered what I'd learned of the collusions these days between Achaia and Amphissa's Egyptian trading-partners: most of it she knew because it was Phaestos' business to know it, but the Cretan paintings on the walls of Egyptian enemies, of which

Theseus had told me and for which Pharaoh was learning to curse us, raised both her eyebrows. I saw that Amphissa the near-omniscient matriarch had been raised behind the same walls as myself

She couldn't do enough to help Ariadne heal, and go forward; but she was also waiting for Glaucus. Our uncles and the circles of women behind Amphissa were utterly determined that Ariadne's blockade of Rhodes continue, and she wanted many Cretan voices heard through Glaucus when he went east with our appeals for more Carian assistance. With a Sacker of Cities still on the roam (for all we knew) and the blackened ruins of Trianda opposite their own coasts, Caria was not going to lightly send a dozen ships to uphold a principle. But if we could convince them that Ariadne's was the way to draw a line, it could only help this marriage we all shared, as allies. It was for Glaucus to re-convince them that Crete was still their first line of defense and we figured his chance of success a fair one, for the age of good blood between us and Caria

I had my own reasons to want him back with us. I'd always thought him simply the best of our men's kind, and he'd been away so long living life with his Antibia that I felt he'd left me behind in a world he considered (perhaps) inferior. For all the strength and pride I took from hard work with the home-guard, it was still a time to feel hurt by Glaucus' scorn for our blindnesses, by his saying he feared to become a lost soul through service of our House. Making this worse were the funerals we held right away for our shoreman and our priest. As weeks passed and I spent a lot of time between Cnossos and the harbors I knew I was seeing more people and offerings at Amnisos, at the Labrys-shaped grave of his clan where

Podes lay, than at the tomb west of Cnossos where Yamo's kinsmen had chosen to rest his bones. Yamo's burial there would give his family a son forever in the company of Labyrinth Kouretes, and Aithe honored him in death as he had her in life: he lacked for nothing of his due. Yet people seemed to feel that the less exalted presence at Amnisos had something more worthwhile to ponder, as they stood by Podes' grave. I thought I understood this when I looked down on Cnossos from Yamo's tomb. I'd gone there with Aithe once, and when she'd sobbed, the House had seemed just another house; like a violent man, worthy only of a town's forgetfulness. I wanted to walk in my own eyes as a man whom the likes of Glaucus could still honor.

He reached the Labyrinth for his briefing early in the month of the ash-tree, the moon of flooding streams and of sea-power, when marines tooled up—and I missed him. His ship the *Themis* had wintered under the little isle of Pseira, out east near some of his crew's homes; so Glaucus had had the rigging needed to go to sea at the very time I was off to the west with Perides' men, digging up the fleet's buried gear. Ariadne, though, gave me a message from him: *Brother, take care of Antibia till I come home*. I could see his strong native nose, his gray-green eyes, his stride: his words told me everything anew of how he wanted his life in Crete, what it cost him to make this one-more-voyage for us. *Brother*: I worked harder than ever at drill and home-guard labors, and made it an offering toward the brother I hoped to have again.

I led retrieval of the ships' gear from Dia Isle, and got through it with a minimum of shame for having hid everything in The Grove out there. Some captains said that, for such a hiding-place, their sails and oars couldn't be lucki-

er now, but I still had a dread of those shadows where the dollies' feet dangled and clinked in the wind, so that I hoped not to go there again. Pandaros put out aboard his ramming-vessel a few days after Glaucus, with no less than fifteen ships behind him, almost five hundred crack marines: Perides wasn't glad to see such strength leave home but, right now, they'd be better-used against a war waiting to happen in Rhodes. Show the Carians our own will to stand up to the Lion. Within a week of this departure we had the coastal forces back up to a thousand and more, with village men still coming down inland roads to answer season's summons. Perides was still debating Sicily with Ariadne, when a ship from our friend King Kokalos beached, with a message

How long since our mother's death, and Icarus' flight? Two moons? It strained belief and raised a lot of odd speculations that a boy and an artisan could make that voyage in such a little boat, even across a sea becalmed with Little Summer. But this was what the Sicilian embassy said before Ariadne's throne: speaking his master's words, he told us that this prominent Cretan artisan and her unruly boy had arrived under circumstances suggesting they were fugitives, and further, that the artisan had asked for asylum there, at least till she was advised of her standing here in Crete. Kokalos would most appreciate knowing our will concerning this strange thing: Cretans would be welcome to fetch the two home if we so desired, he said. Then he ceased, and stood smiling through his beard some dreamed-up age of smooth relations: Ariadne thanked and dismissed him

— You did well, all of you, to let on no disturbance over the attacks and the other Cretans they must be holding, Amphissa told the fierce-eyed clergy along the

benches of the throne room. —Notice the man's plain robes and trappings, too, that didn't parade the wealth that's been stolen. I think this is a peace-offering, Daughter. Else he'd have quietly enslaved the very artisan you say he wanted

—No, no, forgive me, Perides put in. —He's expecting punishment now, that's what, and his bold allies are nowhere in sight. This is a trap, and a beginner's trap at that. It stinks like Velkanos, if I may say so. Or if it is an offering, Mistress, let Kokalos *send* the pair of them home. Not to mention our other people

—Out of the question, Amphissa said laying a hand upon Ariadne's. —He'd send one ship, like this one, and the odds are we'd lose them somehow. They *must* be brought home to justice, we all know that

And Ariadne listened, to everybody, Cratus and Theia, Perdix and Diamat, Amphissa again: Theseus, listening carefully, said that only a massive assault could do what was just and sensible now, but he sat back knowing there was still little ground for anybody's trust in him. We couldn't ask Perides to go alone, just the *Talos*, but we couldn't wisely take much more from the north coast's forces, either. Ariadne decided on fifteen ships, enough to do the job and hurt Kokalos badly if need be, and she drilled the single aim of Perides' mission into him like an oath. The Admiral now approved main caution like this, and he seemed brisk and strong and even casual on his well-healed leg as I went with him and his officers to the new harbor, from which they'd put out. I think Perides wanted to accomplish this like a great final offering of his career to the throne of our mother and father, and what lived of them in Ariadne now. He clapped my shoulder boarding the *Talos* as if half a moon's voyage would see

him back for supper and reminded me what men we had in fellows like Daitor. *Make Juktas proud of you, Deucalion*, he said. *And draw my bath when you see my sail!* It wasn't like him to be solemn, though he grieved for all that had brought his own sister's death out of such a boy. Rank upon rank of Crete's best marines boarded with him, the worst of their vengeance-rage to some degree tempered, it seemed, by these moons. Again I worried the departure of so much strength: it turned out Perides was right, though, that many more men were still coming down the mountain roads, to take up this cause that held home first. Indeed, some days a young man could shout for the sight of thirty ships and more we still had, slowly cruising east and west before the eyes of Cretan towns. We'd even worked out identification-signals with the shore. If our failures with iron had kept Talos a giant of bronze after all, he never had walked the world so strong

Amphissa left Ariadne for Phaestos a few days later—*I'm only going back over the mountains, Daughter*, she said—and the same light touch as Perides' did her good. I figured this might be the time to fetch Cleite back, and Tukato sent us word that she was much better. So I used my rest-day to walk up to Archanes: Cleite was owed our courtesy and I wanted to bask again in that union of world and sky at The Caves of the Winds. The road upward that late morning had all the glow of spring's fragrant first grass on the air, and a thrush was singing. It had rained a little in the night and I remember musing how sorry Phaedra'd be to lose the ritual-place she'd filled in Cleite's stead: Tukato was sure to be pleased with her. I was a mile or so up beyond Bull's water meadows when a great green lizard shot across the road in front of me: then I heard bellowing far behind, and sprays

of sparrows and wagtails abandoned the trees. When I saw a barn owl flying in the midday sun next moment, I knew; and then my body knew

It hit like the earthquake last winter when I'd gone to the cave: not a slow-coming rumble or a slow-building sway of the Earth, but one first tremendous *jolt* as sudden and vast as sky-thunder, then the rising roar underneath it, stronger, louder, and because I'd kept my feet I thought the first jolt had let off the tension and it would dissipate. But it didn't. It kept getting worse, louder, stronger, and this time a palpable surge ran right up through my bones and then came another jolt, so strong that my knees flexed hard and my stomach seemed to fill with frightened birds

Astonishing, the depth of the feel of this swaying, the strength and duration and rising noise of it, rumbling and roaring underneath with sounds of cracking rock: the oaks and willows and cypresses lining the road themselves began to groan, this wasn't possible, I thought; and I knew I was safe up here in open country unless the ground just split open, but as it still grew worse, another *jolt*, my panic rose. And rocks that'd slept in place in the ditches since this road had first been cleared began to tumble off each other, roll around

The thunder—I didn't know which way to go and what dry dust there was began to rise in brown clouds. I was facing inland and saw more rocks rolling off the hillsides, dust rising like daemons and a loud crack like lightning came from ahead as a dead-trunked male cypress crashed in shambles across the road. That seemed like enough advice to turn me around and yet the Earth was trembling and rumbling so badly that I doubted I could run the road home. Home. I just turned with my arms out for balance

and took a few wide steps: the Earth heaved and jolted and I bit my tongue as the countryside began to bellow and screech, alive, alive

It couldn't go on like this, not this strong: I staggered some way back to the last turn round a hillside where there was a vantage toward the sea, there were the Labyrinth and Cnossostown and the green coastal hills beyond—and I saw. The black and gray burgeoning smoke was already as bad as we'd seen that day from Dia Isle, but this time it looked far lower on the horizon, as if the ash were too heavy even for Earthbull to lift and fling. The sight of it rippled before my eyes as if it were hot as summer out there, and I knew it was *coming* because the space of turquoise sea between it and Crete was growing narrower with unbelievable swiftness: ships were out there: the ships

I prayed and prayed and the trees groaned out of their roots with the crowns of them tossing, as I myself swayed amid this thunder: birds were circling and just the effort to keep my feet with ridiculous arm-motions broke up my words. My stomach knew now it was just getting started: I had to get home: *Ariadne, run outdoors*

And then a concussion buckled the air and I was struck by the strongest loudest blast of chest-cracking thunder I could have believed: it boomed past me, through me like a wall and rolled and rumbled across the world and the Earth kept shaking and shaking underneath. It hadn't been a count of twenty since the first jolt and the black and gray tower of ash began to fountain higher than winter clouds, as I stood with echoes and rumbles of that chest-slamming boom in my ears: *look* at it, burgeoning up and outward like a hand, but coming in low off the sea, too, it looked like a black wall of hills fluid and

rolling, swallowing more and more ocean. I gaped: the ash had to be miles still north of Dia but the wind was running our way and you knew there'd be no mercy this time

I was still standing there with my mouth open, dumbly marveling at how fluid the rocky crust of the ground as it heaved and rumbled with shock after shock. Next I knew a wave of *heat* passed over me worse than anything like the Breath of the Ass off the mountains: I'd seen it coming like a ripple right through the green of the land before me and it would've singed the hair off my head without some palpable cooling from the sea. Everything northward was turning to dust and smoke as the Earth kept heaving and rocking, sick, and the just-visible shapes of houses in Cnossostown were turning to tiny pyres of brown and black cloud as they fell and took fire with spilled house-oils

I started trying to run amid the downhill racing of stones and the animal uproar, birds circling overhead: another tree, a halfdead willow went over and its crown crashed next to the road, the roots ripped up red earth and stuck out like some headress of snakes, a swirl of insects. I fell on my face with the same shock, and just as I got up and set my eyes on the Labyrinth's roofs down there as a target I saw the entire east wing, all its crimson-pillared porches and colonnades simply sag a little bit sideways, sag and then collapse in on itself and slide and tumble down into the east gardens, white dust rising out of it now, the shops, the shrines, our chambers. My House, my House; and as my heart sank the west wing began to crumble too, crimson pillars went over and the roofs and the great Bull's horns of stone smashed their way to the ground, and the shocks and jolts and ripples of

the Earth just kept coming up through the hills before me. Trees, tiny trees on the crests of the far shore hills were—they were burning, how was that possible! And though the faintest of shapes moving down there seemed to be people tearing out of the buildings and out into open courtyard spaces I heard no human screams till I was trying to run past the Callistans' homestead, and that was on the other side of a rise a half-mile east of me

The shore-trees were burning! And the black wall of the ash was still coming, rolling straight in off the sea with the towering cloud ever higher and broader behind it: I knew men were rowing for their lives out there but which way could they go, head for the beach and run perhaps—and now there was a sudden lull in the swaying and jolts underneath my feet, though a deep thunder lived there still, persistent. Maybe Earthbull was tiring. I could scarcely think with the sights before my eyes and my body wanted to stay up here, it'd be crazy to run down into that coming wall of black but *she* was down there someplace, that was the place to—So I started to run again and my eyes were watering with the flaming trees and the wreckage and harm ahead of them. I rounded another low hill, and when I saw the sea again, my legs died. Withered. Because of what I saw above the hills and the flames back of Amnisos; above the greenbrown shape of Dia Isle; above the roiling charging blackness

It was a wave, it was a wave, it was the bluegreen of the sea standing upright where moments before there'd still been some sky above the ash: the ocean was simply gone between Crete and Dia because this thing had sucked it all back up into itself, and far-off as it was beyond the Isle with its naked rocky roots you could see the iridescent winks all through the beast like sun on water, only now

the sea was standing upright. I stood frozen, seeing; and out there on the sea-bottom's naked muck men were jumping ship and finding they couldn't even run. I'd put them there: I gaped: the ocean had stood up on end, it was higher than the very headland where she'd danced, and there was no end to it in either direction. Sunshot, blue, astounding, a wave was coming and coming to marry the mountains and the blood fell from my face

The scream wouldn't leave my throat. My brothers, my people, the ships—I could hear it now, a soft distant rushing like wind through a gorge, getting louder; and as it rolled and kept rising and rising the undulant top of the wave became a crest, and turned foam-white. But it held its head high and higher still beyond my own sense of its rhythm or balance, and the appalling mass of it held completely upright as it smashed into and over and around the Isle of Dia, nothing more than like a giant tripping on a rock, and then the white back-streaming head of it, so high, so high began to come down, a full break-over of white in the center first and then all followed, falling in thunder, falling with white spray's dream-slowness, crushing and roaring. And I heard the *poom-paum* of the impact of its trampling over Dia and then the vast concussion as it rammed and plowed head-first into the coast, over the shore, the cliffs: it smashed and rolled right *over* the headland, and the sky and the Earth filled with its long roaring thunder, the sound of mowed-down trees and houses and ships and rolling boulders mixing with duller thuds, and clunks and snapping-sounds as of somebody's spine, and under it all the continuous roar of wash and froth. The seaward valleys resounded with murderous inescapable uproar and both endless lengths of the coast were half-lost in thundering

iridescent spray. And the waters still rushed inland, rolling up the hillsides with the white foam darkening, driving soil and the wreckage of ripped-up orchards and houses and lives ahead of it, devouring everything, fields, filling up wells and hurtling on with a sickening chewing-sound of the wrack being rolled beneath its thunder: there seemed no end to its inland-running strength and the farther it came I knew the more bodies and animals and dead things it would leave to mark its height. And now the hills in front of me came alive with upward-running fox, a dog, a rabbit and cats and sheep running too hard to bleat: a goat, then more goats and even a deer running zig-zag: the sky above the hills was filling with rainbows of sea-spray now, a final subsiding perhaps though the world was thunder of the sea and more houses were falling in dust down in Cnossos. And I saw what must've been the last of it rill up the river just east of the smoking Labyrinth, five miles inland and more, the river running backwards in brown-black froth with smashed trees and unrecognizable wreckage jamming into the banks: now there was the softer roaring of the sea running back into itself, a vast laving-sound of waters, crashes here and there as it pulled things with it. Was the Earth still? I listened and felt, looking at the misty iridescence over the land—and then there came a *whoom*, *whoom* on the air and I jumped covering my head as a complete snapped-off ship's mast dropped humming like a bull-roarer out of the sky and stuck in the ground not a hundred steps below me. Sea-rocks too, even some fish and a round white thing that hit with a clatter: I started down in a daze to get home and saw what that was: a marine's boarstooth helmet. Mist prickled my skin. I wanted to curse The Powers that'd helped me save a boy so he

could—That'd helped me put those men, so many men in the way of—This couldn't be happening, it couldn't, but now the tower of ash was visible again in the wave's wake, roiling and reaching upward and out toward us, a hand bending the horizon anew, cascades of black ash showering down

And below that was the roiling wall of black I'd seen before the wave, but that was right on top of us now pushing another wave of evil heat and a sulphur-stink of bad egg before it: in an instant the black impenetrable wall of it softly engulfed the sight of Dia and the sea, and kept coming, roiling inland with the lay of the land, the north breeze fouling completely with its smell. If there was still blue sky visible far to the west, the entire eastern half of the coast was being swallowed, heat-rippling and then disappearing with this hot black filth rolling in over it, and the limitless dome of the sky was cowling over with gray and black. The misty sunshine out westward looked so strange and blessed as the dark loomed in everywhere to my right; and I heard a queer rattling sound now, a kind of pelting but it wasn't rain, it was hot ash and cinder and as the lower reaches of the cloud rolled over the land I saw flaming things drop from higher up inside it, redyellow cinders that shone in the daylight, plunging and trailing streamers of gray smoke

And my people were dying down there! It seemed to need my life's effort to make myself move—it was strange how fascinating—I tried a scream again and it came out a sorry little noise but it freed me somehow. And now, like the time I'd gone over Bull's back, everything seemed quite ludicrous, myself trying to march back to town so resolute in my loves and hates while the end of the world was raining down. The Earth felt solid underfoot at least

and I picked up my pace, was running now and taking short breaths of the sulphurous stink. The air was alive with a noise like sand plunging into a pan, the black curls of smoke and ash absorbing the landscape in front of me: this had used to be the way home, look at all the broken trees and the farther downhill I went the more peculiar everything became. It was afternoon and growing darker. Eerie. We'd known nothing, nothing at all about Goddess or Powers. My body itself did not want to go down any farther but she was down there someplace, *I will harrow this for you* I thought and my runner's breeze let me feel the water on my cheeks. Was I crying or was it the irritating air, I didn't know but I wouldn't have minded the end today if it could be beside her, that was all, my best friend, my family

A tremendous after-jolt threw me down to the road on my left shoulder: it was luck it was only pain, not a broken bone. I was about a mile shy of Cnossos and red-glowing pieces of rock were bouncing in sparks down through the trees and starting grass-fires: there was no sky above me now, just a heavier-pressing pall with swirls of falling ash turning the space and air before me to a gray cloud. I was sweating and panting and had a gravel already in the back of my throat: I covered my mouth and went on and at the last bend of the inland road I saw the first people, crouching across the road from the House of the Horae, which was wreckage. It was Tallay and a few of the women and with them were staff of the Guest House, trying to gather themselves to go inland for decent air: meanwhile in tending injuries they'd torn flounces from their skirts and tied them over their mouths and noses, and Tallay tied one on me. I was going to ask if they knew where Ariadne was but I looked up first and saw the Labyrinth, indistinct

in its wreckage except where the gray was broken by shards of daylight: I saw no fire there but no few houses of the town were burning strongly and the whole valley was in uproar. Cinders kept splashing down and other people came out of the gray and the fire from the Cnos-sostown-side of the stream, wretched shapes, dazed, children wailing and everybody ducking: there was an old man being helped along with the white of bone sticking out of his forearm, blood all up and down his broken side and he coughed and screamed

Getting darker: a floating mist of itchy particles hung on the air from ground to grayswirled sky overhead: I knew there'd be much worse to see if I went on, but the world was over anyway. Shock, anger, it was already a kind of gray indifference at the core—*like Goddess' own*, I found myself saying as I went past the rubble of Tallay's house, and saw the doorway's lintel with its three painted heirodules lying crooked on the threshold. Crooked, because underneath was the banged arm of a woman sticking out, and a mush of bone and red and gray matter. I wavered on my feet, more people now staggering up out of the underworld ahead, no, out of the bed of the stream because there was no alder footbridge anymore, townspeople clasp ing injuries or jars or babies, dozens of them, people who'd tried not to flee right away. Grandmothers limping leant in on boys' shoulders, old men, girls, coughing and crying or just hurrying the clan along with shoves to get out from under this thickening poison darkness, if there was such a place to get to

And then I was out on the causeway and saw the great crosswise track of the shocks in the rippled-up paving slabs, the Guest House a fiery rubble and, across the stream, half the Labyrinth, the whole east wing sheared

off down the steep of the garden hill and the long pillared south corridor simply ending on the air at the central court's turn. Dust and black smoke mingled with the ash above the cypress trees, above the few pairs of Bull's horns left on the roofs that still stood: I was running again past lost-looking people, past my grape-arbor and the gardens so green last Midsummer that now looked plastered with gray snow, to the leaf. And then I stopped short because there was no viaduct anymore either, it was all a mound of crazy blocks and stuck-up timber down in the stream. Just crossed it this morning: it was a first real wrench of habit that opened a new panic in my chest and with a mad haste I slid down the bank, waded the ash-scummed water and climbed over a bay laurel tree to mount the far side. The ramp that climbed to the west court had a foot-wide crack in it, red earth beneath, a wound: the southwest portico's pillars were on the ground like sticks for a child's fire and the entrance a roofless heap. Where now: cinders kept falling in sparks on the gray rubble court ahead: no sky, nobody here: how strange the light with the sun slanting out of the west and darkness descending on this side

Maybe I wasn't breathing enough but I suddenly dizzied and grew very confused: the stream below full of ash and stone and trees had changed in an instant from a pleasant little bathing-place to a savage ditch, like a dumping-place or a moat at the Labyrinth's south foot; and with the portico in rubble at my feet I could now see the south end of Cnossostown, five or six houses with orange heads of flame leaping, a dozen more like dead humps of wreckage and shapes of more people straggling for the hills beneath bright cinders. A huge red-brown bull went galloping past the burning Guest House, lost,

berserk as his Earthshaker Father and swinging his horns side to side as he ran through the gray: I lost him, and then he was below me drinking at the stream, and next I knew so was I. And when our eyes met, the Earth rumbled again, and this time the sky responded with a tremendous white bolt of lightning—It struck down out of the gray above town but no thunder followed: nothing made sense

Where was everybody? It was all I could do to remember the broken south corridor and leave that entrance behind for the north one, round the far end of the west court. My eyes began to sting now as I crossed it and my chest knew a crazy gladness (another bolt of lightning)—At least all the squabbles and degradations were over. And then I heard, like an answer to that, another *poom-paum* out of the blind distance and that same chew-up-everything thunder and roar: it had to be another wave hitting. There could not be anybody left alive out there, not a soldier, not a sheep, a bush. *A thousand men*, three hundred of Amphissa's and the whole—It really was over. The craziness wilted. And I wished I had my sword now because we could certainly not let Theseus live, not let him live to say that his Father, his fraud of a God had beaten us, laid us low. It'd be him and his wolves set to claim the spoil: you couldn't let people think a bribed priestess of Delphi had been right—Then they'd accept Earthshaker too. He had to die

With a purpose I did better making my way through the suffocating dimness and, round the north precinct, I found the narrow north entrance ramp practically intact, right up to the pillared low-reliefs of Bull charging past His meadow's olive tree. What about that? Maybe Poseidon was not like Goddess to go knocking His own shrines

down. Virtue in everyone. I was afraid as I went up that narrow space because there might be more jolts coming but—The heavy cedar doors were shut and barred. I shoved, then pounded on them. A locked door amid all this! I shouted her name, my name, names. Just as I looked for a climbing-way in I heard somebody drawing the beam back: another bolt of lightning hit the crest of the valley to the east, itself only just beneath the settling cloud of ash and cinder now that was roiling and rattling everywhere like gray dry snow

Cratus in a cloth mask opened half the door (which creaked on displaced hinges) and pulled me inside: he pulled me toward work so quickly with the others down-court who were trying to salvage stores from the magazines that I forgot to mock whatever he was replacing the door-beam against, and I'm not sure he knew. The place was utterly changed, the whole east side of the Labyrinth was collapsed so that the well of the great stair was now a pit full of stone and broken pillars and rubble, and its upper stories were simply not there anymore, the east garden slope now began at the edge of the court's stones and you could see the town burning in places under the gray. The great triple-shrine across court, the doors to the crypts and the throne looked alright, but I could not find her amid the bustle of priests and priestesses in dusty half-dress and masks, scurrying back and forth from the magazines with jars and cups and rhytons full of grain, to empty them into one huge pithos they'd dollied to the middle of court. The Athenian youths, yes, House staff and guards, Kudru, Phaedra I recognized, Theia and Silus, Hippeus

—Some of the magazines collapsed, we've got to save what food we can before more shocks, Cratus said hand-

ing me a spiral-painted bowl. — You didn't find Cleite?

— I never got there

— Sweet Wine! Ariadne called coming out of the corridor to my right at that instant and we seized each other and kissed and squeezed: she'd never kissed me so much so fast all over my face, as if she'd got back something beyond all duty to struggle for. — We worried about you too, she told me—She had on a short yellow kilt and a dusty open-breasted jacket whose puffed sleeves' elegance would've been ludicrous here, except that they were crushed and soiled; so she'd fallen down too, and smears of her normal light kohl showed me she'd been in tears, or others had pressed theirs to her skin. But she was every bit on her feet now and I liked how the cloth mask brought out her fine eyes; and then she was telling some of the clergy to go and see if they could get into the chief grain-bins rather than keep shuttling back and forth with mouse-sized portions from the magazines. Theseus was already trying to bring out another pithos and she asked me to help: the corridor was black because she'd had its lamps snuffed against fire, and everybody was moving with uneasy glances toward the ceilings. No telling if there'd be more collapse any moment

— Can you do it? she asked at the threshold of one of the bays

— I think my back is broken but it's up on the dolly now, get out of the way please. Phaeax, take the other side. Elphenor, carry the lid and the rest of you each take a magazine and clear the little jars out of our way for the big ones, grain and oil first. Here we go, heave!

And the Shepherd and his youths set themselves to shoving and shouldering the pithos, bigger than any of us, out toward court, Elphenor guiding with the lid like a

shield in his hand and Theseus looking up and down the corridor for the next task. He recognized me.

—So, you're alive, he said tugging his mask down off the beard. —Where'd she go, brother, what do you think she wants next?

Before I answered Ariadne called up the corridor that oil was priority too, there'd be burned people and other crucial needs for it

—Alright, he told her. —Help me find another dolly and we can wheel out the main stores, Deucalion. Where do you keep them? and he put a hand to my left shoulder, the bruised one and I recoiled with some pain; but Theseus didn't take it as he might've yesterday

—Something hit you? Are you alright? Maybe you shouldn't lift things, then. Hey, Tenes! Geryon, hurry up, get Kapha or whoever is free and get in here. Orneus!

—I can—I know where the dollies are, I said

And so we kept working and I saw him time and again strain his back and his every muscle as he wrestled the heavy jars up onto wheels, hardly pausing for breath between each magazine's labors but keeping his youths and the rest of us moving and encouraged; and when more jolts and rumblings and cracks of lightning struck and we wanted to flee he made no such move but spoke soothingly, *Come on now, Let's do what we have to do*. We worked and shuttled back and forth and there was almost no telling the hour outside anymore: it was getting so gray that the spreading hood of ash obscured the last of the sky, the sight of Juktas itself was lost and even the west was disappearing as far as we could see. By what seemed nightfall we had a dozen and more pithoi safe (perhaps) outside on the court, oils, barley, corn from the shattered bins, and when Ariadne and the clergy wanted

to keep going to save what clothing and ritual things they could the Shepherd didn't argue, didn't rest but helped them bear out armfuls of robes and tools of sacrifice, chrismes in pyxes and crystal rhytons, statues of Goddess, Labrae, tripods, vessels full of wine. And still, when nobody could go on he took a few youths (*Come on, you're Athenians aren't you?*) over into the east wing's rubble and they picked wood out of it for a fire: we were exhausted but his strength seemed endless and it wasn't with the expected take-charge manner. He kept asking people were they alright, what did we think should be done next—In my own half-daze I thought he knew what was lurking through my mind

—Unless you need me I want to go find a sheep or something, he said to Ariadne. —Alright? You've got to eat and keep your strength up. Acraeus and Porthaon, keep the fire going till I get back

—I see plenty of House-staff to order so, this Acraeus answered

—Get off your buttocks and fetch wood! Theseus shouted. —Fool, you can weave the wind later. Find some meatspits! Teucer, Elphenor, help them. Blast it, only you'd sit there for service with the world on fire. Get up and help, or you'll answer to me

—We'll go see if we can find clean water, Theseus, said the black-haired young woman Polyxena with the other Athenian women (Aithe too) standing up

—Good. Yes, good, thank you. I'll be back, he said

—Be careful, Ariadne told him

She'd seen it too. Those had been his first real civilities toward his women—sensing traitors the while, assuming it in them all—since we couldn't remember when. Well (I thought as we all caught our breath and wretchedly rest-

ed, dirty and sullen in the ashy-aired darkness under some torches), he'd worked like no prince today, but sheer survival counted on it. My shoulder was stiffening with a bruise at the end of the bone and Ariadne gently rubbed it with oil as Phaedra went around with more for everybody's work-blistered hands. How could I say the thing inside me, that we could not likely let him live

Pretty soon the Athenian women came back with buckets of water from the stream and as they rested the youths Phaeax and Scirus started skimming off the white scum of ash, the others and House-staff holding cloth over each bucket to keep out what was still sifting down in the flame-flickered darkness. It stuck to our oiled skin, bothered our eyes, without these masks we'd have choked: it was more than dark, it was a pall that made distances look grainy and whose weight your lungs and body could feel, you could not see the tops of the valley's hills, nor moon nor stars, only one lurid place or another where fires burned heaps of rubble. Look at this: no more quaint unplugging of a House pipe for water: now we lived from a row of covered buckets. We scarcely talked except to worry Cleite and everybody's kinsmen out there, tried to plan how to handle the certain crowds tomorrow—Somebody wondered where the soldiers were and why they hadn't come inland to help keep order. I couldn't say anything yet about what I'd seen from the hills but I seemed to know that nobody would be coming from that direction. And every time I thought of the men I'd set up to be annihilated, I saw pictures in my mind of Theseus dying on my sword, but then my stomach would hope he made it back with meat. Brother. The women tried making beds on the court-slabs with their flouncey dresses. At least the shocks had subsided, the lightning

and dry thunder and the fall of those smoking cinders. Sunrise had never seemed such a thing to long for, and to dread.

The night was young. Soon we heard a heavy pattering and when we held out our hands the sky dropped black rain in them. Ariadne and the women picked up the clothing (I realized I was wearing all I owned, in fact even my iron sword was buried in the east wing) and we became miserable huddles just inside the throne's anteroom and the corridors to the crypts, fearing more shocks, the downpour thick and loud and steaming and hissing in the fire. When the black rain stopped we went out and stoked it up: the rain came again: back and forth, filth and disorder and hunger and despondency eating at our nerves already, and it had only been hours. The one remedy was to think of the people bleeding and coughing and shivering out in the near hills, gathering themselves no doubt to come here tomorrow for food, healing, hope. When it seemed this black rain had finished (the air was a little better) Ariadne pulled a tripod before the great shrine and lit some dittany, standing straight before its smoke with her palms out-and-down in a quelling posture: that was all her: we could scarcely imagine morning and she was back between the worlds, recalling that this had happened to Crete more than once, conjuring tomorrows. Oh, how our family must've smiled on her for just this gesture; and then the priestesses, Theia and Clio and Sinope and Perdix and Diamat started to sing a little something, invocations from nightly ritual and the Athenian women took it up, the priests, I too, weakly. Weary, soft voices. Kudru's face made me think. Goddess might not really be indifferent. She'd just wanted to rearrange things a bit, like a matron of the House and we'd only

been, well, underfoot. Or if it was Mother Nothing at the heart of it all, if it was only Powers that did not care if you were kind or got killed, well, there was freedom. Make the place anything we wanted, anything at all and nothing would get in the way. Ruthless competition was fine and if we wanted something else that was fine too. Do what you will: nothing and no one to interfere, except perhaps those more adept at working the same non-rules. The voices balmed me a little and I started to cry for the men, beautiful men, lovers of home, trustful of our facades of knowledge, power: Diamat got up and put an arm around me, and maybe it wasn't quite indifference, if you gained a few more of the good things in the world out of kindness than from cruelty. A little encouragement from The Powers toward *the nicer thing*, as mother'd called it once. *Anything you want* must've been the only rule The Grove had shown Ariadne, so long ago: *Be free: Here's a world: Enjoy*, and Something had been trying to wake us to it

At last we heard Theseus shouting behind the north entrance gate, and in he came dragging a dead sheep by the hind legs with one hand, and in the crook of his other arm with head against his shoulder was a child, a little boy maybe five years old and we gasped because the boy's left leg had been somehow cut off just below the knee. Orneus helped the priests take the sheep for butchering and Ariadne and Phaedra and the sisters crowded around Theseus as he laid the boy down on some clothing and stayed kneeling over him. His advisors sat where they were and I saw the Shepherd backhand his eyes to clear them: the boy was pale as death

—Did you get the water? You've got to wash it first while he's still out and then get some oil and a bandage, Theseus said. —I can't stand this, I found him dragging

himself up the royal road on the way back, he's—What are you looking at, you old corpse! he suddenly shouted at Elphenor, who'd stood to regard this display with a scowl from behind the crouching women

I helped to tear and clean some bandages: Theseus' and my hands touched in the bucket, he said Thanks and started wiping the boy's face clean, telling him he'd be alright, asking Ariadne what else she thought might help him. And the Shepherd of Athens, Kouros of Poseidon Earthshaker, Hero of the Isthmus, sniffed as his hands wrapped the stump of the leg, *Not too tight* he told his help. Maybe I'd hated him most because I couldn't pin him down: needed him to seem unchangeable so that I could pride myself on not fearing change, which itself was a lie: everything inside and out seemed in ruins: could I not believe that he'd seen such destruction fall today, and had roamed this night of horrors, and found it enough, even for his heart, which had longed for mainland years to see Crete go down? Could he not have realized what he'd been wanting in the sight of this child dragging itself—What did I want from him? Fealty, renunciation of everything his life in his world had taught him, in blood? I couldn't get rid of my mistrust but it belittled me to watch him over this boy, fussing, watching and wiping and speaking to him—Somewhere he must've suffered for the loss of *this* Theseus, resurrected now perhaps, I'd been a fool, this was all the religion I should ask of him

Phaedra laid her ear to the child's pale chest, for he'd not moved at all: then she looked at Theseus and said she was sorry

—No he's not! He's not! the Shepherd argued; but it was so.

He wept. Openly. From the stomach. Looked up. Ari-

adne crouched beside him, slid her arm across his shoulders as the rest of the onlookers turned away. I needed to say something.

—Brother, there'll be more people needing you tomorrow.

—I know, I know it, it's just that if you'd seen him—pulling himself along with these two—Look how small his hands are, so perfect, like his mother did his nails yesterday—He's so little

—I want you to eat something, and rest now, Ariadne said

—Alright, I am tired—Somebody has to go to the sea in the morning and—check the situation, said Theseus.

I told him I'd go. It was a wretched night. After meat, of which we tried to make an offering-meal, people livened up enough to talk priorities of reparation-plans, but that didn't last long. Ariadne and Theseus lay together on some clothing and everybody tried to sleep, but we all seemed stuck-awake thinking it had taken this to make us behave like family. Did we suppose we could manage now. Gray ash began to sift down again and made the fire sparkle as it fell: the night-air grew chill and more foul with sulphur's rotten egg

We saw no sunrise, only the truth of the destruction, the end of splendor and unappreciated ease, the sky showing slim shards of blue through the low gray swirling pall, which appeared to be breaking up toward Juktas and the mountains. The ash underfoot was a fool-finger deep and you could count the voices of birds. Rising light soon brought various groups of people toward the Labyrinth, mostly women and children who shouted royal names and frightened prayers so as not to be taken as looters by the guards we had; and each group seemed to come from

a different refuge in the hills, as representatives, with bruised or burned or bleeding children the sign of their group's dire need. Tallay and some of the Horae's women struggled back to assist as they could, Queen Gelania made her way down with a dozen Callistan men and women too, whose eyes all said they should've known there'd be no outrunning this. The lady Nomia turned up in a bellskirt half-burned off her legs, people said she'd been visiting in Cnossos yesterday and had caught fire herself running through the town, trying to help people get away, taking the gesture so far after months of shame for her part in the villa's misdeeds. Her house-man Virbius had been killed up at their house at Vathypetrou, she knew already from a servant; but she wanted to help and then broke down saying she'd carry all the oil and grain we'd give her up into the hills. *They've probably more stores than we have*, Ariadne told her, *Sit and calm yourself and let my sisters look at your legs*

In almost every group there was someone bringing Ariadne a debt of guilty fealty, that she'd been right on the cliffs about the only thing to fear—It gave her power to organize people when she needed it. You had to notice, though, how few men were with the groups coming in: survivors out there must've figured to do better by appeals with women and children, or the men were hunting up food and salvage. But the ones in their prime had to be mostly dead, and all the way down the coast, too. I realized that for anybody near shore, if you saw the wave coming, it was too late to run or row. Cratus and others wanted to accompany me but it felt as if what we were going to see was truly—my fault; and Ariadne wanted Theseus here, so he'd be seen distributing food and help and courage as people returned, which wish he abided

— I'm going and I'll come straight back, Theseus.

— You be careful, he said. — Did you eat? Watch the shoulder.

Oh, even a slender elation was crazy amid so much pain, but I felt it: it was so simple, all I wanted was to get along with him as an equal, as a man, and worlds of hope and even glorious things we could build together seemed to blossom in my heart. The irony of *brother* gone—In fact I grew hasty to get him (us) the facts. I actually wanted to serve him as my king, just so long as the welfare of these people was first in his eyes and it was there as he put what war-wounds had taught him to use among the injured, looking up time after time for Ariadne's nods

Yet I'd not cleared the north precincts when a bald young priest of Archanes, one of Tukato's newest initiates came round the west bastion with a face full of news: I asked him where was Cleite and he burst out with a sobbing scold in some tongue of their prayers I didn't understand. But I knew she was dead, and his master likewise: dumbly I followed him back into Ariadne's presence.

This young man said that Cleite had been waiting me at Archanes when the first thunder came. He said the children were mostly alright, that Tukato and she had helped get them all outside and spent the first while of it teaching them more how to ride, to soak up the strength of it, watch the horses running about making answering thunder. But then it'd gotten so bad that they'd decided to go to the offering-house at Anemospilia, where Tukato had focused so much power lately, which might help; and this young man had gone with them, what a walk that was, he said, dodging falling trees and the road itself heaving them into each other. And there outside the house they'd met that foreign prince with the nickname, who'd been

haunting the hills up there since his failure at the altar; and they'd seen the smoke and the ash getting worse, the wave that hit shore and they'd asked this prince what he wanted, there wasn't time now. *Take me*, he'd answered them. *Send me to Goddess*. He would ask Her for mercy and tell how kind the Cretans had been to him, *Please*, he'd said, he don't can bear his life more. Tukato told him they didn't have that kind of prerogative here, and Cleite said that that wasn't really the spirit of The Offering; but the prince had wept to them both, it was all and the greatest thing he had to give, life was so lonely, he begged them to see it was love, and to send him now while for once his heart was bigger than his fear

And by then (this young priest wept) they'd seen the utter destruction coming and there was thought in Cleite's face for Ariadne's danger: this priest was sure Cleite had given Labyrinth-level assent because a life, now, might avert what many believed Ariadne herself would offer. So they took the prince into the offerings-house there, a deed in itself with the shocks underfoot and he was very brave as they purified him and helped him lie down on his right side on the altar. And with Tukato chanting and caressing the prince's hair our sister had made one quick stroke across the great neck-vein, and this young priest and an attendant began to collect the blood in vessels for the house's central shrine. He remembered his master choosing out a vessel with a white bull on its side, an enormous gesture in case we didn't realize already Tukato's feelings about these Gods of the north. The prince seemed to fall asleep and Cleite laid the knife down, turned away: Tukato stood there with both hands on the body, weeping because the prince had done something after all that not even the king—Excuse

him. Well, the last thing this priest remembered was seeing Tukato reach down and gently shut the prince's lips together, and then he'd given this priest a nod to step outside and see what was happening. The house attendant had been right behind him with a vessel full of the blood when a terrible shock struck, and the whole house caved in. On them all. He'd tried, he'd tried to dig them out but the stones and timbers were too heavy: there couldn't be anyone left alive inside, he ended, the house was still burning right now

We covered our faces with our hands, clergy, guards, staff, Athenians, suppliant, children. Cleite. Tukato. Perdix lifted her hands and I saw the quick whites of her eyes as her dark lids fluttered and the corners of her mouth fell. *Cleite'd have left this world on her own before long anyway*, her face had said as the water came. Cleite's spirit, Tukato's moving out into the world, riders of its life forever now: that was all. But I never looked at the meanest dust again without knowing there was greatness of man and woman latent in it

— Well, there it is, Elphenor's voice said. — We've told you all along the futility of this, this darkness. Now that Earthshaker is

— Go and thank Him yourself, you cursed dog! Cratus cried and before anybody could move he drew a dagger from his belt and was on top of screaming Elphenor, stabbing and stabbing and telling him how long he'd lusted for his blue blood. Neither Sillus nor Auxo or the elder Kouretes could stop Cratus, and the younger ones, Teledamus and Ion and the rest had no more will for it than a Yamo: Theseus and I were first to try, and that was quickly, but two stabs alone had been mortal. Elphenor's face an utter surprise and then disappointment, his chest

heaved and he cried out till his skin went yellow and his eyes rolled still: for the first time, the other advisors and the majority of our own people shared one look. I was sorry for this man who'd shown me things about our own ciphers, about reserve; but like everybody else I was numb, and number over Cleite and Tukato, angry too at the words so that I let go Cratus, and Theseus did the same. Nobody said so but it was a quicker death than these men had given Podes. Theseus made not a flinch toward presuming to judge, but gave the blood-drained faces of Elphenor's peers a hard stare, and that was all: Ariadne might see reason to banish our priest but there was too much need for every experienced hand and familiar authority. Cratus took himself away without a word or any expression, and entered the crypts, and Perdix went worriedly after him: the body was borne out for burial, probably with the boy of last night (there could be few formalities now, let alone his wished-for pyre unless his brethren gathered the wood), and I tried to depart again. *Don't fall asleep now, people!* I heard Ariadne attempting as I went down the ramp. *We'll make a new start, just like Europa! You'll see*

But her answer from the people was as much a weary mewling as it was a try at prayer, from hearts shaken by the thing done at Anemospilia to no decisive effect. Everything breaking apart. I could not find my tears for anything

I crossed the gray-hazy customs yard with my boots sinking past the toes in drifts of ash, and all before me floated a grayness like a powdery mist that made me pull up my mask again. These had been the north meadows. People were sitting on the stoops of ruined houses or tossing salvage out of second-story windows. Wreckage

and the smell of wreckage waited ahead, borne in on the gentlest north breeze. As I went seaward the houses, whether whitewashed or pink or lemon were starting to turn queer green, rust-red and gray, just like Gelania'd told us: everything, to the twigs on the trees, was coated and muffled with ash, a few finches crossed the sky here and there but the world had forgotten that this was spring. I held to the road and came to a boulder of pumice twice as big as my head, which I picked up with ease and heaved off the road: there, that's better. At the head of Cnossos valley I noticed more ash on the ground, but clearer air too, as if the wind had blown the back-end of the cloud inland: yes, spears of sun were coming through the bent and broken trees ahead, but when I took my mask down I tasted a kind of vapor of fish and ripped-up woodsap, wet mud. Then, ahead, I gaped. A dark high hideous mass, like an endless serpent sunning itself, lay across the road and climbed the lay of the hills either side: the line of wave-wrack. It was going to get worse now, the smell alone promised that and I tried to keep saying *Just like Europa* as I looked for a place to climb over

I went far one way, then the other, looking for some break in this wattled wall of mud and tree-parts sticking every way like spikes: mixed in—it stood more than twice my height in places—were blocks of stone from houses, fish tails, a sheep's head and shoulder, there was a cow's back legs, and there, there the first person or an arm at least, just sticking out of the wrack, and I realized I was looking at a shipwreck, a good two miles yet from Amnisos. My eyes seemed to open to the shape of a ship's entire front half spiring crookedly up out of the ashy mud, and spilling inland on this side were snapped oars, a

javelin, six or seven dead men on their backs or bellies with limbs at sickening angles, open mouths half-buried in gray. I just grabbed hold of some cursed roots and started climbing over, swearing I'd come back to help honor the burials but there was nothing I could say, and as I hurried over I stepped on a marine's face staring up like an open-eyed mask set in the mud. I screamed and fell halfway over trying to apologize and reached for a hold that itself turned into an octopus' still-live arm: I let go and kept falling, and on the other side was another world. The air itself was clearer but the hills were naked and gray, acres of tree-stumps and mowed-down timber, vast lightning-shaped gray and brown networks of runnels in the earth where the sea had run back to sea: the only sign of the road now was the orderly row of stumps that had been its shade-trees, and where the trees themselves had stopped tumbling you could see the swirl-patterns of the water's abandonment, dead birds, a cat, here and there the last flop of a bass, masses of broken boughs and torn-up brush. More men. And I looked for some relief in the gray but there was none beneath the sky's muted blue: this desolation reached to both horizons. There could be no towns standing between here and Zakros. Zakros. Planks underfoot, sour vapors rising, curved ships' gunwales, olive boughs, wild almond. Springtime coming, and summer's heat. Oh, yes, we'd be smelling past lives alright

And the farther seaward I went through this swath the more pieces of Amnisos I saw, the squared beams and dressed blocks that had been houses, patches of roofing cane, somebody's hammer, a block and tackle. A driver lay half-sunk in mud near his smashed-up wagon: his name I could not remember but I knew the oxen, Dapple

and Blondie lying on their sides as if napping, but with tongues out and bulging eyes, still yoked together. By the frozen flow of the mud around them it looked as if they'd tried to run and been sucked back this far after. Another wreck. *Attempter* I read near its prow. Two oarsmen in each other's arms amid rags of clothing, shields. And I dreaded seeing Cordax or Creusa the port's mistress or Podes' people, but I didn't, they were all gone, buried or sucked out to sea

There were still a few tamarisks standing in the last lee of the shore hills, raped of most leaf but still standing. Whatever the sight gave me, I lost it when I got close, because there was a body jammed into the joint of one's three thickest boughs. An anger drove me to look, look good and close; and it was Elaphios and now I could cry again because there wasn't going to be any coming back for him this time, I wanted to take him down but I'd have to just drop him, I spared us both that, I passed on up over the silt-slippery crest

There was no Amnisos. There were no houses and no ships' moles anymore and it took what breath I had to see where the waterline was now, practically lapping the naked foundations of Creusa's villa. That was the only sign of people I saw. The sea was smooth and the sole feature of the place was a hump of naked rock a short swim out: bobbing timber, floats of pumice and ash-scum rippling on the waves. Dia Isle was still there, striped and stained with gray, mere patches of trees on her flanks on this lee side, who could tell about The Grove; and my chest sank, for all its will to rage, and I squinted to see the beast beyond the Isle

But Velkanos wasn't there anymore, not so much as the blotch of its old crooked crater. High-floating gray

and dark blue drifts of ash-cloud pointed in vast ribbons to where it had stood, and stretched a few last grasping claws clear across the dome of the sky to eastern Crete: stuff was still falling, but letting through a grudging bronze of the sun.

New start.

Kinds of destruction.

Like flowers in ash.

And I suppose the Shepherd's rebirth *this* important.

Suppose it was?

I slid down the last naked hill and moved westward along the new beach to see if anything was left of either Katsambas or the new harbor. Trees, bodies, more wrecked house-parts, children, a sail hanging off its stuck-up yard: they'd tried everything to get out of the way and I knew there was not one single strategic position we'd picked that would've left our thousand safe. I took a sword from one of the corpses and slung on its comforting weight

Our only hope of defense, if we needed it (brother), if anybody was left alive overseas, lay with the ships gone east and west. Perides had five hundred cracks with him, due back anytime now and the Achaians had shown us you were somehow safe from waves on the open sea: Pandaros and his ships, though, might be wrack against Rhodian rocks, guarding a coastline. I walked faster because this was a day's march and I did not want to be out here come night with so many people's angry shades. Blame me? Who else was there?

I was nearing Katsambas (as far as I could tell, since the coast I knew was largely gone) when I saw some people coming toward me through a seaside field of mud and broken trees. All men, perhaps a dozen marines labori-

ously dragging a cart around debris and some of them picking up weapons and things and heaping them on the pile. One of them, sure enough, was Mestor, and with them Daitor too. When I could see Mestor's facial scar (they were all filthy, some had hacking-coughs and red-eye and they looked like they'd fought a battle), he hailed me by name and they all jostled round. Now they were close, I suddenly felt a craziness in them

— Well now sir! Glad to see you! Mestor shouted. — Headed out to Katsambas, are we? he asked with a cracked cordiality. — Save your bootsoles, we've got everything useful from there right with us, don't we, men.

— What about the new harbor, I said with fear's forced smile. — There could be ships because of the rotation-schedule, and the cliffs

And Mestor laughed, and Daitor joined in, and they all began laughing, coughing

— The rotation! The cliffs! Mestor said. — Oh, sure, sir, but as soon as it started yesterday those fellows put right out, because it's *safe* on the open sea, he lilted savagely. — Isn't it safe, men? They're all *gone*, that's the story, sir! Poof! And hey, ever see a ship in a tree? We did, back there a few miles. There's *nothing left* and we're the home-guard right here! Hey, look, Deucalion's wearing a breadknife!

— Where's the loaf? said an ash-streaked marine in the back

— Perides will be back in force, I said. — And the Rhodes ships

— Ho, sure they will! Mestor grinned like a skull

— We're not worried though, Daitor said. — We still have the hostages, right sir?

— The Athenians? The King and the

—The king! —The sacred king! men laughed round the cart

—Better wake up, *sir*, said Mestor looming closer with a dangerous look in his eyes. —We got to know that fellow awhile back and he's our hostage now like the rest of them. You know whose month this is, don't you, giving us the wonderful weather? What else do you figure He has in store, more statues then? We've got big company coming, you mark my words, *sir*, and we're not going to stop them with moonblood and girls' curses

—But—Some people think the north is wrecked just like this

—It doesn't matter, Daitor cut in. —We want them prisoners till we know better, and that is it, he said beating his palm with a fist: the hundreds of brothers he'd lost after scarcely beginning to learn to lead them were in his eyes' gray sockets, but he did not seem to have a thought to blame myself or even the House. The others followed these leadings and repeated them, coughing, thirsty, gripping aching heads: there was something to their words I'd hardly considered, and though they already looked too beaten-up to fight for themselves, they were wild enough to kill anybody where they stood for too much argument. At their elder Mestor's order they resumed picking up what arms they found, and the plan was to go back to Cnossos and get the Athenians tied up at least

—Good idea, I said

—And if they resist we'll kill a couple right off, maybe those old toads, Daitor said, like a man trying hard to breast unknown waves that were drowning old devotions

—Absolutely, I answered

—See, men? Minotauros reborn. Ha! Ha ha ha! Mestor laughed

I never learned how these fellows had survived, I kept my mouth shut except to humor them as we worked our way back, a few of them finding friends dead in the desolation and cursing sea and sky and Earth. We could find no well unspoiled by salt and ash and by the time we got over the wall of wrack again the afternoon sun warmed enough to bring the smell out of things. The gray cloud was settling fairly fast, so that we saw the smoke rising out of Cnossos valley and the halfwrecked Labyrinth before us, back of gray trees; and stragglers, seeing their home-guard straggle in, showed us faces full of thoughts like Mestor's own

Their plan was simply to seize the Athenians as soon as I walked them up into the House, but not all habits of protocol were gone yet and they agreed I should speak if that'd save a fight. As I came up onto the central court from the ramp I saw Theseus and Ariadne bent together over an injured woman, our clergy and the Athenians still busy doling out cups of grain and oil, a much longer and denser line of shattered people stretching from the jars down through the wrecked south corridor, gazing or trying not to upon our ancestors glowing on the walls. Ridius' guards leaned wearily on spears as if disorder were the last thing anybody wanted, and rows of people lay either side of the standing line, groaning, coughing, lying herb-drugged and in bloody turns of fine cloth; but where the guards looked for relief in the sight of us, the advisor Porthaon tapped Theseus' shoulder and he stood right up as if expecting some sort of coup. After all, they'd just seen Elphenor murdered; and now many people followed those eyes to us, and saw what was left of the coastal forces, and a mewling murmur and sobs disturbed the air

— You're all prisoners! Mestor shouted before I spoke

and a marine behind him did say *Kill one, show them we mean it*. The guards sprang forward to protect the Shepherd but he didn't back off from Ariadne's side at all, just folded his arms and stared familiarly

— What are you *doing*, man.

— You think we don't know? said Daitor; and now, suddenly, for the first time I'd ever seen, a look of something like fear broke from Theseus' face, but I thought I understood it as he looked to Ariadne. She stood up slowly and took the Shepherd's hand, fixing the eyes of the men who not days ago had lifted their swords in her name, pushing Daitor back a step; and I tipped the Shepherd a quick wink and said he was hostage now against northern opportunists. He mustn't try anything

— Oh, he said. — Alright. I understand, men. But may I make myself useful meantime? Why don't you come wash off and eat something, we got the pipes from Juktas spring patched together, and there's water here

— He thinks we're joking! said Daitor pressing up to me: what *would* I do if it came to blows? My hand reached to hold his arm

— Not at all, Theseus answered. — Mestor, we know the rules. Tell you what, if we try to run or anything happens, just kill me first. Stay right with me like a bodyguard, how's that. Come on, there's enough blood. We've got runners on the roads for help, too, you'll see.

— On your life then, Mestor growled. — Be *your* servant, puh!

— Fair enough. So everybody, please, stand down. Let's hear it, brother, Theseus said beckoning me to himself and Ariadne; and though I had nothing good to tell them, his part in reestablishing the water and getting word out for help—plus the ways Ariadne was looking at

him, touching him casually now—mollified something more of my fears and suspicions. They decided to eat something as I did and we shared what we knew: I almost smiled to see, too, that after the good water and a muttonbone apiece, Mestor's full company including himself were sprawled out and snoring.

Sunlight slanting through a crimson colonnade; the broken symmetries of multi-doored ritual halls and the way the pillars framed by the doorways across these chambers played with your eyes; the journeys to be had as you stood before our walls' endless murals and hangings, gardens and seashores, mountain-towns luminous with all their birds and four-leggeds rampant; the scents on the smooth draws of air flowing through the deepest corridors of the east wing, incense and warm barley-bread and a faint zinc of sacrificial blood and wine and beeswax. Clean skin, clean linens, bath and bed, the sounds of skirts and their dream-giving perfumes, the strong taste of kiln-burnt clay, the presence of the ages in the smooth-worn turnings of our stairs; our family's laughter—These were things we began to see in our sleep as this month of Earthshaker's unfolded. We knew better than to speak much of them as enormity on enormity took up our lives, but they were there in every eye behind the impatience and irritation and bickering councils. Water, food, herbs and unguents and poppy for pain: there was nothing that wasn't either difficult to get, or limited, or a complicated worry. Black rain. Midnight aftershocks. The smell of human and animal meat and fetid sea-mud crawling over the hills. Flies. Beginnings of fevers here and there as a day or two of south wind shot down the mountains and drove back the smells with its own hot gritty blasts. It actually appeared that a crops-planting might be worth-

while with the ash most places only ankle-deep; but the labor we lacked to plough the stuff under, the simple faith it needed to farm three wretched hungry months, and in the shadow of a mountain still there in our minds, if not in sight—It took everything Ariadne and the Shepherd had between them to keep order. Anxiousness to hear from Crete's other houses increased and, with it, despair that either Perides or Pandaros' ships would get back

We doubted we'd live to see Crete's splendor again but the foundations below the ruins were ours to work with. Ariadne led many small rites before Europa's strong-standing tomb, so people could remember that everything lost had itself come out of destruction just like this; and it helped some, helped herself, too, because it put her that much more on our mother's path, as a rebuilder. There was another reason for such rites, though. They balanced the work of mass burials we could not avoid as the first step toward a tomorrow. She and the priests and priestesses came out every day, to anoint bodies sparingly with oil when we'd pried them out of the hardening ground or dug them out of the wrack-wall. And Theseus—I was still watching his every flinch from behind the more obvious scrutinies of Mestor's and Daitor's militant men, but he missed not a day of this grisly labor, and I daresay that for all his experience of war on the mainland, he'd never seen so much death. Awhile ago I'd thought his every breath calculated to ingratiate himself and make his secret way: but he broke down again when our business finally came to Elaphios up in that tree and we had to do some brutal things to get the body down. And we casually touched and said more with less talk than ever: there were still times of mutual resentment

and withdrawals because I think we were both afraid of what was happening between us. But if he'd not thought me capable of tearlessly dragging a corpse by the arm to a grave, I'd not thought him able to grieve that our lack of trust had put so many good men out in the waves' path. We were all overwhelmed, and when he said he'd like to send the first seaworthy ship we laid hands on up to the mainland, to learn how his people had fared, nobody second-guessed him.

Yes, said Perdix, herself grieving Cleite and so many, *We have to look after all our family now*; and he took the word from her like a compliment at last, as if even his Aryan disdain for mixing with Earthling blood were dying in him. He sided with Ariadne more often than not against his advisors, brought his most obvious traitors Aithe and Kapha back into equable care, even dared be harsh at times against whining and torpor. But what had our grandmother said, that *They all come back to Her*? I never thought him a man to live for his Queen, but in the Labrys-shaped mass graves there was a Power he no longer slighted. Could he and Ariadne be moving toward love? Couldn't tell: she looked satisfied that he felt our losses, that he seemed to find his old contempt pointless, and whenever he made her smile, our futures lived. They slept together now in a crudely-furnished west wing storage room, set up till we might begin to dig out the east; and there was a new ease between them, her hand on his shoulder as she poured him the night meal's ration of wine, his Thanks to her, encouraging her to eat. It seemed a beginning that even Cratus and Theia could live with

Meanwhile, we could hope Glaucus successful, that Pandaros' fifteen ships were just keeping things tight

around Rhodian trade for the Lion. But Perides' mission was overdue, and there were not going to be any hundreds more marines coming over the mountains. For Hippeus' and other heralds' reports were reaching us now, some of them laced with appeals for *our* help: the ash had not harmed Crete's best farmlands in the Mes-sara plain around Phaestos, but Amphissa's house itself was in ruined disarray bad as Cnossos', and in fact between Amnisos and Zakros there was not a town or great house unharmed. The whole island had been rocked like one huge boat. With deep apology Hippeus confided what the messages didn't include, the widespread remark that Cnossos had deserved the worst of what happened. And what about ships, Theseus asked: answer was that we might ask four or five from Amphissa's small southern fleet, but there'd be nothing and no one coming from the east, that was sure. Thousands were gone, and the homes they'd lived in

This brought back a lot of my anger against myself for the disaster, and now that we knew our utter vulnerability I watched the Shepherd as never before, for one sign of a secret hope. So did Mestor. Indeed, he made a sort of spy out of everyone he could for just this purpose: Ariadne defended Theseus the best way she knew, creating more basic hopes, helping people believe we'd not likely starve if we set ourselves to living off the sea, and to planting-rites. Pressed to answer the fear, though, she could only resort to the new world between herself and him. *Is this a man to do these things you fear?* she asked the crowds; and we saw how far people were from her first trust of him. Theseus himself fairly glowed with what, in its naturalness, added truth to her words

Then one morning I was in the throne room with him

and Kudru: Kudru, though the body of our artisans had voted him the Daedalaë's leader in Iris' stead, hadn't been faring too well through these days when neither he nor they could devote themselves to their workbays. Some of them had been carefully taking favorite murals off the walls and stacking them in a corner of the Admiralty building for safe-keep: there was still too much digging-out to be done in the east wing for much more, though, and the three of us—or rather, he and Theseus were arguing how to repair the images back of the throne. The landscape there, and the painted palm whose sanctity shaded the dais, had lost big chunks of plaster, generations old: Theseus wanted something more stately in their places, a brace of intimidating griffins perhaps like the one on the inner west wall, where (he remembered) our grandmother'd used to sit in council. But Kudru, trying his frowsy best not to stir up trouble, complained of the same old *Balance it till it's dead* mainland style. I was trying to put it to him that Queen and King made such decisions, when a young mariner leaning weakly in one of the doorways turned us all around. Ariadne and a crowd of clergy, bringing the man to be heard by Theseus and me, were out on the court just behind him: his black locks were salt-stiff and there were dark circles beneath his eyes, and I might've been glad for the word off the sea this promised. But I recognized the light gold necklace he wore. Not a common shipman, but a member of Glaucus' diplomatic crew. *Where is he!* I said

—He's dead, sir. All dead. *Themis* too. I'm the only one left. Is it wrong to name a dead ship? We were trying to come home. We did everything orders said. In Caria, you know. It was all arranged with them. We were coming home, this man said, trailing off till we sat him down in

the anteroom, fetched him wine he could scarcely drink for the shakes in his hands—Ariadne and the rest gathered in to hear, and people stood outside the doors listening too, every bit of news a kindling-stick to hope, or its opposite

—It was—We were coming home. We were isle-hopping back from Caria. A little northeast of Cargos, there on your tapestry. It was a nice afternoon. Felt like rain, though. Glaucus was spelling me. He liked to row. And I could hear the breakers off to port. The normal noise. We were going to run for Palaikastro, beach there, and he was going to detour home for his lady before we reported. That's his prerogative. I was lying down. I could hear the breakers going by. Then there was thunder. One big bolt of it, then more. And I was hearing breakers to starboard too. And I looked around. That was when everybody saw it. It was so big. It was so big. There was no place to go. It was sucking us right up it. It was so big and it had no sides. No end. Like a big wall, moving. We turned her prow into it. We never cut water like that. We went up and up and up. We were all screaming. And then she flipped over. I don't know what happened. I dreamed I was flying. There was black and a roaring and then I don't remember. I was on the side of a hill. On Cargos. Why am I alright? Most everybody's dead on Cargos. Why am I alright? We buried—my shipmates there. I told them who I was. They found a fishing boat. So I could get help. That's how I got here. We had to wait. You couldn't see. It was days. But Glaucus would've wanted me to report. I'm sorry I spilled my wine on this nice stone

—Nevermind that, said Theseus stooping to meet the man's eyes as the crowd of listeners grew outside the anteroom's dolmen-doorways; but for all he tried, we

learned nothing of Pandaros' blockade-force, of his fifteen ships and five hundred men, no few of them with iron swords. *What you wanted, we arranged: We're diplomats: We were coming home* was all this man could say now. Theseus gave up, but then Daitor, urged on by Mestor and his company in the crowd's midst, pushed his way past the clergy and Ariadne and pressed the man to think, to remember

I was glad Glaucus and I had made a little love once, that time in the harvest rites. Had he suffered: had he cursed us as the ship went up, and up: half a day more and he'd've made it home. Would have, could have, should have. Brother. What could we tell his Antibia, a Glaucus gone, a Theseus gained? What would he do now. The crowd watched Daitor fail too and their very faces and shaking heads said they felt something bad coming. Nobody panicked, thus, when Daitor went back outside and without a word he and Mestor and the men all drew their swords and started reaching for Athenians, young men, their women, Porthaon and the other advisors too, who called out to Ariadne for the first time. Theseus stood alone to one side of her and endured what to him *was* another Cretan panic. I hadn't realized how little approval there'd actually been for the mainlanders' freedoms in our midst these days. My friend, gone: I wanted to disappear within the Labyrinth's deepest halls and yet something stronger than anything I'd known was in my heart now, to *shake the House with its blood*, as he'd have done: I went out into the court's increasing disorder of fear and bodies and of itself my spirit said *If I'm not a man to make Glaucus proud, then let me die*

— Mistress, with all due respect, Mestor was saying, — you don't know what you're talking about. If the

Themis is gone you have to assume the fifteen ships off Rhodes are wiped out too. By themselves they couldn't save Crete either, but don't you see? You can't count on Perides and his men getting back. I *know* what's coming now!

—You're all liars! said the elder Acraeus from between the tips of two marines' swords: House-guard were looking to Ariadne from the edges of the crowd but she was letting this take its course, letting the voices of fear and despair have their say. The month upon us; the ptoliporthos surely still roving with his thousand, now free to hit Crete itself anyplace he chose; the words from Delphi—The more these men tried to frighten Ariadne toward their wisdom the more they called forth fearful answers from even the injured people sitting up along the court's far end. *Train us to fight: Restore Earthshaker's statue and rites: Kill a few Athenians as an offering to The Powers*

—If you can say first—If you can explain to us, Ariadne began to answer (shoving back the locks of her hair blown across her face by the day's first rise of south wind)—Just tell us how all this destruction told the difference between our ships and any others! Well? If all our men are gone, why not the mainland's?

But the answers that assaulted her from all sides, shallow as they were, were too simple for people to doubt. Because Crete had simply always taken the worst of Velkanos, who knew why; because this madness could only be the doings of a Poseidon; because Achaia had long-known disaster was coming, witness Delphi's words

—Words from a priestess in Apollo the mouse's pay! I shouted

—Look at your own House, woman! Mestor said com-

ing closer to Theseus with his blade drawn, if down at his side. — Your own family! Goddess used to take Her kings, and now that's finished She's killing Her people. Well, I'm not Her Consort but I'm not going to let myself or anybody end up slaves of mainlanders, who despise Her

—And is that in your hand the love we should turn to now? Ariadne answered after pause with her arms akimbo: Mestor hadn't made a lot of sense but sense was not the strength behind his appeals to the crowd

—Oh, Mistress, this is a death to me to say, but please don't talk love to us anymore! said Daitor, who stood with a grip on the back of little Kapha's head, the flat of his sword to the youth's side. —They'll be coming, don't you understand? With hostages we have some kind of chance

—You're all liars! Acraeus repeated as if it were a proverb

The House-guard pressed a bit tighter round the crowd of us, ready for Ariadne's orders if a kind of civil war was to start again. Theseus was letting her handle it: I tried to think how to help. Perides' five hundred might well be lying up at Malta till the worst of Velkanos cleared: saved from the fleet's fate by mother's murder. But even if they and the Rhodes force got back, could it hurt to keep the Shepherd—safe? Still, more: for if the mainland was unharmed and meant to bring us down, they might discount even his life in favor of the Cretan take, gold, cattle, women. With all this and the clamor about us I just didn't know how to help her, and now Ariadne's hands came off her hips, and she opened her palms out-and-down to the Earth, and closed her eyes and stood still, silent, listening. And slowly, as people watched her for judgment, even Mestor's marines fell

quiet; and I saw one deep breath lift her bosom, her delicate jaw move forward as her teeth set. I knew, and thought *No, don't ask It of her, please*: She exhaled slowly, face completely grave as it lifted just a little now, resolve, consent, and then her arms fell to her sides and she looked round at everybody. Phaedra, Theia, Perdix, Diamat, Cratus saw what I saw and they moved toward her: she raised one hand to them

—This *is* what comes, Mestor, she said, — of the King's refusal. Sleep. Night Mare. But—I see now, people. It's not the fields or The Dead or The Powers demanding The Offering. It's you. Oh, I had other visions for us! she said with half a gesture toward taking up Theseus' nearby hand, but he did not answer it, frozen as he seemed by the other-world enormity in her words, his brows arched together above a stark blue gaze. — But Goddess—The Aridela is the *damos*. The children do hateful things, and yet she loves

And then she turned in the silence (without a glance toward the House-guard, ready on its toes for her) and took Phaedra's hands down from her face: I heard Phaedra say *No, Not me, Please don't go* but Ariadne led her out with a hush to a space amid the people. I don't know why she chose Phaedra to succeed her over an elder priestess: Ariadne did seem about to say more, words being time, and life, but then she went pale with her own mortality in her face, her posture sank as if her spirit were leaving already through her feet. And where angry faces might've called this a threat or a punishment moments before, I now saw only dumbfounded looks, adamant tremblings of features and people rooted where they stood, trying hard to fight off from their hearts the power of a world believed to be wholly lost

—Stop, stop! Theseus shouted suddenly shoving past marines' weapons (whose holders themselves seemed tranced) and he got himself between Ariadne and Phaedra, his face rage-red

—What is this! Don't you people ever see enough death? How many times this, just since I came here? That youth, that Callistan, that foreign prince and your own priestess with him, and what was given back to you for it? Death, death, death!

He grabbed his own hair and turned redder and redder, almost frothing, stamping one foot up and down

—I forbid it! I won't allow this! I'll kill you all myself first! he raved on, gesturing crazily: I'd never seen Theseus so angry, so agitated beyond himself: it was as if all he'd been opening to had only been bending his soul further, further, like a bow that had now reached its limit and was snapping back hard; and his bearded makers saw and looked ashamed. But Cretans, Daitor, even Mestor—They wanted no part of what would push Ariadne to The Offering. People started to call to her that the Offer was potent, that we had the Athenians anyhow

—Listen to me, Theseus said. —If my word means nothing to you, still there's something more sensible we can do. This boat we have out of Cargos—We can trick it out some, and send it to the mainland and offer *them* help! That way they'll assume you're strong, and the ship can find out their condition. And meanwhile your Admiral will be back, our ships that is, and—Ariadne, he said turning on her as even Mestor's men began to assent, —I'm not going to let you—I'm not going to let anything make you some fool's corn-dolly, do you understand me? It is *over*

This last with a harsh down-cut of his right hand: such

a quandary in Ariadne's face. Perhaps the last of her mystery stricken; the people, for love of her, siding with Theseus, and her own desire to live filling up her eyes. But her indignation showed most: what he'd spoken from might be love, but it boded more a stripping-away and a possession, than regard for what made her what she was. Ariadne asked Theseus if he would submit, then, to close guard, till this ship fetched us facts. His face showed his plain irritation, the insult to his honor's word; yet he consented. Now Theseus seemed to look for that reach toward his hand again, but Ariadne turned and walked into the west wing's corridors, toward her makeshift privacy. Her wake was silence, and the marines, hanging nonetheless close to their hostages, sheathed their swords

After that—though she still worked with Theseus in all we did toward commencing to rebuild—Ariadne turned inward. Not with Bull Himself had she felt herself so close to her life's end and it made her look anew at her throne, at the Shepherd's love, everything. It would've pleased her to bring Amphissa back to talk but there was little except bad news pouring in from everywhere on the island. The early spring's portion of maddening fly-crazy south wind did not help, there was no word from Perides and nothing from Rhodes, and the intolerable wait for our destiny off a fishing-boat began to make people demand some share of the weapons Mestor's men had been gathering up. We could not find the caches of blades beneath the sea-mud. When real weapons ran out people started to make slings from leather and cloth, sharpened sticks. And what to pray for as we led ragged daily rites, the dubious hope that the mainland, as here, had been devastated? People who tried to avoid the turn toward arms talked a lot about cities overseas and kin who hadn't

been seen or visited for too long: everybody knew what happened when raiders came and we got news that not a few towns, or their ruins, were being abandoned for inland high ground, where defensible shrines or their ruins seemed the only wise places to wait and see. Evacuation-thoughts became councils among some clans, who sent out appeals of their own for ships from our southern houses. We waited and worked and put what men we could to chopping the acres and acres of mown-down timber, searched for surviving shipwrights: we'd never seen such sunsets, gold and green in the sky these days, and sometimes watching them we knew, we knew we could rebuild, and better. That was tradition Ariadne made sure we remembered. But we were at Achaia's mercy now, and we'd never heard-tell of their having any

Seven days passed after the fishing-boat's departure, and Theseus (understandably, most said) was showing more anxiety than any of his twelve for the fate of their people. Not a single island boat had put in yet. Then Theseus seemed to—break, if that was the word for it. Queen Gelania had come down to add her meticulous island elegance to our evening meal in the civil refuge of our supper hall, and was playing the harper's part, singing airs to please Ariadne because they were friends: Theseus seemed to want to lose himself as well in smiles from Ariadne if he could raise them, and he ordered second and third wine-rations for everybody. He didn't care if we drank the last pithos dry tonight, he said. He made sure his ubiquitous guards and Mestor got their share, and they laughed as he recounted (at his own expense before the gathering) that hunting-night years ago, sharing Mestor's spirits in the hills. Then Gelania sang more, things learned from her former realms' guests out of

Ugarit in Syria and such, where the people lived on milk and honey. *Will you hold the next song till I come back from—nature's call?* Theseus said: Daitor and Mestor alike rose with the Shepherd, but Sillus had caught the mood and asked where exactly they thought the man might go

—But sing, more by all means, Ariadne asked as Theseus left her side with a kiss to her forehead. Gelania said this was from Egypt:

*—Oh my beloved
how exquisite
to bathe in the waters
as you watch
and to let you see
the way my soaked dress
marries my body's beauty—
Come, look at me.*

A last flourish rippled from her strings: we had no words, and even the usual praise of cups tapped on the tables was passed up, for silence. Gelania and Ariadne, together without trying, lowered their eyes and sat still, not reaching for cups, remembering other worlds

—Where is he, Mestor growled.

But nobody answered, until it began to look like a mistake; and when we saw Theseus again, he was coming from the sea.

7

Continuance

Ariadne lifted the conch to her lips and loosed long throaty farewell to the ships off Amnisos. I stood beside her on the hill above the mariners' cave, and they were slipping away from Crete in the late spring morning's first light, just after new Willow Moon. Its waxing crescent floated low and red above the waters in the dawn, and the hills, stripped of their trees and the port-town, reverberated with answer from the small multitude of people packed aboard the ships. Once more in unison their voices: *Oh-lo-lo-lo-lo-lo*

They were only nine vessels, and that a motley, a sight that spoke how we'd been faring since Theseus had disappeared. Three Cretan warships, all that were left us after disaster in Sicily, were now scudding out ahead beyond Dia for a pack of four broad-bellied merchanters, those ships scavenged and sent round from Phaestos by our aunt; and two black sleek-hulled patrol ships took up their rear, low-riding vessels built in the style of Alxiona's northern islanders, bestowed upon Crete last moon when her contingent had put in. These nine were heading out toward high seas in an eastern-pointing crescent and Ariadne raised her arms now, as she reveled in the voices: they sang as much for her as for the shore and mountains

fading from their sights, almost three hundred strong and trilling up to her through the morning calm, like the voices of Blessed Ones. Which they were—people and families and key figures in foreign trades, chosen by their own clans to leave Crete while anybody could. Troy, Miletus, Ephesus, Cyprus, Ugarit, Byblos, Tyre, Pharos, Libya: strong ports of refuge with Cretan cousins in them all and there was high boisterousness in the voices still reaching us, young ones making adventure of what their elders grieved as end. Ariadne's arms came down slowly to her sides and she looked exultant just to see them getting away

I was watching the light where the waves were breaking, the light coming out of the sea and shining like a molten rainbow before it vanished back into the sand. Blue and silver, amber and wine, indigo and flashes of honeyed crimson, the sea drew this light back into itself and then flung the next wave up the shore, it seemed I'd never seen the light quite like this between the moon and the brightening dawn, not in all my days of coming down here. Was it because of this end, because we knew our deaths were very likely under sail? Old Mother Ocean taking our ships and people back: the waves breaking over and over, the rainbow of light melting back into the Earth and the sea, again, again—No one could have named the water's serpent colors today

But to have shared Ariadne's procession of torches bringing all these emigrants down here—the loading of watercasks and weapons, of potted grafts of olive and fruit trees and vines, the blood-offerings and blessings up here at the cave, the families' partings, lilies and crocus in loved ones' hair—All this was to realize how much was finished, and how much beginning, and the sea looked

older than time, wholly other and new. How she'd borne our mother Europa to these shores, fed us, made us rich bearing Cretans everywhere on her back: these waters which two moons past had stood up on end and smashed us to kindling, thousands killed; and now she was taking our people back so gently toward safety this morning, and soon with equanimity might deliver a new breed, a race of well-heeled raiders. Squanderers. Drawing the light back into herself and casting the next wave up the shore, again and again

Ariadne's free hand took mine as we watched the sails belly out with the day's first slow warm south wind, a spate of The Breath shooting down the mountains these days. Hold onto me while we let go of everything. It was good to feel her hand, for she'd led us to douse each our torches in the sea this morning: I wanted to know from her, ritual wasn't the world we faced down now. Three torches had marked my life so far and it felt too soon for a gesture with one that quite accepted this, *this*. You could see where grass and groundcreeper and a poppy or two were growing over the muddy ruins of Amnisos' houses, grass uncut moving up the Labyrinth hill too, ants and snakes in the cracks of House-blocks, birds in its tumbles of stone. We knew what they and the light in the sea were telling us, of the melting-away of all things, and our turn was come. But it was still too enormous. The thing would not be known till you were hard up against it and we did not know what we'd find ourselves doing when it came. *See through, Feel, See through: Give yourself to what always wins*; yet here was a fear to core your bones. Strong as night and just as blind, it seemed, to your last shred of will

To help myself draw upon what Dicte Cave had taught

me I'd painted my eyes again with royal vermilion: it had brought dream-memory of Athens, rather than vision, but I'd kept it on, for I remembered the Shepherd's disgust for it and I wanted to be exactly myself when I looked him and his Companions in the face. Defiance like this and a reach toward better might be all I could manage and she'd told me she'd ask nothing more—*Just stand with me, Deucalion, as you can*

Oh yes, we knew they were coming. It was as clear as the sky where Velkanos had used to be. My stomach was fear but I found myself sneering already at what they thought to gain. Gold, the servitude of disdainful women, rancorous competition amongst themselves—a bitter thing for the generations, whether rites and their visions reached your soul or not. Every one of us was free to meet this as we chose, to fight, to take to the mountain-shrines and caves, to face them standing on the shore; but there'd be no more ships coming back from Sicily, that was sure. And our friend Kokalos was no man to let the news of our losses wait for his master's use

I still wanted to kill when I thought of our uncle's end. Using Little Summer's calm seas to make the most of his fifteen ships and honor Ariadne's wishes besides, Perides had not even beached his force in Sicily, but had kept the ships cruising back and forth before the walls of Kamikos while the *Talos* alone went in. Kokalos sent a messenger down from his citadel to inquire why such a force had come: this alone had launched the salty Admiral's temper (*The fugitives, man, the Daedalaë and our people you took prisoner!*). Ahh. The fugitives. Well, the Admiral should please come up into King Kokalos' presence to discuss the matter, this messenger said: Kokalos had changed his mind somewhat, or rather, he had a better proposal. As

the great Admiral was probably aware, Kokalos always had admired Daedalean works, and he wished to discuss perhaps retaining this woman Iris who'd fairly dropped from the sky into his court. If she deserved punishment of some kind under Cretan law, perhaps Kokalos could begin reparations for certain unfortunate episodes that way. *What?* Perides had barked. The messenger insisted he please come up and have a bath and the king would explain the fine points of his proposal. All the messenger knew was that these Daedalaes did not care much for the Sicilian court: one might let her suffer punishment by way of labor here (the unruly boy was another matter) and thus turn misfortunes into something to prosper both Houses

The officers with him told us that Perides had had his suspicions: he knew his orders, too; but after listening, he'd also felt it *might* be good to fetch home something like hope, some sliver, however incredible, of a chance to get this upstart-island back in line with Cretan welfare. He hadn't liked it, he'd told his men he felt out of his depth but he had to try, and at least speak with Iris: so when he'd satisfied himself that Sicily's fleet was chocked and tarped on its beaches, he'd brought his ships in, and left them with loudly-given orders to annihilate this city if he wasn't back within one day. And our marines had thundered affirmation with beats of their shields

He came back, aye. Just after sunrise next morning a squad of laughing and taunting soldiers appeared on the wall above the gates of Kamikos and they flung the Admiral's corpse right over the battlement. It jerked to a halt and swung by the neck before them, naked with the skin a ghastly gray, bloated-out and the Sicilians joked that he'd had his bath but the water had been a trifle hot.

It looked like they'd scalded or boiled him to death. And *Here's your Minos*, they'd laughed on, *Here's your king between Heaven and Earth, Come and get him*

The men had known, given the orders from Cnossos, the annihilation-speech for what it was. But Perides they'd loved through years of service, could not bear the sight. Not after two defeats besides at the hands of such people, and their orders *had* been to bring back the Daedalaë. So they'd laid siege, for days and nights, and *Come and get him, Come and get us* the Sicilians had taunted even as these marines stove in every ship they found near Kokalos' harbor. And they'd cut trees and made assault-ladders and dozens of enraged Cretan cracks died scaling them, there seemed no end to the rocks and spears and arrows coming down, Sicily expecting, after all, punitive attack. Five hundred marines soon became four hundred, and it went on, and they bled the Sicilians badly too but lacked the sheer numbers to sustain any breach of those walls. The design itself had been too good, for as you climbed one flank of the salient you were hit from the side as well as above: walls built to protect a young isolated ally from wild-country raiders were now protecting raiders from Cretan law, and men kept dying

In the middle of the seventh night the Sicilians counterattacked, too, setting fire to six of the fifteen ships: next morning, having driven them off, our officers stood back to rethink matters and the first thing they realized was how much the poor old Admiral looked like bait on a line. Between their grief for him and their brothers and their lust to take down Kamikos' last two stones, it'd been all they could manage to back off and hope to return with mortal numbers. But the Sicilians, seeing withdrawal in

progress, charged out to attack again, laid fire to three more ships (that seemed to be their entire goal, which helped to panic our men with their worries for home) —and at last they came away with neither the Daedalaë nor Perides' body. It'd been nothing but a disaster and on the way home itself three of the six ships broke convoy, at night: they'd not been heard from since. Knowing the captains, officers had to believe they'd put about, for some kind of suicidal vengeance

And nothing from Rhodes, Pandaros or Caria, nothing; which had left us with less than a hundred marines. Half of those were nearly as rabid as Mestor now to kill any stranger that touched Crete. Others had gone with the ships heading out this morning toward some new life; and the rest of these men were waiting the end with kin. The end. Where was Ariadne's Pandora now, Who would not leave Her children to useless pain? Could even a farmer still think there was such a Being anywhere? Not even that Cargos fishing-boat we'd sent north to soothe our worries had got back. Perides, of Crete, strung up on a criminal's wall, scalded to death as his reward for good faith. Now we'd endure the Mestors every side, *Do you see now, That's the world. That's your human animal.* And Iris and Icarus slaves, if alive: Kokalos too in time, for his troubles. Thumping his hairy chest just now though, claiming to the world he'd beaten Minotauros and not some mere admiral. Gone: our people: gone

A few priests and priestesses were climbing their way up the inland road between the tree-stumps now, glancing up at us, lifting robes and bellskirts over the sea-mud that still plastered the land, half the Athenians behind them, those who'd come to see Cretan friends to the ships. Ariadne held the conch to her side and looked at

me with a squeeze of plaited fingers. I was better now than when the Sicily news had come. Wanting to torture Orneus (as Mestor suggested) to find out where Theseus had gone. Or to make one final fire of myself and drill with our home-guard's futile numbers, be ready to kill one Companion. But she'd seen the plaint like Glaucus' in my eyes, *Don't let me become a lost soul, Where is courage, What is it*—She'd wept then, as if I were some measure of her soul as she of mine, and said *Don't let him break you now, brother, I need you to stand beside me*

Meaning: she wouldn't kill, and she wouldn't run. She'd never looked so thin though she still walked with that swaybacked proud posture: diminished by events, prayer-fasts and the rations of food we shared with people, her high cheeks had hollowed some, she wore no paint round her eyes or jewels, just a sprig of willow on the chain that held Labrys between her breasts. To rejuvenate the land by any means that might yet work. Her regnancy now was the crown of roseleaf half-hidden in her hair, her Name and its devotees, her courage in Stepping Forward for Crete's sake. Her hair she was wearing up these days because she knew I loved the delicate tangles it left behind her neck, about her ears: it was within her pride to do so for someone, now

That pride was near the bottom of my fear for her. This stubborn brightness about her still, would Achaia not have to destroy her for that alone? The very ability to feel, which her Steps Forward sustained in us; the seeing-through engendered by her visions—These had no place where men demanded numbness and belief. You could not make slaves of people who held fast to her

Cleite we'd lost because she'd started to believe there was no place for her in what had come: Iris had fought a

world step by step and it had consumed her. Ariadne's skirting traps was surely why the Shepherd had tried to break her: to break her with hope if need be: he'd shown himself perfectly capable of everything needed to marry peace between the realms, dangled it in front of her through an hour of desperation and then absconded, to make her feel a fool, to make her put out her own light, because she had believed him. We all had. But she would not be broken. She would not. And we fed her counsel as she fed our souls. Diamat told her to see through what he'd left her with; to see that, had we made Crete's last child a warrior and slaughtered mainlanders everywhere, to this we'd still have come, in Velkanos' shadow. *You remember I spoke for war, Daughter.* Ariadne's burden that she'd been leading Crete down a path of weakness had been purged by fire and shock, wave and aftermath. She was staying because she would not betray two thousand years in her blood. Where Pandora? Nowhere except within her, and Crete endured in her hollowed face with something like audacity. Loving her, we kept our souls

She had no plan: she saw no way out but believed that one would show itself to the watchful: she smiled to me anew and looked back at the sea as our people rejoined us on the height, and I felt the smile on her face my own as I watched the light coming out of the sea and vanishing. How mysterious, the waters, their color more than moon and sun! And I loved the light on her skin and to be there beside her at the last; that if we were to Step Forward, we'd do it together: I kissed the curl of bone behind her ear

Aithe and Kia walking arm-in-arm reached us first up here: they seemed to be hurrying ahead of the others because Kia the redhead slipped in the muck, but Aithe's

hand-hold kept her up and they *whooped* about it. The two of them still going about adorned Cretan-style with piled curls and bare breasts, short bright kilts like a couple of saffron-gatherers in a mural: their eyes (especially Aithe's) looked straight before them these days and their squared shoulders backed up that brightness with strength. Different women than had beached here three years ago. But I looked at Aithe, the white gold of her brow's first curls, the flawless pale strawberry skin of Kia the wishful builder's face, and yes, rankled to think these Athenians were somehow more beautiful than we. Could it be some Power was removing us just for that? So I was still straining after *reasons*: no, life was not the same as dousing your torch in the sea

— Good day Mistress, Aithe said for the two of them: as she turned half-back toward the sea and the disappearing ships she added that she wished she'd sailed with them. She'd taken Ariadne seriously about daughters founding new cities, and maybe she even wished herself a priestess now. Like the daughter our emigrants had chosen on the beach to be their First Daughter, new Aridela for a new world: *Phoenissa!* she'd cried aloud to the ash-ruddy moon, *Bloody One!* and that was the Name of Goddess sailing with them. A totem by which great-children would remember this dawn

— Well, Aithe, Ariadne smiled, — maybe there's a new city you can found in Athens.

— Yes, we—By your leave we wanted to speak with you while we could, Kia explained when the two of them had pondered Ariadne's answer: Kia was frailer of build than Aithe and looked as nervous about something as on the day she'd confessed their treason

— You see, Mistress, Kia said, — those gentlemen, our

Shepherd's advisors—We thought you should know they spoke to us yesterday, to Kapha and Anchinoe too. They said we're forgiven. That everything will be forgotten

—They're going to speak with Theseus too, at some point, Mistress, said Aithe, —to ask him to forget even what I shouted at him that morning after my bad time. You see, they want to be sure things—look right, when we get back to Athens.

—Ahh, Ariadne said.

With us, boys and girls? Follow the Good Shepherd, even as this flock of unfortunates did through the house of death

—I know that I swore I wouldn't go back, Aithe went on through the gloom that had come with their words.

—But now that we know they're coming—I'm sorry, I don't mean to remind you, but—What is it in a person's blood, that I can still feel *my old home, my people*? There must be a way for us to tell the truth, too, Mistress

—Oh, I hate those men! Kia said with a coltish stamp of her foot: whatever she'd learned from our Cyclopes might find its way into her father's work in Athens, but she did not expect much more and her red tresses swung as she stamped again. —They love to hear themselves talk, how a crippled enemy is beneath one's honor, and then when the chance comes and the spoil is right

—But you know, Ariadne broke in, giving Aithe the conch to carry for her and taking Kia's hands, —you know there are things one can do. You once told us, Kia, that on the way here, his first journey by sea, Theseus promised Goddess a better shrine in Athens, if he got home. Considering what's been done to women under his father's throne, you can call him to that, in public, and see that he builds it. There's no telling but I'm sure a bet-

ter influence than Poseidon might come out of it. The city began as Athene's, after all

Leaven for Aegeus' lump, she'd called these women once

—Something like—The Seed Within The Lady, then? said Aithe, and Ariadne's face lifted with a delight I'd not seen since Cleite's best days. But Kia began to cry a little

—I swear we will! Kia told her. —But I declare, it galls to give men the show when you know you're smarter, in some ways anyhow, and after living here three years. Oh, I used to love the moonblood days when we rested together, and talked and sang and dreamed—Three years of it! I suppose I can break myself to it alone in the house again, if I can't bring custom home. But why should a woman hide The Flower? If I could make beards fall out, I *would*

A smile all round as we walked for Cnossos now, clergy a double-file behind: I wondered if Kapha would hide his blossoming, too. Obey these rules, people, and they'll keep out the crazy world. I laughed a little darkly under my breath. Not so far off from Alxiona's own ways, when you thought about it. The Defender of our Faith had put in here last moon with a force of her sisters, their souls as tight-wrung as their black braids, hands ever at play at their belts' twin daggers, serpents horned and fanged prowling their painted arms: they'd come to help the ruined Crete they'd heard-tell of. Still roving the islands herself, Alxiona, purifying places of Aryan compromise and adding raiders' ears to the string at her mast, and not just the left ones now—Probably nothing had ever dropped her jaw as had the wreckage of Crete's coast. But she'd enjoyed the rescuer's part for that, her pity for Ariadne's struggles with the marriage scarcely short of

contempt. Told her the conservative blood of Naxos would welcome Labrys clan with family's arms, as if we didn't know they'd like our marines about, against Achaian Grotsa. *If you will not take leave yourselves*, she'd said, *take two ships of us for your children*. Said she'd be back, too, with a force more able to help Mother Kriti. But who knew. Who knew anything, even the color of the sea

He crouches out here, someplace, feel him, waiting his brother-bulls from the sea. All along: he must've known all along that the mainland's high kings were going to invade when the time felt right, and now Velkanos had made it so. My stomach sickened to think he might've given the All-Clear, too, precisely when his brothers had brought the statue and put right to sea again. *Tell the Lion, Now, Now*. And yet, this running-off his biggest gamble ever: maybe the north was in ruins like ourselves. He wants to believe. Has to believe. Holds on. Crouching in some ashy remnant of a bush out of searchers' sight. The spring's first brood of bugs riling him, mosquitoes swarming out of the black rain's stagnant pools. No one near to be a rock for. Whispering curses, his nose full of corpse and sour sea-silt, the gravemounds rising and everywhere the south-wind-ravaged swath of the waves. His vision come true: Nature's life is death. Cannot wait to get out of here. Hold on, hold. Making plans: how to dispose of the old man in Athens: to show his mother his triumph over the house where bulls ate man-meat. But what this weeping inside him? It is not for what the Companions are going to do. That is the price of a name. He cannot stop looking at the lurid bole of a broken tree and thinking of Phaedra's mouth and body. Desire and disgust, a slave to both (women his weakness) and powerlessness

before anything a humiliation: every wave lies down on the shore so weary, weary of insatiable want and need and want, the endless war against return to the nameless Circle, the sea-surge like his soul's sighs, endless. Endless lest a man strike out, boldly: this rage like nature's rage, he's saying. Look at this swath—She's violent, isn't She? It's her: it flows *out of her*, he'd said: it's nature in his blood demanding blood. A pure emotion, he says. He cannot wait to get away, *Let me go, Let me go* from these black-headed Earthlings—and now his knights hard at the oar to take us in. Why hurt? Why kill? Because forcing the world to resemble one's dreams felt hard-on good, for awhile: a sky Immortal-blue within the skull, a moment's death-bought innocence, a Happy Isle between the (tap tap) temples.

* * *

Phaedra said we should cut olive branches and wrap them with what wool we had, as a sign of peace mainlanders recognized. Right behind Ariadne as always, the more so in our growing fear, Phaedra'd chosen to stand with elder women like the lady Nomia, some of Tallay's sisters from the Horae, Callistans and not a few men, who'd decided to try to stymie the beaching Achaians with outrageous welcome at the shore. If the courage it took to meet determined raiders with nothing but a leafy symbol might keep off Night Mare, she and the others were willing in the Queen's name, even if Phaedra's voice did thicken as they talked what to do. And if this failed, it'd still let Ariadne do what she could, out in front of Mestor's and Daitor's men and women who'd decided to stand to the death farther inland, at the wall of wrack

from the sea. Thus there'd be at least one sure attempt to avoid a slaughter

Cratus and Perdix, meanwhile, young Theia, Teledamus and many others arming themselves—They all spoke praise for Phaedra's initiative, but I had a feeling there was another depth to Phaedra's thoughts. She had offered to kill Theseus, as well as to marry him in her Queen's stead. There was something different about the audacious loyalty she shared with Ariadne. A broken thing inside it that made it a vengeance, like the look in Alxiona's narrow archer's-eyes: a passion that might wait a generation to fulfill itself, but would. That natural sneer in Phaedra's lips seemed a sign that neither suffering nor honor would really touch her till she'd fulfilled the justice her heart demanded, as a daughter of Crete's mountains and Communion

As people made choices, though, the *damos* itself was breaking apart, and taking men with it every way. For every Nomia or Tallay staking their lives on peaceful gambit there was a Theia or woman of Cnossostown who had to decide that, with no more ships, a fighting death was preferable by worlds to even the chance of rape or enslavement. And as children were squeezed aboard those last ships, or sent away into the mountains with yet a third main body of Cretans making choices, everybody grew angrier, and arguments broke the rites we still shared. To the woman and man of us we needed everything which only the great *kyklos* dances and the pourings with the group could bestow—but if those who meant to fight did not want to be softened by a Phaedra's preparations, those gambling with an olive-branch did not want their chance foiled by Come-on cries and blade-beaten shields

—I'd like to point out, if I may, that we are not mon-

sters, said the advisor Porthaon with some temerity one evening in the central court, when things were going bad before the great shrine. Doing what he could where no one at all believed him or his fellows anymore. Porthaon was perhaps the warmest of these men and he tried to make his eyes catch Cratus', pinching at the wattle under his chin with its neat-pointed beard

—Of course you're not, Cratus answered him, —but you flung enough of the word at us these years, didn't you. Didn't you!

—And how many of the good Achaians will be coming? Theia said, with a touch of the Shepherd's quaint mockery

Nomia said we should put these gentlemen themselves up in front of the welcome, but those who'd fight feared betrayal of their plans. They were fierce toward everybody, guilty perhaps because their Queen would stand her ground but not with them. Theia hurt Diamat for standing beside Ariadne, saying she'd never been anything but comfortable: Perdix, as an elder, put Theia in her place for that but had set her own soul on this world at the last, voices she could not refuse from the tombs crying *Life, Life to the death*. Perdix wanted to bleed just one and ask the man, *How does it feel?* and curse the consequence: Cratus, though, was somewhere else. Years ago he'd fought against war and since then had tried with his soul to bear along with Ariadne. Now, like Cleite, he no longer felt connection between his insides and his people's situation, and that made for a world his heart had no interest in. He loved Ariadne and me as his children but he meant to go down proud, in a way no liar could later cast doubt on, denigrating the Labyrinth. Ariadne, then, moment by moment, had only honor and kinship and rite

to keep the different plans from spilling blood in the House, and the memory of her Offering still stood potent enough to help her

It was chiefly Mestor arming and training people now, clergy and Cnossians alike, in the deadliest methods and tricks his own years in the fleet had taught him, and the forty-odd marines who'd opted to fight worked with him. As fear increased with every dawn (and with the sight of Labyrinth clergy at blade practice) the numbers of these people soon reached close to three hundred, women, men, youths and old ones with salvaged bronze or the stick-spears and bird-arrows they could scrape up: Daitor, meanwhile, rushed through villages from Tylissos to the remains of Nirou Chani to recruit more people, and by the time these fighters turned to the labor of closing the gap we'd cut in the wall of sea-wrack, their numbers were closer to four hundred. They scorned all semblance of fear, disdained even to look for the Shepherd; but how many of them had even seen those Achaian regulars who'd shown us their crack form in delivering the statue, how many knew the skill and discipline they'd face? It didn't matter, it was stay free or be killed and leave the world to The Powers, and their drills and sparring in the meadows just north of the Labyrinth, the echoes of their shouts and booming shields put more fear through the valley

Some people broke down and joined them to fight as they'd fight, others took the sooner to the small pack-trains heading south out of Cnossos for the mountains. Of our clergy, young Clio the Egypt-trained healer and Geilissa had gone with the ships, the Kouretes Ion and Leucas with them: it was for Myrto, Haemon and Auxo to lead groups of people up country, where shrines offered

high sheltered places to wait what happened. Sanctuaries like Karphi up in Lasithi, that ridge-top tower of rock all but impregnable, should battle come so far inland. It was strange to foresee our life going on in an *underground* sense in high places. What kind of Crete would it be, though, when these idler sky-gods ran the great houses but the people still looked to the Earth, the Mother and Her Youth? We'd heard already of the shacks outside mainland sires' walls, kings whose peasants were all but foreigners. Ariadne and I still had ambrosial moments alone late at night, and we whispered that, if we lived, we might find service *standing between the worlds* in a new sense: between us instead of children we had grim laughter, as we dreamed of ways to keep an old Crete alive beneath their noses

But again, so much preparation to fight created pressures on people, through mockery and worse, to join it; and Mestor himself did not miss me. Did he think me immune to guilt when the young men (shades of my brother) I'd fought with three years ago looked me in the eye? Did he think my stomach easy when night came down and I saw what morning tide might bring in people's eyes? My brother, my father, my mother, Glaucus and Perides, so many—There was nothing he did not try to use against me, the fact that their spirits were these hills around us—*Aren't you man enough to stand up for them? People will die*, he said

Yes: people die. That was all I had to say to him, whatever he thought of the vermilion round my eyes. And indeed, his very words my ears now heard for the first time as things the Labyrinth itself had spoken to the people, time out of mind. He was what our parents and clergy and others before had made him; and the fate our House

had made for itself was coming home, step by step, in men like each of us. I tried not to judge him in revenge—for what *would* I do when they came?

Orneus didn't seem to have no plan either, he'd been looking for some refuge since his mother'd decided to stand with Nomia and the others on the shore, and had become a kind of messenger between Amnisos and the House. Through him, the morning after Mestor spoke to me, I got a chance to see what I'd do. Three ships' sails had come over the northern horizon and Orneus had bolted for Cnossos screaming *Vanguard!* all the way: we thought the hour had come, and to my shame I vomited fear till my stomach had not even water to bring up, my arms and legs trembled so that I was useless. Useless. The ships, though, were a motley like the ones we'd sent out, a merchanter, an island-needleboat and a ship like the *Talos*, built for war. The only person aboard them I recognized was a man from Kastri, Cythera, who'd led his people's contingent against Athens. The man's kin were famous devotees of Goddess even in Cretan terms, but if he'd led his men's march back then as a fellow to match their goatskin bagpipes' daunting music, now he looked little more than some tramp-trader, dressed in salty rags. Kastri, his home, was flat, wiped off the Earth, he said before Ariadne's throne: he'd come to Crete for help, but now knew better. And the islands, what news?

A new world in scarce three moons, he answered her. First, before he and fellow survivors had left Cythera, those two ships with his own had put in from other islands, one of them from Saliagos, Paros. Those people had been doing fair trade in foodstuffs and lodgings for the mainland pilgrims to Delos over the years; but now, this season, they'd been seeing numbers of warships

coasting by, heading both for Delos and to reinforce their trade-station near it on Naxos, moving out into the islands in strength not seen before. At these words every one of us on the throne room's benches let out a breath that seemed to have our souls with it: so they were not laid waste. This islander, though, went on without quite realizing what his words meant to us. These Parians in that merchanter, he said, had left because they'd come to understand the kinds of men who'd be following pilgrims into Saliagos' port: warriors on liberty all but taking over the town, gorging and drinking till they were blind, then brawling among themselves and chasing the local girls and boys and already more than one death had come to both sides from such things, giving Achaians more cause (as they said) to make control permanent. In old times this would've been a matter to bring before Minotauros, whose ships might be asked to increase their orderly presence. Now—Well, the man didn't know what to say but he had more we should hear

The warship come alongside his needleboat had sailed full of refugees from Ceos: the city Ayia Irini there was devastated too, his fellow captain Tereus dead, for all his kin's dreams of a tin or silver trade. But Tereus' kinsmen had not left Ceos because of Earthbull. They'd left because right on Earthbull's heels had come at least twentyfive mainland warships, whose warriors sacked the ruins, slew what men they could and put to whip-driven labor the women and youths they called the usefuls. They were in earnest, they were taking over, and now that Ceos was pacified, half at least of those ships were moving on, moving southward, no doubt to link up with Achaians already in the isles. Did we understand they were coming. What were our defenses. The enemy

couldn't be more than a day behind. This man of Kastri couldn't be sure but the Parians had said there were big, very big rites going on at Delos. Warriors had to be massing there for something and only Crete could offer a target to match their strength

Match their—No, he did not understand. An incredulous half-bitter smile took Ariadne's face and then died away till her lips had folded in on themselves, an anguish that lacked only tears. Vision, strategy, rite, hope, she looked as if the last shadows of these things were torn from her and it cried through my bones that, in sorrow, she might begin to blame herself after all. So many lives—Cratus and Theia stood up across from her with their own fresh determinations and their bodies' moves alone disoriented her: Ariadne blinked at the beggarish mariner and then her eyelids lowered, as if in judgment, unfair but mortally binding. I got up and found myself telling this man how glad we'd be to resupply his ships if they'd only take with them a few of our children (from Archanes, I could have Hippeus fetch them), wherever they were headed: the commotion in front of her brought Ariadne back and then she looked gravely pleased at the words, which was something

*The images, she said now: the little gold-and-ivories of Goddess, the vessels our generations had poured from—*She rose off the throne and was moving again, out through the anteroom for the crypts, where she might commend those things to Earth's keep. As I followed her past the seachart tapestry her body's breeze moved it, and those fingers of the Peloponnese rippled toward Crete once more. Coming, out of every crack and corner, the fleet which Theseus had dared deny to our family's faces: Echion of Delos holding high a trident of Reasons to

break the wind before their sails, Freedom, Honor, Glory. To remember that man was to remember a hatred bigger than just Crete: I wanted to pray my father's treatment of him might help but I knew there was more use helping to dig up the west wing floor

By sunset Phaedra and Nomia, Sillus and Tallay and those who'd destined themselves for the shore had set out, dressed in every trapping of good birth and Cretan charm we had left and bearing their olive branches high, higher than our hopes. Cratus spoke for Mestor's company with an obliging oath that they'd abide a peace if it could be wrested from Theseus: eyes were full, and much as I loved old Sillus and regretted over again my insults to Tallay, it was Phaedra most impressed me, even if I was sure the Shepherd would protect her. *With my life I will honor your faith in me*, she told Ariadne

There were twenty-odd Callistans going too, and Queen Gelania came down with them, and stayed with Ariadne to comfort as she could. Seeing the rancor born of terror among the women, Gelania gathered the sisters herself and made Ariadne the center of a Callistan rite, and Diamat, Perdix, Theia, Scotia and Sinope adorned her from head to foot in private, bathing her gently, censuring her, combing her hair to that sinuous mare's tail down her back (which alone I liked as much as her piled-up tresses). It brought them together to dress her to face the mainland, but this did not mean her heather-red, open-breasted gown, or the high tiara. She wore only what they could cautiously counsel, a woman's white cotton robe and a red-and-white-chevroned, flounced kilt to the knee, tied at the waist with a soft red cord. Spirals chased the hems of these garments and the sleeves of the jacket they found her; but where it should've been open at the breast,

the white under-robe now covered her like a winter-garment, she must not provoke their helplessness with her beauty. It was the electrum chaplet of roseleaf that told she was Queen, the determination burning between the falls of her black hair

Gelania's own astonishing red-headed elegance, from the golden dragonflies of her necklace to the proud features of an island-queen in her forty years' prime, was something like a vision of our mother beside Ariadne as we offered one he-goat and anointed ourselves and the pillars of the great shrine with the blood. I stood by Kudru (*You're my king* he said, fighting not to weep) as we also pressed a little home-earth to our brows, expecting to be part of it again very soon; and I can't think but that every heart on that central court's stones was near to bursting, for we tried to pour to that Mystery in each other, but it was not possible to sit still, concentrate. We advised the Athenians to get back in their first clothing if they could, and to stay out of sight till, for them, it was safe: Kapha and Kia wanted at last to run after Phaedra's people but there was no way to know they'd be spared. They joined us in the only thing we could bear doing now and that was to turn, dance and chant beneath the night sky's stars in a great hand-holding that Ariadne led into a spiral. Yet, when this ended, there was still only waiting

Cratus and Theia and the rest gathered up their weapons and took to the north meadow. By dawn they'd take battle-positions at the wrack and they knew Ariadne would be somewhere between them and shore, when the time came. But they started sparring and pounding their shields into the night, as we knew people had to who'd made their choice; and by the time night's black was fading toward dark blue, we had to have a place to breathe,

the two of us for a moment, a moment. So we walked Gelania up the inland road, back toward her remaining people's camp. It was good to breathe the fragrant silent hills and Ariadne's eyes were big in the darkness: *Have I done everything I can: Is there only this waiting*

Round the inland turn above Cnossos we saw a yellow glow ahead, like a dome of dim daylight over the trees above the knoll of Europa's tomb: a crowd of perhaps a hundred people were at vigil of their own, and just as we came out of the dark, they saw Ariadne, and both she and they froze in place at a wonder unlooked-for. Now they lifted palms and olive branches and torches and weapons out toward her and blessed and praised no less for her common clothing than if a young Europa herself had come: she lifted her palms out to them and, when they started to sing to her as The Aridela and added in the names of their clan-totems, names of Goddess they prayed and learned by, we knew there were many here from places far back of Cnossian hills, and wilder too. Gaia, Themis, Hera, Demeter, Artemis, Aphrodite—Ariadne moved into their midst before the tomb (as Gelania discreetly melted away toward her camp) and she turned in place to touch palm-to-palm with every one of them, and I started to cry because I knew what it meant to her, this coincidence of needs, this last union with women and men of all ages, in which they gave her the Name she most wanted in their service. Mountain-people who'd followed her down in her grief-days for our brother, others who'd worshiped with her at shrines near and far where she'd sought oracles, mothers who'd helped to bring her grandmother's hope-plant: beautiful names they had, Akatirija, Danate, Kinuwa; Rasuto, Labiani, Nyasha. They kept singing softly and taking and

giving the touch, timorous, hungry, luminous in their best trade-gotten kilts and headbands: necklaces glowed against their skin beneath the torches, some had drilled and strung the sealstones of sacrifice received from mother after death of kin at sea: the young women had done each other's hair, pulled the men's lovelocks forward on their bare chests. Some lanky with slender noses, hands like my father's, many of stouter build with the strong native nose like Glaucus': I wept to see him yet alive in my brothers and sisters and their eyes looking into hers were all at once sensual and so grave, like a hundred roebucks' eyes, proud and vulnerable

And some of them stepped to me and we looked in each other's eyes as at a pouring, and our palms met; and where I might've found blame, my heart filled instead with peace. They gave it me. It was like touching at last palm to palm with Juktas the mountain, for we felt Him behind us in the blue dark. And we knew there'd be terrors to shake a mortal soul this day; but Juktas and this touch could never wholly pass away. The mountain dreams forever still in the lap of Kriti, Powers born of the Power that always wins

A man was telling Ariadne they'd come down here because they'd met Clio and Kouretes heading up country and they could not bear their Queen alone (begging my pardon), not now: they were ready with their wood-spears and cudgels

—But I want you to live! she protested, knowing they did not realize the force approaching. —I want you not to fall asleep, to plough your land and feed your kin with the same heart that brings you here, to Europa. Or what can my life mean! she implored

And then from behind me, Hippeus shoved his way

through to her: he was puffing, drenched with sweat from his headband to his belt, and his eyes were anger that this news should fall from *his* lips

— The harbor, he said. — Mistress, it's full of lights

My being pitched: time was gone now, and I saw one moment of wild astonishment take Ariadne and the young women and men near her lowered their spear-shafts about her like a new House-guard. The crowd around us so composed one beat of the heart ago seemed to crack open with a wail and curse and cry, and many scattered every way leaving those nearest five or six-deep ranks round their Queen: some were taking lovers or old ones up the knoll and the stairs to the pillared tomb-entrance, suddenly fearing less The Dead and the dark than what was come: others bolted ahead toward the Labyrinth and town. A few simply fell at Ariadne's feet and after one last glance to the mother of Crete she pushed free out of their circle and bade them stand up, called them to come into the House to wait what happened with herself in front of the fighters

Some people followed as she took my hand with a life-strong grip, yes that was all I wanted, that we Step Forward together, and she strode back toward the Labyrinth. Half-ruin that it was with its tumbled colonnades and broken-horned roofs, it stood lit up with torches atop the Kephala and looked as savage and luminous-still to me as on the sunny day Payare'd called it so. Where was he this evening, little Spice and Beans? We waded the stream under the causeway's broken shadow, darker than the night, and with fear-clumsy feet climbed the cracked south portico, a pounding of swords and spears on shields filling the air from the north precincts and beyond. The moment-at-last had driven more folk from Cnossos to

find themselves a weapon and we heard a shrilling now, too, shrieks like lost souls' as people thoughtlessly shut themselves in their houses, or ran northward. Many, after all, had borne themselves in shame since the day the Carrians' cry had sent them into the hills: dogs were barking everywhere now

The night was turning blue, blue as the lapis in the eyes of Poseidon's statue. Which we'd burned. His wrath. Some would believe that, I did not and in any case there was no help but our clasped-together hands. My legs moved with a stiff trembling that seemed the wild urge to run, and too much power, but that gut-sickness had purged itself: Theseus, Theseus had won, and I cursed him and that helped me resist falling in with despair. For that was mostly what we found as we got back into the central court, Kudru's staff-people and House-guard and servants on their knees before the great shrine, some of the Athenians with them as they pressed palms or brows or their whole bodies to crimson pillars which had known an age of blood-offering, and consent. *Where are your crushing waves now*, somebody was crying: people saw Ariadne entering swiftly with more behind her and they tried to show her better, even if they knew her intent to pass *through* here on the instant to the worst. Diamat, old Diamat, the one priestess left her, was calmest of all of us and came down court holding a stone pyx of some much-prayed-over chrim, plexus-high in her palms. She'd saved something to help us do what we believed was the House's honor and Ariadne buried her face in this last mother's loving shoulder, no longer than one might sigh. Diamat opened the pyx but just then a commotion of Ridius' guards behind her saw the north gate's cedar doors swing open, which I thought was for her and my

passage-out; and Orneus came half-staggering in, alone, and the doors were bar-bolted behind him again. He saw us and begged to be heard: Ariadne refused because she had to get out in front of Mestor but Orneus told her it was over already at the shore. She stopped and listened for Phaedra's fate

There was no believing, Orneus said, there was no believing how many ships, how many warriors: his choice had been to stand with his mother in the best Cretan way but she was a prisoner now, like the rest of the women, Phaedra, the Lady—*And the men? Hurry up man, what happened!* Ariadne said and by the ashen fall in Orneus' face I knew that things out there had hurt him

All the marines and most Callistan men with them had turned back for Mestor's fighting line: seeing the white teeth of prow after prow bearing in on shore they'd known in the instant what hours of wishes had denied, that as unarmed males they'd be nothing but practice targets, fodder for fear. Still, Orneus stayed, counting on Theseus to save him and his mother, and how they'd trembled watching so many lights, innumerable lamps rising out of the morning twilight and turning into black ships with startling eyes at their prows, ramming up the beach almost rail to rail spilling over with men and spears and war-shouts. He and Phaedra and all the rest had forced themselves down the last shore-hill chanting *Aridela* best they could with branches high, Orneus swore this, and they were surrounded by twenty warriors, red and blond and black-bearded men in bronze helmets and greaves holding spearpoints to their ribs while a dozen more charged up beach and looked for ambush. Horses being led down gangways, big mainland horses saddled for riders or ready for the traces of chariots: their chant

faltered at the enormity before them and Phaedra began to try to ask for Theseus. One of the warriors stabbed lightly at Tallay's hip and old Sillus the one Kourete tried to stop that: he took a whack from a spearshaft across the face, and lost his urine, Orneus said, and the men laughed he'd make a good horsepriest

They were told to put down the branches and before they saw even an officer they saw Theseus, King Theseus coming their way in a hurry with a gray priest struggling over the sand just behind him, cranes on that man's robe. His men had brought his gear, he looked so big, Orneus said, studded leather corselet and tasselled greaves and a great curving bronze helmet with blue plume, the snake-embossed sword he'd told about slung at his hip again: his face was bright and wild and sunny as he looked the first captives over with a stranger's eyes, ships of Athens beaching behind him, men with the Rock's Erechthid serpent and owl and horse and goat-devices on their shields, lion and eagle from Mykenai, mercenaries too, Sicilian men with that crooked-cross sunwheel painted on their chests. So many, and more and more ships' prows just kept ramming up the beach from the foot of the headland to Katsambas Road

Phaedra and Nomia tried to tell him there was no need: Theseus had just said *Shut up* when an officer joined him and the priest to say the vanguard was ready. They were angry, though, because they'd been promised a big port-town here with villas and warehouses full of things and all they saw was dead timber: Theseus told him there'd be plenty for all and the priest added something about The God's proper share, and the officer left to wait orders. Now the Shepherd wanted to know where Mestor and his Cretans were. Nomia and Phaedra

begged him to listen and the rest of the women tried hard to start some quavering *home the sailor* sort of catch, and Theseus had some men bring up short pikes with heads on them, a Cretan heads with white eyes was that man off Glaucus' ship we'd sent north, there were two more the priest called spies and traitors from Aegina; and a half-torn-open woman's head they knew was Alxiona's. Nomia collapsed among the Callistans. *We made her acquaintance coming south*, Theseus said. *Do you see we are serious.* Did they see a lot of ships here? This was scarce half, and Cnossos was alone, because ships were hitting nearly every big town this morning from here to Zakros, and another great warrior named Memnon was handling Phaestos itself with a thousand men. *And he's a seasoned fellow*, Theseus hinted. *Look at this bitch Amazon's face, Phaedra, that's what an axe does—Do you want to look like this? Where were Mestor's men?*

She was very brave, Orneus said, at first she refused and then she calmed down and managed a kind of smile for him, to which Theseus drew his sword and stuck it clean-through Sillus' chest where he stood next to her. She broke then: she told Theseus she really didn't know about Mestor or anything, only that she'd do whatever he said, whatever. He was the son of Poseidon and she'd known it since he'd thrown the ring and she'd do whatever he said

Theseus laughed and told the priest this was true enough, likely—*There's more you'd better hear*, said Orneus as Ariadne began to move. *He didn't spare even my own mother in the—in the raping right there on the beach*, he said with his eyes filling up now. And Phaedra—He'd put her on her knees before him and made her lick our Kourete's blood from his sword. *It's part of their*

religion, he told the priest and the fellow had said, *You mean it was part of it*

Tally they had to kill. They stabbed her to death with spears because she'd not only fought the rape and hurt them, but cursed them in the old black Cretan. *One of their best whores—Strange, and a shame*, Theseus said. Phaedra he had tied up aboard one of the ships for now: the others were divided up among the men right there. But this host really had been angry about the port-town, not even a fight to get the blood up—The last Orneus saw, Theseus was flinging Sillus' severed head in front of a chariot's horses in the vanguard, to startle them and keep the operation under control, the priest nodding this, knowing the need for order on strange land

And why had the Shepherd let Blue Eyes go? Possible threat but definite fear-spreader, all the way back to Ariadne. She pulled my hand (not a doubt of me) toward the north gate—And if he'd never stop trying to break her, what else did he have in mind? Yellow sky rising out of dark blue over the east wing's broken terraces, that first hot slither of the south wind moving in the trees

—You're not coming? she said when I'd stopped us right in front of the throne room's dolmens and I held tight the wrist she tried to rip away before my answer

—It's not that, it's too late, he's mad like his priest! You can't talk with him now any more than you can with Mestor, or Theia

—Let me go! Ariadne shouted with shock in her eyes and I hated myself but I wrapped my two arms around her and we wrestled in place—The House-guard didn't know what to do, neither did Diamat or Kudru, nor I myself. I was terrified for us as if we were one body, that was all I knew: I saw now just like the men on the beach there

was no hope for any words but insults between these—forces: she bit at me and punched and kicked and hurt me, this was a woman who'd rent Bull but I held her, held her and wept because she was screaming as if the child of her body were out there in front of the horses, without her. It was betrayal though I couldn't have told myself so, I was *protecting* her, not keeping her long as I could

—*Let me go!* she raged and I tried to ask her to trust me as I tightened my grip: I said I knew battle, had been out in the world, knew that priest, she'd never stop it now but she wouldn't believe me, her eyes were that wild astonishment again like a netted animal and I felt how she hated my strength, from her height of years

Her soul was in her fight and when she couldn't reach round for my eyes or groin she started *running* until her legs' power forced us over sideways. We hit the stone together but I struck my head hard enough to lose my holds. Her crown fell off. She got up and grabbed it, her eyes watering, and I saw her pull her flounced kilt straight even as she tore for the gate shouting *Ridius, open it!* And then a piercing sound froze everybody, a horn was blowing, high, strong and very close, no more than a mile or so seaward. The note faded high and rising to say, Victory, and Rout: it meant they had broken Mestor's line at the wrack already and were scarcely shy of the head of Cnosos valley. And Ariadne wrapped her arms about her head and crown and stumbled in her momentum. Our wrestling, she knew now, had not kept her from the place she'd wanted: they'd been pouring inland since Hippeus had run from the shore-hills, the battle at the wrack-line begun as Orneus had run the last three miles from there. Between the two had been only swift advance over devas-

tation and now she turned back suddenly and pulled me up to embrace me in front of everyone: her hands gripped and her lips pressed to hurting with the tumult in her blood, and *I don't want to lose my brother!* she said, with eyes that blamed only our blindness. *You have always wished me well,* she said then closer to my ear

Now we heard horns from different sides of the valley's seaward reaches: flanking units joining up again. Somehow, even with the birds waking in the trees and the wind beginning to rush more steadily down the mountains at our backs, the land felt still and silent for the briefest while: prayer and quavering chant resumed and Ariadne tried to remind House people, guards and staff alike that they were free to meet the day. But so far, nobody left, including the dozen or so who'd followed us in from Europa's tomb. Ridius asked Ariadne to let his men surround her at the proper time: she was thanking him, indirectly declining when Cratus, alone, got back to the Labyrinth

— You have to see them! Oh! he said as the doors were barred behind him and Ariadne filled his eyes: Cratus was laughing in bursts between his three-mile winded gasps, like one intoxicated with poison or pain, he had a deep gouge in the side of his gray head above the ear and there was a great splash of blood not his own that made his soiled white tunic stick to his chest. Diamat did her best to nurse his head-wound as he talked but he wouldn't sit down

— You have to see the body-armor their barons wear! he laughed manically. — They look like walking—*chimneys* or something, off a kiln, these big bronze bands of the stuff over the whole body! Little fool pennants and such, oh! And the fellows with the chariots! Cratus raved

on, with terrible sights in his wincing eyes even as he laughed. — We could hear them coming up to the line, they were—yelling because there's no decent road out there, the—The *shit* from the sea's mud is spattering them off their wheels! Oh, we laughed I tell you! I'm so happy and grateful Velkanos hit, aren't you? Praise The Powers, all of you, that wrecked so many good things for them! I love the south wind, eat the world's last leaf, Brother Ass! That *hurts*, Diamat, please I just have to sit down now

When Cratus did, he went pale and laid both hands to his chest: we got him calmer, because we'd seen people die after those signs, but he insisted that he be heard because, once the fight had started, Perdix and Theia, Teledamus and the rest had asked him to go back, put his own last service in their Queen's hands. Truth was, Cratus said, they'd most of them turned sorry, the clergy anyway, once they'd seen the numbers and the professionals coming up the shore-plain toward their line atop the mass of wrack and timber: even Mestor and his men had cursed the sun when they'd seen how broad the line of men and chariots coming, it'd made their position seem one pebble in front of a wave

Daitor decided to take half the four hundred and set up flanking ambushes while the rest of them held this place near Amnisos Road as a draw for their strength: old Perdix had stood up on the logs then, swinging her wood-hatchet and shouting great Lady Pasiphae's name, she wasn't giving one more Cretan step, *Come on you cowards*. The Achaian line broke into a run at that, and it was on. Poor Perdix, Cratus said. She'd wanted Ariadne to know she was sorry not to be with her but she'd been just too angry at the last, they'd killed her Queen through

a helpless *boy* who'd never understood what he was angry about, and she'd hoped to be buried near Pasiphae if that might be. Theia too, rising to the death before her eyes had confessed she thought Ariadne braver than herself, *Tell her that, tell my Queen, this is all I have to give!* Those had been her last intelligible words, said Cratus. And he'd stayed long as he could but when he saw that brave fellow Mestor cut off from the very charge he led, and fighting by himself in the midst of a dozen Achaians—*We owe him honor*, Cratus scolded with a seizure of pain in his chest

And still, he kept on: Did we know that men and women of Archanes had come down to the line? Most of them, yes, they'd had omen—They'd set the herd of their horses free but the creatures would not run and had bit back at the people trying to scare them away, and so most of the sisters and priests had decided to do likewise, found themselves weapons, come down to fight in the dark before dawn. Many of the men cut themselves open to raise their rage and sanctify themselves once more but, from what Cratus had seen, the only survivors of their cult would be the ones who'd taken little ones to the mountains or the ships. Callistans, nearly two hundred marines, Teledamus, Sinope, Scotia in a rank with well-born youth of Cnossos and older people—They'd all fought and they were all gone except perhaps the few women purposefully disarmed with overwhelming numbers and then gang-raped as a first lesson. What hope was there? It was only pleasure to see mainlanders dying from Cretan arrows and sling-stones, *The magic of their lion-images and sunwheels is—as impotent as ours!* Cratus said with a crippled laugh. So many, so many, joyful they'd found the fight and pouring up over the wrack both sides

to attack the rear while those awful horns blew. Had he seen Theseus? No: he'd seen Achaians trying to clear a gate through the wrack, though, so he'd known he'd better fly while he still could outrun them. And then an Achaian had been right in front of him with a spear, and Cratus had looked to die when a stone as big as an orange took the top of this warrior's head off from the hillside above them and splashed Cratus with blood. That'd been Daitor counterattacking. *So—Now I wear what has been on my hands too long, Mistress*, he said. *I won't ask you to cleanse it now*

We carried him together into the throne's anteroom and made him comfortable as we could on its south bench in the sun across from the seachart tapestry: Athenians and advisors, Cretans and guards and Orneus looked on at what appeared the coming end of a powerful priest of the Labyrinth, and their faces saw the world's chaos that much the greater. *A Kourete, thinking to die in battle, Sweet Wine. Daitor's still free with two hundred or so. Where are our guests now?* Cratus said, drifting on his pain. *They probably got lost! Remember they tried to hit Troy, Sweet Wine? You're a good young fellow. Too bad*, he said

I thanked him for the omen, and we smiled: Ridius called Ariadne back onto the court then, and bade her listen. She called me after. They were in the precincts. Once we'd heard that note of Rout they'd been streaming up through less blasted landscape, only harrassed by Daitor's weaponry striking from wooded hillsides and houses' common yards: the losses we'd given them had weighed less than a dove on a horse's back

Sounds of hooves on stone, shouts, smashing-sounds now as they broke into the custom house not fifty steps

from the north gate's pillared ramp; and over the rubble of the east wing's hillside we saw flashes of fellie-wheels among the broken and upright houses, fires starting, throngs of shields and spearheads glinting dawn light and rushing this way and that, men dashing house to house wary of more ambush, finding some houses wrecked already by their God but waving friends in to help encircle the ones with barred doors and shutters. Why weren't they scaling up the east face of the Kephala through the gardens? Warned of bad footing by Theseus, told to let him have the honor of the House? They just kept coming, pouring into the streets of the town on foot and horseback and chariot, the cavalry racing straight through to encircle the valley and keep the usefuls hemmed in. and from the west side over the standing bastions came the same rattling and hooves, jangles of war-gear, shouts of rage and joy and wonder at what the warriors were seeing, the House of the Bull that'd frightened them as unruly children—*Where-are-you's*, men spoiling for the fight. *A good young fellow. Too bad*—I found myself rushing into the nearest crypt and seizing up three or four gold and silver cups of Communion that still sat on the stone bench where we'd shared bits of meat at rite. And coming out with these again, I saw that Ridius' men and some of the hills-people, those not just crying or covering their ears or clutching a shrine-pillar like a shipwrecked mariner, had started to climb up onto the Bull-painted porches above the north entrance-ramp with spears and heavy chunks of stone from House rubble. I followed Ariadne down toward the cedar doors and, as they moved with her demand that they come back inside, we jumped, every one of us; for the doors *boomed*, the crossbar creaked and they *boomed* again

— Arr-ee-ahhd-nee

His voice, hollow-toned between the stone bastions,
cold, but with his favorite touch

— Oh-pen the dohh-ohr. Arr-ee-ahhd-nee

She stood before the doors, bristled and shook it off,
the mare's tail swinging along her spine

— Open the door! I won't ask again! Phaedra is fine
and I'll show you all mercy! I give you my word, woman,
but it's hopeless! Now or never!

— *Now*, then! Ariadne roared as she laid her two palms
up under the crossbar and heaved at it. The guards de-
scending, the whole crowd of us gaped from behind her
as she hefted the beam from its wards and stepped back
lifting it over her head: just as she flung it behind her, in
that instant she looked like the King on The Tree, and
then she pulled the two handles inward and the doors
shoved her back

And there stood Theseus, larger and more menacing
than ever we'd seen him in all his gear, the blood left my
face, all a man he was, bearded and covered with leather
and studs and bronze and gold tassels, his helm's blue
plume like a tower. I couldn't see Ariadne's face but I saw
the red affront in his that she dared stand as she was,
barefoot and kilted and crowned before him with arms
akimbo, knees (I saw) slightly trembling in front of the
mass of him: her stance and silence couldn't have spoken
more the focus of her soul but she was, now, physically, a
little goddess—He turned his shield with its ludicrous
serpent sideways to her and without a word his blooded
sword gently swept her to the side against the bastion

— Hurt no one! she said

— Get out of the way. Alright brothers, your orders

Lowered spears and drawn blades crossed the thresh-

old in careful quick two-by-two up the ramp and, more frightened than she but out of myself somehow, I tossed the cups in my hands at their feet. *Fill your dreams! Hooray!* I shouted though I was deathly-sure what orders meant: I was trying to be brave but it seemed a boy's gesture against them. Yet these helmeted men, momentarily sure of the porches above and of the unresisting discipline of the House-guard behind us on the court, did reach after the clanging cups. Were they his Companions?

—Low-lifes, secure this place! Theseus shouted as he directed Ariadne up the ramp with his sword; and then we saw his orders, for his men surged up onto the court now, and they no sooner had Ridius' twenty-odd fellows disarmed before the people on the court than they butchered them, every one of them on the spot, cornering them with triplets of spears or charging into their bodies with swords and battle-axes flashing, hacking, thrusting. It was massacre and melee and as the onlookers vomited and screamed Ariadne began to fight Theseus—and he held her in a bear's hug just as I had, but now she was wiser and managed to free a hand and she stabbed her fingers at his eyes. *Mercy, you said!* and he answered her that they were soldiers, this was war, and then she hurt him and he flung her down hard. That was when I launched myself at him

I hit him with all my weight and he (off balance) fell beneath me. I had only fists but I did get hold of his head and I cracked it twice for his life against the stones. Then the man-weighted mass of a shield knocked me off him and, an arm's reach from Ariadne, I was looking up at the tips of spears close as my nose

—Hold the two of them right there. No no, I'm fine,

Theseus laughed to his fellows and they shared it at my bony fine expense (*He looks good for soup!*). The crowded far end of the court went on sobbing and trembling with the slaughter before their faces: now Porthaon and Teucer and Acraeus pulled the Athenian youths out of this crowd and they all came up toward Theseus in much the same flock of bodies as when they'd arrived. The Shepherd saw and understood the sympathies in certain eyes and he had, he told them, little wish that they start thinking him some sort of animal. But this was war and they'd felt its pains before anybody here today, hadn't they. *Didn't you!* he repeated and Kapha was first to nod, with vomit down the front of his homespun tunic

Bearded warriors were plundering the crypts and the throne room and dragging out people who'd hid in those twilight blood-scented corridors, shouting about the corpse of a sacrificed priest just as Echion said people did here, laughing about the throne's seat that seemed sculpted for some sweet behind. Theseus told Acraeus to take that seachart tapestry away from the men and see that it got back to himself in Athens, then looked over the shambles of the Labyrinth toward town, taking stock of the north-drifting smoke and the cut-off retreats in progress. And—just as Cratus had said—a bizarre-looking figure of a man wrapped in coiled sheets of bronze from his boots to his chin, and scrunched into a boarstooth helmet above that, waddled up the ramp and hailed the Shepherd: he said his lord should come quick, trouble at that custom house, a fight because some fools off the Pylos contingent were setting fire to the place before any others could haul out the goods

—It's this hot wind, sir, or they're angry. One must admit the place is not quite what was promised, this baron

counseled, and Theseus with pursed lips looked over at Ariadne, whose eyes looked able to burn holes in his skull

— Do you see what I'm up against? he said. — They're standing on the prize, the whole blasted island and they fight for bales of wool. I'll be right back. I don't hold any of that against you two. I knew you had it in you. Watch them! he ordered and he left us with six guards between ourselves and Diamat and all the others: Kudru, House-staff, even Orneus a prisoner

Ariadne's hand crept into mine, and found there more of the forgiveness it had come to speak: some Sicilian soldiers (I thought we'd burned all their ships?) had meanwhile marched up into the court with some kind of agreed-upon rights in their faces, and though they were too late for the booty of Cretan House-guards' fine weapons, they set to work stripping the corpses of their well-made helmets and belts and boots. Phaeax and Geryon had gone, on Teucer's orders, into the magazines with more Achaians and (by the smashed-jar sounds and whoops) were showing them where the vestments and textiles and some gold could be had in the lead-lined cysts between remaining grain-stores. The gold-and-ivory statues, though, and other heirlooms were kept safe as much by these warriors' spite and haste as by secret burial: indeed, warriors were already wrapping spears in cloth, dipping them in oil and swabbing pillars and everything else for a grand old fire when they got the go-ahead. A generation of hate at work before us and Ariadne's chin trembled a little bit now because it looked like there'd be no rebuilding this time, our past, our future being dissolved and turned to ashes in a matter of weeks and hours before our eyes: it didn't seem possible

— It's not your fault, I said. — I love you

– No talking. Let go, one of the warriors told me with a prod

– Raped any dead bodies today, hero? I said, out of that slim confidence of knowing Theseus had his own special plans

– Deucalion, please don't make it harder for people, or for me

– No talking! I do have leave to break your jaw, little lady, this warrior said to me

I looked straight at these men, and they stared back, but they broke it off before I did, and they looked at each other and nodded. Confirming what, their pride? Their eyes looked empty to me even as they shared their own gazes: they looked like peasants out of a shack below some wall, lucky if they got to hang a Cretan shield inside it or brought home some charming little clay bird or a water-jug with starfish for child and mother, pieces fashioned by the fabled Daedalaë, sure to make their faces leap with delight. These were broken young men in the heraldry of pride, sheep in wolves' clothing, afraid of each other's demand (taken in from the lord) for flawless courage, young men betrayed and too far into the honey of the trap to ever get out now. Somebody's profit and glory had promised them a warrior's dotage if they lived, but already they looked men who found themselves not luminous sires of the village but dim angry outsiders from the real center of its life, the hearth where wife and mother cowered with little ones. One of them snarled at me to stop staring. No idea. And trapped as they were by good shepherds and each other, their circle would keep tightening round the king, who knew just how to stroke a lost soul's rage

The wind was gusting hot and strong enough now to

bring the irritating sand and a measure of flies, and terrible noises were reaching us from Cnossostown as well as from the magazines, the crypts, the people down court before the shrine: they saw the spears in Ariadne's and my faces and shouted appeals as Theseus came back up out of the north gate's ramp, but there were two different men with him now and they formed up a quick conference-circle with the Shepherd's three local advisors. One of the men was a captain of Eastern-bought mercenaries, tall and supple in studded leather and his desert-bronze skin almost just as dark, a strong hooked nose with a green gem in the nostril our side: a reaping-hook sword with jewels all over its sheath hung at his armpit and he wore gold rings like knuckledusters, precisely one of the contingents we'd used at Athens. He pointed south beyond town to the valley's high end toward Juktas and his voice said all was going well. I couldn't hate him: we'd paid him in our turn to ride the tide

The other wizened fellow was indeed Echion, in his light blue robe with the crane-stitches shining with morning on his clean breast: half-bald, rufous-pated as Elphenor, he looked well for his three years and he saw me as they counseled, gave me a sweet We-meet-again smile, and looked away, all things in time. I had more spit for him but I remembered his promise to my father, that someday they'd cut off Bull's pampered genitals and throw them in Goddess' face, and I shivered: they might really do that to me, right now, and my heart shrunk within my chest as Theseus beamed on operations all round. In his glory, ringed with such leaders in their fields, while they stood more dispassionate, pleased with the fall of his fate their way at such a good time

— The sacred and profane back together, I said thickly

—One more noise, little lady!

And then Theseus was coming toward us. Eyes like cave-ice. He was smiling and beginning to open the front of his kilt. Ariadne knew too and we stood up and I felt her as utterly tense as I was: I was going to die and my voice came from somewhere far from my body but I told him he'd better kill me before he touched her

They all laughed, except for the mercenary captain, and now three warriors laid hands on *me* and—stripped my kilt off, as I was held bent-over by the wrists and by the hair. They kicked my ankles apart and as others took hold of Ariadne I fought and somebody's knee came up into my face like a bludgeon

I staggered, and hands parted my buttocks, and then he was forcing his way up into me. *Why, Why* Ariadne was screaming as warriors held her in place and now his thrusts were tearing into me and pounding like a sun against the inside of my skull. I'd never done this before though I'd heard you should have some oil around but he didn't want to touch me that way, blood was dripping from my numb nose and mouth and the wind was like a delirium swirling the court. I writhed against the sharpest pain but tried not to scream or please him and his claws began to knead me as he thrust

—That's right, brother, take it, *take* it, Theseus said, with a deliciousness of anger and pleasure and hate dripping through his heaves and breaths. —Ohh, it's just like old Bull in His water meadow, that's right, *yes*. Oh, we were coming this year anyway, ohh, and now you belong to me, don't you, *don't* you! Tell me I'm your king, boy! You want to live? Tell me. Oh, I'd like to kill you. I'd like to *chew* you, I'd like to eat your guts! I want—you—*tell me*

And he moaned and his hands gripped so tight I

thought they'd tear the meat off my hips: his seed pulsed into me and he writhed in its spasms, and then he ripped himself free with a roar that shook and stabbed the roots of me. My knees gave out at last in the waves of pain from where he'd torn my entrails: they let me drop

—Look, Pretty Eyes is bleeding! —It's that time! —A virgin every day! the warriors laughed

—Tell me you belong to me, you piece of shit! Theseus demanded: a cloth struck the back of my head, it was my kilt which he'd used to wipe himself off and now he turned me about himself where I sat half-crumpled, clutching my belly of pain and a hate for him that made my skull burn—We were face to face again with the point of his heirloom between us, at my neck

—Half my council tells me to kill you both! he said. —I'd like to chop you up and eat your guts, you sorry *nothing*! But do you know what? What shall I call you, now you're mine, by the way? Mince? Yes, Mince is good, and good enough for you, boy. Tell you what—You know, for the same Royal Kindred reason I am prepared to offer you the throne here, Deucalion. *Mince*. Can you tell me you're mine? Hmm? he said pricking my neck, his face half as crimson as his fellows' helmet plumes. In his eyes I saw the memory of his own knelt-down captive moment here, that he just might weary of this and stab me through. But I was dazed and hurt, and yes, afraid, and Ariadne and people down-court were watching

—They're not very quick, he doesn't understand, said that warmest of advisors Porthaon behind Theseus

—Tie him up then! You, the Shepherd said turning to his mercenary captain. —As discussed, for this one with the eye-paint. This will be your last chance, Deucalion, *Mince*, I swear it!

Chance to what, render some puppet's oath he'd never believe? The warriors stood me up naked—it was like a knife's thrust in my entrails every time my thighs took my weight now—and they roped my arms together behind my back, wrapped slack round my waist and up through my buttocks and (patting the cinches as they worked) handed the leash-end to the captain. Ariadne's eyes told me why she'd been silent, trying with her life not to lose what connection she had in visibility with the people down-court: they dragged her deep into the throne room and I turned my head to the order-giver, wizened Echion between Teucer and Acraeus, watching with his hands underneath his robe, his eyelids half-down, lips apart. Through my hate I saw that Theseus was thinking ahead, or these men were: he'd only done to me what he was not yet prepared to do to Ariadne as First Daughter of the realm he was smashing. Her he'd need much more than a puppet-king and he was holding, for now, to the chivalrous mirage before the people: before even his own twelve, who knew more of these three years than his new-come warriors. Oh, her eyes: I knew that her imaginings were already torturing her, the sounds from the town and the valley only the surfaces of pain and I writhed and cursed this blithe captain dragging me out of the House. How could I be useful now, what could I do, for anybody? There was not much sustenance in jeering men who'd meant *woman* as an insult

Out in the morning sunshine gusts of wind were driving smoke northward from the doors and windows of the custom house while the warriors torching it cheered: Theseus had restored peace and helped them take back their people's shipping-tithes before they burned the very symbol of their oppression, many standing on bales of

flax or wool or crated pottery, everybody with something for his trouble, an unfurled bolt of Miletos cloth, a marine's head still in its fine helmet atop a dancing spear. Men fell back hooting from the heat and I saw one's shield with a horse and startled dove upon it, my old friend Cadimmetes' totem, ah yes, the contingent from Pylos, come to pay the snake back his bite. My mind gave me things for the pain. Lion-shields too. Evidently Echion had not let my father be heard through him. Men saw us coming and a few beards broke from the jubilation to ask what we had here: when they heard, they wanted to kill me, but Theseus' name was redemption, and so they let us pass with a gauntlet of careful hard slaps to my buttocks with the flats of their bloody swords. Hatred, hatred—The captain glanced back and pulled me off to the right, down toward the riverside road and the town. I didn't really understand what this could be for, he knew he had my hatred

Under the last female cypress tree that spread its boughs at the corner of the road and the Labyrinth's hill, a group of twenty warriors with Athene's owl on their shields were hanging a Cretan man and woman by their necks, poking and slashing their bound naked bodies with blades and spears while the ropes were drawn, then released, then drawn again: they let the pair of them dangle till their faces purpled, whipped them when they dropped to the ground, splashed them with water or wine, strung them up again. No telling how long this had been going on except that the man and woman looked so much alike in their blood that they could've been one being broken in halves: I looked away but my eyes fell directly on this pair's baby (as I guessed) lying with its head crushed in the grass not far in front of them. I slid to my knees and

tore up my stomach and the captain abided till I'd finished. He was picking me up when I screamed *Cowards!* through the acid in my throat and one of the warriors (they'd all looked up as if from a broken trance) came up and, having asked if the captain minded, stuffed part of the baby's wrap in my mouth and tied it in tight with a handy rawhide strip. Then this warrior rejoined his company and as we left I saw him seize and pull down hard on the hanged man's legs. I had no thanks inside for any Power, any Goddess for the mercy. A silence was falling in my soul as the blue sky above Cnossos and Kephala turned, yet again, to smoke

He was pulling me across the road when a chariot rattled down the seaward slope behind us, and as the white hooves of a huge matched pair of stallions pounded past us the helmeted lord at the reins lifted a bronze-sheathed arm in salute. Galloping galloping round and round. *Horses, and tombs of Queens up in the hills!* he shouted for the captain, laughing with his means of getting up there early; and as he passed us two marines' corpses dragged after him by their ankles, their heads and arms jouncing, one man's teeth leaving grooves in the road's clay. Seemed no end to it already. Corpses everywhere stripped to rags, hacked up: bands of warriors darting carefully house to house, plunging in through burned or bashed-down doors and leaping through windows for first call on everything, girls, gold, hangings, a hairbrush in mother-of-pearl, and if they came out emptyhanded or wounded their rage was double moving on. Many a house in flames before the people inside could be rousted or killed, abandoned ones burning too, unsacked, so many: I saw dead Cretans with wounds in their backs out in front of neighbors' bashed-in doors, too. At one such group of

houses the captain had words for the wise, telling some Argives that, rifle and plunder and pull down as they pleased, they'd better watch the tops of these hills: the day was young and there was sure to be counterattack. The youngest warriors thanked the captain with courtesy while others ran by laughing: a few caught their breath in this gusty heat and with casual spears uprooted shoots of herbs in beds beside the doors of Cnossian houses. The frame of a loom generations old in flames

The town was a furnace, a chaos of roof-fires and whoops and wailings, clatters of arms and futile arrows. Families too proud or paralyzed to run—some of them standing in their own house as the Queen in hers—were put to the sword in each other's faces or bound up till other warriors brought proper sets of chains, and more died in those struggles. Flies went mad with the thick zinc-smell of blood: the birds chirped on but in fits and starts. *What are the people doing?* I couldn't have told them. Numbness even to the flies' bites was spreading over me, my bound arms and jaw, my nose swelling up, I was mincing as I walked with the tear he'd ripped inside me: I'd never experienced my body as such a mass of pains and I fell more than once but the captain was very professional and helped me up, even offered to take the gag off if I'd not curse him for his job. Defiance was all I had and my snarls made him shrug and stroll ahead, dragging me

We saw very few dead mainlanders in Cnossostown and before long he was pulling me up the inland road past the Horae's quake-smashed house, for that was the direction of the battle if there was one now, Daitor's people perhaps trying ambush and rear-guard actions to let more Cretans get into the mountains before the chariots

and horses wholly cut them off. What I saw next I could only hope would finish me. Under a willow to the left of the road, beyond some bodies that looked like Callistans, men with Lion-shields, Athenians, sunwheel-painted Sicilians, men from places I did not know—from everywhere—had another woman tied up in midair, suspended by wrists and ankles, and all her crimson intestines and organs had been pulled in a mass out of her chest and set afire. She was dead, the meat of her black in places, her hair charred off and these men were still beating and hacking at her. And nearby on the ground lay a man in armor making horrible noises with his friends crouching over him, shaking heads, hiding tears. They'd been taking turns with her and she'd bitten this warrior's sword off and now it was either bleed to death or life without one. It seemed he'd chosen the former and I was savagely happy to hear him begging his friends to avenge him, avenge him: the captain had to draw his jeweled sword when they saw me mincing behind him but, once again, being Theseus' special prisoner was life. Wonderful life

I had nothing left in my guts when the warriors turned back from me and hacked the corpse off the tree, leaving the arms and legs swinging, and they all started tearing at the trunk amid their feet, tearing off ears, lips, nostrils, breasts, clutches of skin. Men from everywhere at every part of her. They ate, roaring at each other, and spat and called for wineskins and raged for this well-liked warrior as he went still. Many, unenlightened by the sacred meal, gathered gear and ran for what battle might be had, further up. I thought my heart must be dead because I wondered coldly how could so many people hate us, like *this*, and we not know it. It had to be—What they'd done to the woman's body, that they were doing over and over

with Crete itself, with everyplace they sailed. Not even a Cratus could cause this: he was only a Cretan, who felt his life and refused to surrender it. Now a warrior held up the bloody skull and shouted *Her name isn't Laughter anymore*. It was Gelania, and next I knew I was on the ground with a wineskin squirting my face, prods at my ribs, *Get up Mince, On your feet now*

Gagged, I couldn't say I'd seen enough: for awhile I'd imagined that Velkanos and the burial-work had hardened me for this, but now, it was enough. I just wouldn't move, not even for Ariadne's sake and I'd never truly felt this before. Deadness. A quick stab, won't you? But my body was not ready: the captain laid on with a little cat of a whip he kept somewhere and after thirty good lashes I found I did have to get up. I found I couldn't take that kind of pain where he was laying it on and he knew the places. So he dragged me on, stumbling, following chariot-ruts and hoofprints and warriors: what did they want: my heart was dead, useless

On and on. I seemed to enter another realm now, dizzying, raked by gusts and sand, the flies ceaseless. But worst—for seeing so much and still living, and having found out I could not let him beat me to death—it looked that I was going to break. I'd begun to despise myself, begun to feel the impotent humiliated captive my body was: nothing could've prepared me for what I was seeing and even the memory of the colors dying into the sea seemed to have vanished, withered away beneath this late morning sun. I despised myself for my share of the sins that'd made The Powers abandon us like this: if that weren't true, we clearly weren't worth any trouble to Them and that brought more contempt. We should have listened to Perides, I should have humiliated Ariadne's visionary

rich-girl naivete, we should have killed them all when we'd had the chance, as Theia'd said. Where was she now? A raped corpse on a pile of sea-wrack; and *her* anger, her answers to her own fears *I* had presumed to judge from behind my Queen's skirts? Throwing cups at them. Hoping she'd somehow save us, like mother making everything right for the boy lifting seaweed. *Who* could have remained so stupid for all the Shepherd's ignorance had taught? I lusted, lusted to kill with an axe of spite. And yet, for every person I'd seen at a rite and now saw dead or in chains, my inmost heart still wept, and listened for the old words of our Kings within it, to Step Forward, to bear death and seeing for their sakes, though you scarcely understood. It couldn't be wrong for a King on The Tree to want it to be over

My tour-guide stumbled on a diverting scene: at Europa's tomb, just beyond a small slaughter in the road of Cretan men and women who'd died in Daitor's actions, some officers were arguing how to get the last hold-outs from inside the stone doorways, the offering-rooms, the crypt beneath: they decided to cut dry and green brush from the knoll and then they stuffed it best they could into the entrance and kindled it, the bravest fanning the thick smoke inside with capes and big shields. The rest of this company, about thirty warriors, spread out round the crimson-pillared courtyard and poised with their spears, nocked arrows: the court was so small there could be no missing even a running child and their commander loudly ordered that, as the daemons came out, he (and only he) would stipulate Capture or Kill. I turned away in a universal disgust as we all started hearing coughs and cries and the warriors tensed in their crescent round the entrance: the captain forced me about and I shut my eyes snarling

— Listen, my order is to make you see these things, he said. — Do open your eyes now, because if you don't, I have to cut your eyelids off. Don't make me do that, he requested

And I understood! I opened my eyes, saw his silver dagger coming up and with very swift hands he cut the gag from my jaws: a mercy for which he watched to see that I looked into the courtyard

But I thought I understood now, even as the green smoke came seething back out of the tomb and the first choking people neared the sunlight. No one could answer for Powers or Goddess, leading children to this, breaking Her own heart, allowing utterly everything. But I saw that I was here to be made part of the Shepherd's new order, his new real world, whose Necessity was that no other world exist to contradict it. Killing our hearts to silence, till all things were but semblances and echoes of the dead world these men saw. This was their way of mastering death, which had become too much for them, fearing woman and lacking potent answer. The first Cretans charged out, young men with swords flailing but they were smoke- and sun-blinded and swarms of arrows thumped into them: they screamed and writhed

I thought of Kudru, never much a man for ritual, like his Daedalaë: only now near this same abyss of fear had he become so. Artisans had made too many images not to know who made and broke the Gods they spoke. And I saw now as never before, that so it was with us, all, children of blood-red clay and sunlight: this slaughter was a making of Images for them to live by; and the Shepherd was trying to make me over in the image of his dream, trying to force me to resemble it. A woman named Pidray came rushing out of the tomb with a baby in her arms as

token of mass surrender and the warriors on orders gave her the same, a volley of arrows. Some warriors had not fired, some frowned on the extravagance but most of them laughed and cheered, making difficult shots on the baby that had spilled. The same Image over and over. And the stunted trees and suffering animal-images fashioned by Achaian craftsmen now passed before my eyes anew, years of them on gold and clay, plain-writ manifestoes of a new relation Crete had underestimated. Men killing erotic knowledge in themselves because they had cut themselves off from the only immortality, The One Within The Seed. Cleite, losing her world to death, had not gone so mad as to mistake the image she'd wrapped herself in *for* the world: these warriors were making images out of the living, women and babies and young men with other than war on their minds, with all their contradictions to power. Balming their fears with bluster, grand action, cruelty. *They're like spawn, who said there weren't many inside?* a warrior shouted as he bent his bow

The Shepherd needed a vassal Crete would accept, and one who'd help change this world to his dreams in his own absence. Who believed with him there'd never been nor could be anything but a Life whose essence was this sport before our eyes. After today it would be easier to believe, and easier still, the grass growing tall about Kephala. But knowing these things, freed by his intentions, I let myself weep here now, and like Ariadne aflame beside mother's bier, lived again. My beautiful ones kept pouring from the tomb and I did not hear the word Capture once, not once—I could never forgive, but there was a curious flower here too, a curious contemptuous sympathy for broken men and their squandering. Get me through to where I might be useful, maybe

If more than forty people had rushed out of the smoking tomb, most of them were swiftly dead, only a dozen or so prime captives standing in a line of linked chains and make-do ropes. We were all on the road back to the Labyrinth—the captain wanted something to eat at midday, and the warriors were pleased with us their first shares—when, out ahead of sight along the road, Daitor's survivors hit with arrows and spears from high ground above the turn where you first saw the House. We were halted awhile till this fighting moved on, and when we rounded the turn, we found that charioteer sitting in the middle of the road between his two dead white stallions' traces, his legs out flat on the ground below his armor, the horse-corpses stuck with spears and arrows. Some of the warriors stopped and commiserated with him, a fine pair raised from colts together, born to the traces, so responsive, so well-tempered even coming over on ship: the man wept without shame as we were trotted past and he got up to kill *somebody*. But the warriors spoke for what was rightfully theirs and he turned back to keep the flies from settling

— My horses! he cried. — My beautiful beautiful horses!

* * *

He should kill her. She was the last of her line, unless you counted the whores' bastards up at this Archanes the natives called sacred, and no man of the council reckoned that stock royal. Obviously, you slew a Kindred to extinguish a House for good, but more, if you wanted the natives to look your way tomorrow you'd better not leave hope from yesterday. Make an example of her. Blood-

price was called for out of generations of Cretan strut. If he didn't kill her, the Lion, the baron-sons of Pelops, these Sicilians or who-knew-else might think he lacked that crucial bit of great kings' nerve. You never knew who might turn for one show of weakness, and Crete such a tempting prize to fall the winner's way

And if his advisors and Echion might say so it was bad enough he hadn't even raped her yet. That was important and if the men so far were too busy, well, when they finished burning and celebrating and fighting out shares it'd be a problem. Then they'd notice friends lost and every man without a honey-pot his own would wonder why he hadn't personally avenged them. They weren't the smartest men, they wouldn't understand or care to about three years of her and him. Rape her and extinguish the last of this childish Mystery and this fear of goddesses' wrath for the men: then cut the head off the island. He didn't want to look soft, did he?

—Go out and ply your tongues on those maggots, said Theseus sitting up straighter in anger on the throne. —I am young, but I won't be pushed around like Aegeus, handing out his votes. I don't care what they think. This has to be handled right. You gentlemen seem to think this place is yours, which I assure you it is not, and you think it's going to stay yours too. Well, you haven't been up country as I have and you don't know the resentment interference stirs up. Half the clergy of this House is up there now, besides. Do you want to pacify the place? Have your scribes send the next ten years' Laurium silver for mercenaries, unless you're ready to push for more boys from home. You see gentlemen, unlike you, I've studied here years, and I learned from these people. The long view. She's the way to keep order. To respect her in

some way doesn't make a man soft, it's to deny her to this Daitor, as either a Queen or a martyr for the tribe. Am I right, Mince?

— Nothing to say? Don't you know your love's life is at stake? Come on, he said, — you know her ins and outs, I know you can help her accept our generous offer. It is a full share in our new rites

— Don't make us kill her, Mince, Theseus said bearing down with his eyes, — just because we're brain-weary and tired of this place. She was a warrior in her way. We might've been friends in better times. I'd prefer not to rape her, actually, but I'd lie if I said I'd much grieve either one of you. It's in your hands. We'll talk this out one last time after my brother Memnon comes and we hold thank-rites. One last time, do you understand? I asked her once myself and that's enough. Leave us now. I advise you to do what you can, Mince

I went out, said nothing, trying not to speak with him since the first day and the ropes had come off. We hadn't much else but silence right now and Ariadne the worst of that, shut up till this council's decision in the crypt she'd shared as quarters with the Shepherd. They had tried themselves to confront her, once, but to them just the sight of her gave her unsettling advantage, they grew nervous and clumsy and vague and she'd had the gall to reject the vanity of their plans for public rites. Wife of the King, Handmaid to Zeus and Earthshaker. Now, one way or another, she'd face a decision crafted beyond her ken. Me they had attending royal council for the sake of appearance among our survivors: *See, people of Crete, a king of your own blood if you simply work together with us now, and help the misguided Daitor's people to see reason*

Two burly members of the new House-guard, my shad-

ows from the sons of light, my very own Companions met me with the civility of spears point-upward and clacked the shafts on the court as I left the naked anteroom. Down court in a stark sunlight still raked by this season's persistent south wind a number of our surviving House-slaves (new words everywhere) continued scrubbing blood, under guard, from where our own men under Ridius had died. Cratus and Kudru and Orneus had lain there a day or two also, among the stacked corpses. To see the place was still a shock, for the paltriness of funeral rites such good men as my friends could come to, and the grief for them cleared away some of my throne room contempt. As Crete's erstwhile King they'd let me take care of the burials and even officiate, they knew our people's predilection for morbid involved superstitious ceremony and even feared some of it. The dark. Like this uncanny ground, as they called the Kephala, and the House's own twisting corridors: no conquering those things, short of abandoning the prize of a proper seat of power

– Where are you going, one guard said

– To see the Queen, in King Theseus' name.

– To see the Queen. Alright, this way.

One before me and one behind, we marched twenty paces down court past the burned crumbled pillars of the great shrine and I turned right into the crypts' corridor. It stank of scorch from fires set too soon before thorough plundering, a measure of the lackwit hate about the House but at least the guards did not follow my turn. They knew the inner way out was also guarded and preferred the sunshine. With no doors to the high stone chambers in here I asked could I come in and Diamat (*Deucalion is it?*) said Yes

Her lady-in-waiting, new title because it was blasphemy to worship mortals: Diamat, barefoot, haggard, tears run dry, and old. Council was trying to recruit the right new priestesses but there was still too much bad blood. Diamat fussed with a stone lamp on a chair against the inner wall, then left us: I touched her shoulder and she patted my hand, smiling, courage

— They don't know what to do with me, do they, Sweet Wine.

I went in and took Ariadne's hands as we sat on her wood-frame cot. *They never did* I said and then we sat quiet as the lamp. Around it on the chair's frayed seat a semicircle of colored candle-stumps unlit, she liked to save those for evening, her devotions. A white wool shawl given as a night-cover neatly folded at the cot's foot, her white slippers under the chair. She still insisted on the clothing the women had honored her with that last night of life but they'd taken away her crown, at least till appearances served. Out of common sight forever, though, taboo: they did not understand how she'd shown herself so familiarly till now. Out of the days when Crete had no Queens or Kings: familiar, family: the ability to see what was in plain sight. Breeding contempt? That was their import

For a few moments she groomed me and asked was I still hurting where he'd—*Not much*, I said

— Are they going to kill us soon?

— Probably, I answered after pause. She breathed.

— How are the others?

— Working. Or judged and dead. Fighting over positions, or tied up for shipment at the harbor. Daitor's still free and it sounds like he's breaking their sleeps anyway. Must be Cretans linking up with him in the mountains.

— He won't stop killing? Ariadne asked

— Who will? I said and her fingers twisted hard round mine

— I cannot just sit in here!

As our masters well-knew; nor did I think she'd have to much longer, but I couldn't say more than I had. Yes, when they'd tired of dancing with heads on spears, of taking houses down with pry-bars, of raping the same captives and decided it was time to work them; when they'd finished their fellows' funeral games and judged the last of us. Then they'd not hesitate, and had proven it. Orneus. No model for anybody's youth, here in Crete tied to the skirts of his exile-mother. In terror he'd protested all he'd tried to do for the Shepherd, but Echion had answered: *Porthaon says you'd argue just the opposite, had the Earthlings won: Death.* And they'd stretched his neck as he screamed across a chopping-block. Why Kudru? At least they'd made him an offer as elder of the Daedalaë, with the rest of the coveted staff watching: a comfortable mainland position in royal service, for his simple oath to work hard and teach. *Why can't I do that here,* Kudru'd said. No questions: Be sensible. But all *orders* were blocks to the light in these people and, though I told them I'd make sure he behaved, Kudru'd have none of it, like Cratus. *You're my King, Deucalion Minotauros!* But your choice hurts *me*, Kudru—*Farewell my friend. All's done worth doing this lot.* And after those two public killings they hadn't too much trouble with the people who had watched. No blood-field, either, but here on these rite-smoothed stones, to align the House with terror of authority. Better? No pretension, anyhow

All through the island, this, all through the realm: aunts, uncles, cousins, elders, *damos*. Cut off in the

palace, as they called our House, we tried to imagine Phaestos and Zakros and town after town but it was too much. Cratus'd said to be grateful for the wreck of the land but he hadn't thought of who'd do the labor after: now we thought of Crete and, yes, at times were glad they told us nothing anymore. It was Ariadne's sole relief from the unspeakable things she was seeing in her mind. I looked at her and knew this was to age before one's own eyes

—Do not blame yourself for what Velkanos alone made happen, I said. —We put a force on the coast to stop this, and The Powers saw otherwise. Listen. A few days from now they hold a rite to thank their Gods, and then there's his final council about us. Ariadne, maybe we should—I mean, if we try, a little bit, we might help things in spite of them

—A new Cnossos in Cnossos? Play Goddess for the slaves? And if I do, who will not despise me who remembers. *I* will. I've been staring at this wall, Deucalion, trying to know what grandmother and mother—Nothing comes. Believe me, brother, she said breaking away from her own rushing thoughts when she heard the fear in her own voice and saw it in my eyes. —Believe me, to lose my life would still be to lose something good to me. But it is exactly now that I have to show forth what I can. That's what I do hear, from all our wild mothers. Because I never thought I'd say this, but I know people are going to be frightened and numbed to forgetting. Still, if they can *see* the—No more words. Deucalion, go to their rite then, and in everything, keep your eyes open for us. A way will show itself, I know it will. Please! she said with hands up in protest, —no more talk of that now. Please, send Diamat? I love you, Ariadne ended, and she did rise to em-

brace and be embraced with the life she desired; but her voice had a lilt of afterthought tacked on at the last, on words so less important than the realm. Well, everybody was numb, and she saw only Crete in my face as I went out to my new duties

I chair palace type, inlaid with blue glass paste and silver and gold in the back, which is inlaid with women's figures in gold; and with a pair of gold finials, and with golden gryphons and gryphons of blue glass paste.

21 Cnossos women and their 12 girls and 10 boys, and the men who belong to them. Rations: 1 bowl grain per day. To be decreased when figs are ripe.

I'd been known before as Overseer: now, or at least for as long as I wanted Ariadne to live, it was my royal function to try to stand between our people and our masters' wishes, to keep the work that made their venture pay proceeding smoothly, and it fell to me to put their reports-home in Elphenor's ciphers. Besides rebuilding what they needed in order to rule, our masters knew there was a Pharaoh's ransom in all that unharvested timber two miles deep along the coast, and they meant to start working at it; to build the ships that'd carry it to profit in Egypt under new (secret) terms; to build defenses against summer after-raids as well. Mestor, I learned first day out with a labor-gang, had been captured somehow and was keeping himself alive just to quietly cheer brother Daitor, or so he said to the slaves and me. But if he'd started as much a rank laborer as the rest, he'd been making him-

self something more of an authority between my hollow throne and the other slaves: he kept Cretan friends by carefully deferring to Minotauros in the old style, but, when it came to his expectations of a better-than-wretched late life, he knew how to please. Another shock, that a man so full of violent resistance one moon, could change so under the sun. I might expect an arrow myself from Daitor but my heart was sure I was learning this world to help my people as I could: Mestor was old and there was something more in his dealings like trying to make a last decent home in the eagle's new nest. We'd been going out amid the sea-wrack for days with Teucer and Echion (*All we can do is keep our heads down, men, and work hard through a bad time—The Gods are sure to smile on that, to a man of us*); and Echion, with his nose for talent, always had things to teach

—Work them till they've just enough strength to get back to town, he told Mestor once. —Your job is to rip out planks and beams from all this waste, especially the cedar, remember that. I'll see to your percentages if you please the King's council with speed at it. If the slaves complain, talk up the threat of raiders to Ariadne, or tell them they have to do this while their women handle the fields, help them think ahead about starvation. Our officer here has the King's permission to kill but only if it's needful to the work. The important thing is, planks and beams, cedar. Work them till they can just make it back and assure them we'll find them good rations, understood?

—I'll do my best, Mestor told the priest and gentleman. The Cretan gang did make the best of what they could, stayed alive and strong because *their* Crete was not dead, they knew it, they were sure. Something would hap-

pen. Something would give. A few already hated Mestor and some appreciated his softening influence: maybe he was trying, with subtle craft, to help them in braver ways than I. Tough old man. As it was the situation pleased Echion every way, for it was to Mestor people were turning so soon with their hate, and their gratitude he had no interest in

The evening of the day I'd talked with Ariadne, a chariot rattled into the precincts and the driver told Echion (busy preparing beasts for sacrifice) that a watchman at Amnisos had seen, or would swear he'd seen, at least three Cretan ships slide by the harbor at dusk, headed west. Hadn't warships given chase? No, because no one else but this watchman had seen them, though that man would swear. Perhaps the good father might come down to the shore tomorrow and sacrifice, that Apollo Slayer of Darkness drive these ghosts off? That was what the main shore-watch believed, that so many wave-killed marines and Cretans had to be lingering here in anger—He really should come

I learned of this because Echion came to me with it, to see what I knew. He'd been told of my Admiralty labors and was a man to look for men behind the so-called strange and the doings of The Dead. So he told me, in his demand for answers

I smiled: maybe they were the *raiders* in his own words to the slaves, risen up to haunt him. He was coming to me, a Cretan, too, for all his pride in disbelief, because for Kudru's and others' sakes I'd served as a handler of bones, and in his mind that'd made me an intimate of snake-pits and darkness. I said that everybody sent east to Rhodes—witness the head of the man off Glaucus' ship—had been killed by the waves, for all I knew. Echion

walked out displeased, a flaw in his mind's glare. But that night I did not sleep much in the room they gave me apart from Ariadne, and half-dreamed what three ships might do if the right moment showed

Theseus heard this report in the morning and dismissed it, left it to the priests. He was taking a chariot himself and a company of men up country after Daitor. That was the real resistance, the real prize now, he said: something had changed that way for Theseus, since Crete itself at first had held that place for him. But he came back near dark only dusty and frustrated, with a few roped-together children beaten from the brush and a mixed herd of cattle and goats, ponies and Callistan striped gazelle. Part of me rejoiced that Daitor's baiting and hit-and-run had spoiled the day; but I also learned what even rebels unseen would cost us

For that same day saw the arrival of a mainland brother-prince named Memnon, whose force of a thousand had done the work on Phaestos and no few south-coast towns. Almost half his men had marched burning and spoiling their way over the mountains enroute to this link-up at Cnossos as they'd planned, for sharing victory. But there were two problems. First, these men were in more vicious spirits than the Shepherd's had been upon seeing Amnisos, for some Cretan had got word of their coming to Phaestos and there'd been scarcely a gold cup the natives hadn't dug into the ground. This Memnon and his warriors had tortured royal kindred thereto death without gaining anything and so had turned on the people there, and in the mountains

Second, Memnon himself was dead, a great leader treacherously ambushed not ten miles out of Phaestos, under the horns of Ida Mountain. Memnon's officers

brought his corpse into town on a shield, draped with a gold-trimmed tapestry from the spoil and one of the warriors behind bore along a tall alabaster jar with Egyptian signs incised between its handles, a gift from Pharaoh himself which Memnon took everywhere. Theseus, returning, met these men with only dust and animals to match his lost brother's eminence and I saw he'd had hopes to rival Memnon's achievements. Later he went out of his way to explain to me (repaying Glaucus' words to himself?) that, after Trianda, Memnon had lain up the winter in Egypt, with Tutmoses' leave. A thousand thanks to Pharaoh, harboring our enemies because Crete hadn't jumped to let his troops disembark at Ugarit. Who is not with Him of The Great Two Houses is against Him. Things were beginning to pull together

I saw no grief in the Shepherd, for the word *brother*. Memnon's warriors were only tenuously under control, for the arrow in their leader's neck. How he'd loved to rove the oceans free as a sea-eagle, they told King Theseus, and he snapped his fingers to get slaves on a proper tomb immediately, offering something handsome near both the sea and the Cretans' war-harbor. Such was honor for the dead; but something more, given Theseus' lack of years and rover-stature, was needed to pull these hundreds to his good side quick. He loosed them like a wave on Cnossos and environs for the night, and these men threw themselves into smashing and burning whatever they could find intact. When the place was in flames and uproar again (giving Theseus no sleep), and with so little wine to soothe them, they turned on their own captives from the south. In my night-confinement near the central court I heard what I hoped Ariadne did not: for toward dawn, a single voice, just one, began screaming, no more

male or female than a cat's howl in the dark, weaker, then strong again, begging, defiant, hysterical, begging, there was nothing I could do and this was surely deliberate to drive Ariadne mad. My guards smiled for the fall of mighty Cnossos as I covered my ears. Such a sound: no one could listen and not turn vicious themselves and I found myself still in that same fight to keep my soul above the tide of hate

Nor did The Breath of the Ass relent one single day this season since the mainland forces had beached. For all this, plus ghost-ships off his coast spooking people, Theseus was in splendid surly spirits for the rites he'd hoped to share with the already-great. He saw me from the head of his procession into the customs yard and his eyes said every word he needed to say: *Wait, brother, and I'll give you last council you won't forget*

The Achaians' numbers, at least the most pious of them with the captains of each contingent were ranked round the center of the north precincts in a square; but where, before, Perides as War Leader would stand to one side while my family and clergy made offerings, now it was impossible to tell priest from king from warrior, and Theseus struck every sacrificial blow, turning the creatures' heads to the north. Echion, beside him, looked impatient and dissatisfied even if this was but a preliminary victory-rite: despite the tridents scratched into Labyrinth walls he might've liked to employ its more official amenities but the altars along the west court were still too tainted, for him, with Earthling custom, and so he'd had a trench dug in the near north meadow, that Earthshaker might receive His due of blood-pouring from the captains. But there were no chants, no communion, no *kyklos*—No priestess or daringly ambitious woman could be

found, yet, to add the grave old customary touches which even these men missed from home, where women had some part. Echion had two answers for that

He'd replaced his manly gown with a loose, near-diphphanous light blue robe that reached to his insteps and fluttered delicately in the south wind; and through the pourings he sang the names of what they called goddesses, each with different titles and attributes and realms. Separate faces of what had been The One: not so ubiquitous that way, so overwhelming; and as these were matched with husbands like Zeus, Earthshaker and Hades and more, he gave me one darting look as if to ask could I (an Earth-priest) approve a sense of balance. I thought of Kudru mocking the dead balance of gryphons either side of the new throne-murals. This was the kind of balance brought forth no shiver of Presence along your spine, was more like a list of useful servants than of Gods. It left me cold and even when the warriors raised their shout it was weaker than any they'd raised on the field. Echion felt it too, though, and just before dismissal he brought forth a rolled papyrus of bright-painted picture-script, brought here by Memnon's men. He wanted all to hear what the world's greatest warrior'd had to say of them, through Memnon (peace to his shade). Ahh, the sumptuous councils they must've had on future trade without middleman Crete

—Amon Ra gives thee valor and victory over all foreign countries: He sets the glory of thee and the fear of thee in all lands, the terror of thee as far as the four quarters of heaven. He commends the Earth to thee in its length and breadth, so that westerners and easterners are under thy oversight. He makes a speedy prey of those devastated by nature: He devours with his flame those who are in their islands. Crete is

in awe of thee: He gives thee power to trample them down. He makes them see thy majesty as a young bull: those in the midst of the Great Green are under thy battle-cry. They hear thy roar

And the host indeed roared anew as Echion concluded his translation: as I turned away (guards with me) I saw Theseus in their midst with his two fists high and beating the air, as if milking the sky of power to raise more. The warriors liked his youth and independence and it seemed that Memnon had found an heir of sorts: the voices were those of men fresh and ready for another such business any time

No. There could be no place for Ariadne in that and she'd seen it looking no further than a blackened Labyrinth wall. I had to get her out of here. Better deign to talk at this last council on her fate. Maybe suggest how humiliating it'd be for her to be exiled, to—Naxos, say: they'd offered her refuge, a small island too, Naxos, no place to raise a vengeance-fleet. *Yes sirs, I practiced, then she'd lose Queen's powers here and you'd be rid of her, without the onus of her death to hunt you down. I'll go myself and watch her for you the rest of our mortal days, no questions asked*

But of course this left our people to shift for themselves, and she'd never do that. I did not know how to bend her pride and, in her words, it was *exactly now* she meant to bend the least, for people's sakes. The Shepherd with Echion rode out in a chariot after the main rites to honor Memnon's burial and win his men further: between this raking wind and sleeplessness, the horrors and the tear still in my loins, I could not think, but the Shepherd's errand sent me to a place worth a try. I begged a tiny vase of offering-oil from the new factotum

of our store-rooms and bore it up to the clan-graves west of the Labyrinth, where Kudru now lay, Cratus, Yamō, the House-guard. Even in sunshine my Companions preferred to stay out of the myrtle-grove's shade, and they waited my harmless mutterings to The Dead together on the side of the hill

I laid my palms to the border-stones that gave the grave of our friends the shape of Labrys, and that day with Kudru lounging back in my boat with his songs shone into my mind, the whirling helices of light in the water. Such grief at that time for my father, and yet it seemed a dream-happy moment now—I poured the oil and prayed for help whose shape I could not imagine. Nothing came, for a long while's opening myself to listen, listen: it was Theseus' and a man's world now and The Dead did not return to haunt or help

Then my eye caught a young man (marine's helmet, spear and sword) sliding warily down toward me from the grove's far end: one of Daitor's men come to kill the cooperative? We stared a moment and then he beckoned me toward his cover, and closer, I saw he looked much better off than any Cretan nowadays. *Bless Goddess, the very man Deucalion!* he said

His name was Pemptus and I remembered the name, if not him, from another life, those early-dawn runs toward my father's blade practices. He was about seven years my senior and a head taller: his salute was pure old-style and he immediately made it clear he had no connection with this fellow Daitor. He'd gone with his ship *Sea Snake* to Rhodes with Pandaros, and he showed me the black of his iron-bladed sword: *So you're the ghosts,* I said

—Sir? We were holding Rhodes in blockade with the Carians as ordered, when the sky went black with a thun-

der, and stayed black, weeks, longer. Pandaros was sick assuming the worst and we hoisted home-sail soon as we could see, but—I don't know if you realize the raiding going on, Pemptus said with fearful look down-hill, that showed me that these Night Mare moons had touched him. — We lost most of our men to our duty just island-hopping home, sir, and then *home* we saw Palaikastro in flames, and Pandaros beached us there to fight. But there were so many Achaians, sir, not even iron can outdo ridiculous odds. Pandaros was killed and I'm sorry to say the men lost control by then and everybody went their ways, by foot and by ship for home. But—We saw nothing but smoke. Gournia, Miletos, Mallia, then Amnisos—We only knew *that* place because Dia Isle's still there. So we kept on west for the new harbor. Been hiding there and spying out the situation, and forgive us sir but it's looking hopeless. What about the Queen? We're sixty marines, plus oarsmen and they're willing, mostly, to try some rescue. But we feel it might be better that—Sir, can you get the Queen away? We've been trying to hunt up our own kin out of this slaughter. Maybe we can make a life someplace else

I said I feared I agreed with him, but that the Mistress was unlikely to leave so many under the whip, nor Daitor's people at their killing to worsen the general lot. *I assure you that is well-taken, sir*, Pemptus answered; but he was right that sooner or later Achaians would find his company. I told him (having heard disaster in those *mostly willing* words) that there were too many warriors here for rescue, too many to make diversion worth a try. But if he'd give us, say, three days to slip out somehow, we'd come to them. *And if we don't come, go by all means, and live as The Aridela wants you to*, I ended before my fear

second-guessed me and my shadows grew too restless. And for this, out of his memories of her, I believe, Pempus took my hand and placed it to his brow. *Blessed Be*, he said; and the late-spring greenery took him safely back

A way, this might be a way if she'd consent—My two shadows, rankling in the south wind, consoled themselves with laughing looks for the smile The Dead gave Cretans. But I knew I'd better hide my beating blood in cunning company. How quickly one forgot how it felt to be alive! A guilt for the shame of abandonment haunted my every thought now but, back in the precincts, there was a new edge to my eye, sizing up every sentry, could I wrest that sword away, kill this man or that. Without too much hurry I made my way back to see Ariadne (Would we have to leave Diamat? Could I?)—but by Echion's and King's order I was not to see her again before final council. *What? It's important! I'll see you take the blame!* I tried against the guards, but to them I was only king of the liars: the Shepherd cutting her off from everything, squeezing and twisting to break her still. He'd wanted me to convince her of—Something had changed. He'd made up his mind. That had been the icy thing in his eyes

I hid my face that day in ciphering, and looked down years of self-hate, making lists of our conquerors' deprecations. She'd have to bend. But I knew I'd need help. Towards dusk, back from the timber-work came twenty-odd men with Mestor across the customs yard, downcast and stumbling and their Cretan locks and limbs patched with sweat-stuck sawdust: guards either side herded them down toward town, where there was a camp with cookfires for the slaves of other gangs too, burial parties, old women who could heal the useful as required. How good they were, our masters, making kine of people: you could

not see those men shamle by and much worry rebellion. They wanted a sponge, oil for the blisters, a bone and a sleep and they'd think about all else tomorrow, and tomorrow. After the crisis, which would never end. And if I went down there amid the bruises and aches and anguish on pretext of healing, to whisper some hope and appeal? I did not trust Mestor or the men learning new rules under him, and there we were, fighting ourselves and half the master's battle

I wished I'd not seen them, but I had. If we left them it'd be like cutting ourselves from the root and our lives would wither, love die in selfcontempt, the shame. My teeth bit hard on my hatred, anguish and hatred for everything I saw between my eyes and the darkening mountains

The only thing was to get out of here, beach those ships out in our western wilds and join up with Daitor's people. Yes, up there we'd feel free and, with *Sea Snake's* men and their iron, make these heroes suffer till Crete was too much bloody trouble. Sweet! Tell her that: she'd eat roasted venison every night among Artemis' girls, not so bad a life to live day by day, lean as a leopard: she'd be our wild mothers then, mountain-throned as in our first days: better than the shut-in life of naps and baths and primping in the works for her

—Do you want to know how I hate this place? Theseus asked me, ripping his chinstrap loose and *flinging* the helmet at Echion, as his council filed into the throne room that night with salutes he did not see in his haste to strip.

—Do you know how long it's been since I breathed air that doesn't stink of death? Seen a sky without a vulture in it? You can't even think here, this cursed wind, and I haven't had a decent sleep let alone a rest since I can't re-

member. I've got Athens to deal with too, that Aegeus, there's another problem, besides what we found today

— What was that, my lord? asked Porthaon beside his brothers

— Oh, we were at that burial and coming back we spotted fresh tracks, men's tracks and the little holes spear-butts make alongside them. These people, what does it take? What are they eating out there, wood? I've had it Deucalion, *Mince* I mean. I'm going home, and I don't much care what we do with that bitch

— You're upset now, we mustn't be hasty, said Echion.
— Watching this place is a task for the eye of Helios as it is

— *You* administrate! Theseus roared with a mocking waggle of his sweat-soaked tawny head. — I don't care anymore! And do you know what, *Mince*? It doesn't matter what you do when I go, because there'll be plenty of men to watch you for one false move. Your sea-power's gone, that's the end of your wealth, and who's going to follow *you* into fights without gold to gain, hmm? That's why the bitch is the real problem. For her I know your slaves might fight. Why can't she be like my good girl Phaedra?

A chortling ran the chamber's benches, ribald quips to follow up the King's and lighten his mood, before youthful impatience fouled their nets of plans. Theseus sat back and basked a bit, young lion under a palm. He seemed to think they loved him. Seemed he thought Phaedra did too. But I could see her waiting him on ship, felt her lust now too, lust to make him suffer, rip his life up by the root.

— Let's see you smirk after this then, *Mince*. I'm leaving tomorrow noontide with my best three ships. But first

thing, your little love is going to dress up, just like she did in the old days, and I'm giving her one chance, one, to call these dogs to a truce. And then she's coming with me, and if the truce fails, let them fight to the death but they'll never hear from her again. Alright? That simple enough for you?

—Coming with you where, said Echion. —She'd be nothing but trouble-royal in Athens, you said yourself she *ruined* that girl Aithe. In Athens she'd upset everything your father

—I've thought of these things, be still old man! said Theseus. —I meant, she's coming with me through the islands. Obviously I can't take many ships from here yet, I'm sure the isles are full of Earthlings and raiders like this Daitor. So she can be my prize shield while I sail home. I'll think beyond that later, when I *can* think. I really don't care.

And hearing the unsavory vagueness of her end I tried to (calmly, calmly) tell him how confinement had been breaking her down: he needn't take her: the chamber laughed at my insult to their credence, laughed again at the Naxos proposal. Like idols of stone, hands on knees, their eyes knew better than I the end he'd not speak even now, some uncanny sanctity still in this chamber for him

—Why can't you listen to me! I said. —We'll get your truce, and then let her enforce it! You don't need her. Let me talk with her

—Why, so you can work up some sex-spell to sneak off? I knew a woman in Athens named Medea did that. Go sleep, Mince, or pray or whatever it is you do, you've got an early start tomorrow. Guards!

And the pricks were sharp at my back before I could say more—What, half a morning to find Daitor and undo

all this rage? The Goodnight-smile from the throne was—He was too smart for us, he well-knew this would fail. A sop, to show they'd tried for peace: *See, it's you Cretans' own fault that we have to go hard*. Make her look the cooperator too, cut her and people right off from each other and with so much blood these days the ground would be clear, yes, for seeds of lies they lusted to sow. Her power to move people frightened them most, even as they desired themselves to be moved: safe *ekstasis* they wanted in purest form, her erotic death. Every killing I'd seen now seemed to anticipate this one; nor would it end, by any means, with her. An everyday event, in place of The One they could not bow to

The luxury of three days to plan was suddenly gone: I paced the island within my crypt-cell, beat my head to the ancient stones, wrestled the pillar like a strength-giving tree. I slashed my left arm deeply thrice with the promise to mount The Tree as no Minos had, if The Powers would show us—But by midnight guards rattled past and roused Ariadne and Diamat with orders. I heard no argument: she longed to see the world out here, her people, me perhaps. And just before first light, as the guards brought me out on the court, Diamat emerged, looking better than she had in awhile, and she announced the Mistress' readiness. Diamat's hair was brushed out, her old breasts looked strong with her posture of pride and resolve and she had on the good short red-and-white kilt that, till now, Ariadne'd worn. A circle of chrism she'd saved in that pyx glistened on her brow and Diamat stepped to me, rubbed some of hers on my own: the two of them, I realized, expected death

My blood decided: kill and die today but he'd take her nowhere while I lived. At that instant a company of no

less than sixty warriors jangled in pairs up out of the north ramp darkness and formed a double-file half as long as the court, some group of elites with spears and shields of Athens, the very Companions no doubt. Then Theseus stepped from the throne's anteroom where he'd been napping, his beards packing up the trophies of his captivity (matched Bull-cups and all); but the company's officer plunged to one knee before him, begged forgiveness that Phaedra'd not arrived, nor the slaves from town for her presentation as Heiress to Ariadne's throne. *My subordinates are sick and slow and forgetful, it's like a spell, this cursed place sir!* he said. *Allow us to it now, how many slaves*

—Nevermind then, get up, the Shepherd said to him.
—Did you hear that, Mince? You're going to oversee Queen Phaedra, my titular wife here. Not such a bad sort, am I? Think of the benefits, he added for the ranks, but they dared no mirth: their new orders were to take us down past the Earthlings in town and to make sure this effort got seen all along the way. *Your heads if you lose either one of them,* Theseus warned: *Be back here well before noontide*

And then Ariadne stepped out under the dawn stars from the crypt and Diamat instinctively raised her palms out to her: the gesture spoke my soul at the sight of her, the worlds had been fractured for me so long that this was like rain, and it amazed me that even these sternest of ranks touched the shafts of their spears to their brows unbidden, that Theseus and his bustling colleagues only stood beholding her too. Was it the rising light, the crimson of her heather-red Queen's gown, its embrace of her proud stance? She glowed, as the House once had, like the electrum crown restored to her long black tresses.

She touched Labrys at her breast, and her face merely took us all in, careful of or somehow past defiance. Maybe because we'd been seeing her stripped of power's ornament, her sudden appearance like this brought back all of Whom she was to everybody: for me it was like seeing her reborn as from the sea. Theseus and his men—How hopeless they should think their sorrow hidden as they stared at her, stared regretfully within themselves. Ariadne said nothing but answered Diamat's gesture and when she moved we felt it like a Breath through the world, a shiver before the splitting of a stone—Word within words born only of The Trees

Theseus and his beards now thought better of something, and with a snap of fingers to the officer he and the elders retired deep into the throne room. The officer walked the rank down to Ariadne and spoke: whatever he said I was sure I could disabuse her as we moved. But *What is this*, she said, *How do you expect anybody to come near enough—Get somebody else to play your games, man*

—Now now, there there, the officer said. —Look, it is up to you. We can still kill a lot of people if you prefer that kind of peace. Wouldn't you rather try? We're all your children, aren't we? Oh, they'll find us you can be sure, Lady. They always have so far. We march up-country and seem worth attacking and your peace-loving Cre-tans turn up in short order. Ranks, to the march! he shrilled

—*Three ships at the new harbor to take us if we can get away what do you think?* I blurted, feigning to kiss her ear as I joined her between the moving ranks, leaving Diamat behind

—What? Ariadne said. —But how could we?

—Look at him fawning! this officer's voice crowed and

in five strides his goat's-butter breath was in my face. — If you talk again without my say-so I'll break both your arms, understand?

Him I'd kill if I had to and could: Ariadne comforted me with a smile, so proud (I guessed) of how I'd borne myself amid the traps of hate. But her answer meant what, How could we get away, or How could we leave? Her face set cold—How to say I knew we couldn't leave? Did she think me born less of our House-blood than herself?

Dim dawn. Sixty guards. They marched us down the eastern slope, across a plank-bridge for chariots crossing the river and into Cnossostown. Charred hulks of houses in pried-down tumbles of blocks, a dead dog bristling with fun's arrows, bits of ripped-off clothing, a stick with blood on its white-whittled point: everything smouldered and stank of fear and horsedung and death, smashed-in doorways with spews of broken jar-shards and the tracks of scooping hands across the piles of barley-grain left in the dirt. People here and there, filthy with a pair of shouldered waterbuckets or on some master's first errand of the day: when they saw Ariadne every one of them stopped, some signed fist-to-heart, but none lingered. Life lit in their eyes but they looked nervous as deer now, afraid of miscreant loyalty buried already

Charred frame of a loom with its strings all sprung beneath the fig tree by a house: waste, to the dugged-up herb-beds, coltsfoot, mint, camomile. *Your turn will come, you fools* I wanted to say but Ariadne looked struck dumb enough, seeing and smelling it all for the first time. They let me take her hand but her head kept falling, then striving to lift. She'd never really tried before for our mother's imperious bearing but, awkwardly, it served her now

We came to where they'd camped local slaves together for easier watching before a curve of blackened house-fronts. Not quite time to roust them for the fields or the timber: most lay sleeping in clusters round low fires, but lightly, for as the warriors came on they began to sit up, from bad dreams to worse. Guards made cautioning-sounds as people rose, *the Queen, the Queen* and I heard her breath as she saw how filthy, bug-eaten, ragged and weary they looked, breathed the smell of their soup-bones and barley-gruel roasting over flame. Like we'd entered the underworld searching for souls lost in bitterness. But this was the world; or a new kind of world

—Now, now, our officer warned as most people got up: some voices called to her but others turned prudently away and this bumping of bodies smacked of commotion.

—You may certainly hail your Queen's visit, but remember she's on her way to try to make peace with the dangerous outlaws, if she can! Pray hard for her success, offer up your day to such good cause! That's right, that's right, he coaxed as people bowed heads, aimlessly

We were nudged on with shields before she could speak, but an old woman's voice called *Oh-lo-lo*: unanswered, it died alone on the air. And now they might think they had to abandon even her as a source of hope, their souls' image a captive to be used as they were. Ariadne must've thought so because she swallowed, *How could you think it?* she said to me. And my heart flew toward my mouth but that cursed officer was walking backwards just now, smiling right at me: better not get myself disabled, *Look for a way, Look, Look*

But the morning rayed down over Cnossos and another day of hot south wind rose with it, and the flies riled the shield-burdened guards, we walked and called as in-

structed, yelled, pleaded with Daitor's name and every other Ariadne remembered, to come down, no tricks, please, it was time to talk. Up hills and shouting into wooded ravines, along the river and up into inland vales, up the Archanes Road, calling till our throats burned. Chariots and warriors passed us and ranged the scrubland below. Fools we were to walk into this last trap, her eyes knew it more every mile now: surely the rebels saw us as willing bait, despaired of her and kept clear. The sun climbed and my heart withered because her eyes, seeing the wreckage and the world taking root in it, knew the one path out of this. The one way left her beyond lies, the indisputable message she could send of *a Word that I shall tell thee*. Hers was the look I knew from the eye of every bull and goat and dove who'd looked at a priestess come for an offering, the same wordless consent, the knowledge of something more important than one's life. And seeing this, I grew *glad* about Theseus' plan, for whether she'd been told or not, I knew he'd stop her till our new life did. *Get to the ships whatever it costs*: I'd sworn to keep serving if she Stepped Forward but the selfish truth was I had no wish to live longer than she

— We might try again tomorrow, she told our officer, and he smiled as he ordered the ranks about for Cnossos: perhaps in his face Ariadne saw some part of the world that soothed her now, out here in sunshine where there were birds and green things, water, trees. She snaked her arm round my waist and pulled me hip-to-hip with her, and her sun-squinting features gentled: guards broke that up, but we smiled

We'd come back to the causeway along the south bank of the stream, opposite the House: I planned to bolt from here where the footing was best, I was only wearing a kilt

and these warriors had their gear to slow them. A few spears dodged and I might be away with a chance: there was no way to tell her and I was thinking how she'd despair of me, but just awhile. To test the warriors' drowse in the wind's dry heat I stopped and fussed with a boot and they scarcely noticed; but they were just turning to descend the stream-bank when a *whoop-thud* of arrows struck seven of those behind us in the back, the volley from the inland side behind the burnt Guest House. The stricken warriors fell and writhed and others crouched to help them while more charged the arrows' direction with a kind of wakened glee: Daitor's second volley flew as I swung my arm round Ariadne's neck and pulled her down underneath me. She was gaping at the writhing men and shouting *No, No!*—A young woman's voice, then another was calling *Aridela!* while the warriors' laggards yelled at each other to go for archers. By the pause after the third volley these others had whooped away their fear and rushed clattering across the causeway: the officer wanted this prize so badly that he left only one guard explicitly with us. But that one knew what he'd been given and he watched us closely: I saw his face hardening, with effort, as a Companion hit between the shoulderblades writhed near his feet

—Get off me! Stop it! Akatirija! Daitor, stop! *Get off me!*

I did, as the fight moved up the valley: Daitor had trailed us in and seemed to count it a good enough kill and harrying. My odds would never be better, one crouching guard among bodies, trying now to help his friend, turning him on his side and the man's face winced as he gasped with disbelief, hate in his bronze-browed eyes

—Kill them for me, Leos! he said. —*You, this is you, in the back, oh Gods help me*

– I can't, I would but the orders, our guard answered.
– You, with the rib-wound, can you help? Help or I will kill you

– Could be—a way, if you can help, Ariadne said with pain

This Leos' ardent eyes—I knew I couldn't outrun him off an equal mark. He gave me room to work and took my place next to Ariadne where she still knelt. The wounded man's spear between my booted crouch and his back. I feigned closer look. Three ships waiting, with iron, against the Shepherd's three. The only *maybe* we had! She'd said she'd love me whatever I chose, meeting this—*I choose you*, I thought and I didn't want to kill but warriors' voices were not far off, and returning

– Get this Cretan off me, Leos, they make me sick!

The guard stood over me and asked how it was and where he expected me to look up with *I'm sorry* I thrust my hands down round the spear and shot up with it and both-hands-rammed it low straight up into his thorax between spear and shield. His whole face bulged and his mouth fell open as he ran on it, I saw his eyes wild as Ariadne screamed and he doubled over backwards. I let him go with it sticking out of him, he dropped and kicked clutching at the shaft

It was done, and I stood blank with two strange hands, still feeling the impact and plunge through a man's chest

– Oh Deucalion Oh Deucalion

That was my soul—in her wide eyes as she knelt there in the grass in her splayed red gown, in the wail of her last dismay amid the clatter and shouts all around. The man was choking on blood as he curled into his death, and I knew whom I had killed

– Oh Deucalion

Then don't let it be for nothing

—Go with Theseus, I'll be there with ships, please trust me!

I waited for nothing and bolted west up the cracked causeway, zig-zag like a wild goat before the hunter. As soon as full stride stretched me the pain of Theseus' work came back fresh, I hadn't counted on that and I hobbled at first but no arrows, no spears and no men seemed to be coming. I cleared the first rise westward away from Cnosos, the hillsides and road without a warrior to be seen, so great was the wish to be the one who cornered Daitor. We all had our ways of fighting—I turned again to check pursuit and (nobody) I stumbled and fell. Rage got me going again, fear that I had left her alone in their midst but his pain and the daunting run I'd set myself began to pull already against my strength. Hadn't thought to grab a weapon, and what if *Sea Snake's* men weren't there: she might loathe me now, refuse my aims. What if he figured this out and took *ten* ships homeward—And how could I run three hours and match him in battle? For all this my heart laughed crazy with a joy that it *would* be finished between him and me today. Today! All I wanted was a fight half-fair and my heart longed (she was ahead of me now) just to see his hero's face when he sat up in his victory-ship to see Dionysos bearing down on him, The Kid, The Noisy Boy. Timing, timing, we'd catch him before he cleared Dia if I hurried

Yes I killed but You didn't leave me any choice and Goddess I'm sorry but give me this one thing Goddess give it to me I want her and eat my heart every day if You please but this one thing—I offered You my life now give it back, I've tried, we've tried, the people need her and You know what he'll do, Just a chance, a chance

I ran, and saw no one but a few far figures under fruit trees or in barley-fields: in an hour perhaps I was near the ruins of Katsambas and my wind was gone, I had to rest, let alone be careful of warriors out here with second-offerings for Memnon's grave. You couldn't have met a nicer cutthroat. He'd be missed. I was bleeding again from behind now, flies at me and hot wind, sweat salting my eyes, no headband—What'd happened to Hippeus, anyway? Shadows were short beneath the near-noon sun,
Get up, Keep moving

I hadn't been out here since Velkanos and saw that the land looked greener and more normal the farther west you went: less ash had fallen this way and saplings rose up luminous-green among the smashed-down timber, squirrels rattling round the trunks. Yes it was late spring, the sweet time and The Wheel was all there was: there was not going to be any big justice. If they were Death it was up to me to play the other side of the Big Round. Yet I'd killed, and he had saved Phaedra—Oh there was no thinking it out! It was The Powers' paradox not ours, all we had was a mortal body's urge to live in happiness. Achaians felt it too but, attracted to us, this was how they handled it. Right, brother Glaucus? We hadn't laid *their* land waste, raped *their* women

We'd never had time to clear a road this far and I was crashing on through sapling-branches and briars, my low-booted calves raked by thorny burnet-bush, angling northwestward and keeping away from open ground along the edge of the swath of the waves. I'd grown used to the sight of a wall of tangled wrack but as I came round a hillside-crease in its length I suddenly saw the white of scattered bones, and skulls too: no wrecked ship's hull or gear about: this was what remained of the blood-field.

Men I'd helped to kill. For trade-goods, international status, to put fear in Theseus. Well (I had to rest again), it was over: guilt was at me but I drove it off by tearing the scab along my left arm and shouting that *This our end was not justice, not justice, it was only that Utterly Everything was allowed*—So I ran the harder, for her, stumbled and bled and cursed and ran and rested, tearing over timber and nearing the shore as the sun passed its peak. Waves of sweat tortured my eyes as I pushed through the last brake of brush and debris and then below lay the white crescent of the new harbor, all wrack and piled sand and hull-debris just as Mestor'd said, yellow cliffs busy with gulls at the far north end. And nobody: no ships

They'd said three days! It couldn't be! Call me Theseus or Echion, I charged crashing down-slope to the beach and believed that if I believed hard enough and yelled I could make them be here. And then I was on my knees with two handfuls of sand before the glowing-blue waste of waves, and its idiotic mutter. Gulls swooped by overhead, eager for the meal when I'd washed up after walking into the sea. She wants us to live, eh? One last astonishment for this day: I now thought of the people back home and I didn't care. Do it. She was gone, there was no hope, and I had killed

—Sorry sir but we had to be sure it was you, not you as bait!

It was Pemptus jogging down from the head of the beach behind me! And a dead-silent (*ghost-silent*) company of fully-armed marines not far behind him: another man now ran off round the north curve of cliffs and I got up off my knees, and asked where the ships were

—Safe sir, Pemptus answered, looking round as if in doubt of me or still holding to their days of caution.

—Where is the Queen, sir? How did you get away?

—Later, please, let it be enough that I killed a man to do it. Listen, the Shepherd is sailing home right now, three ships, and he's taking her hostage through the islands. I know he's got no good end in mind, and *that's why I'm here*, I said raising my voice to the rest of them now at Pemptus' sides. —We're *not going to let him* hurt the Queen and we can save her if we hurry

—But—Deucalion Minotauros, Pemptus said (and I was glad to see him rest objections on my old title), —you see, we have got some of our own families out here and there, since we spoke sir. And—It's not really a fight we're after anymore, we

—I can't help it! We all had plans didn't we! I said and next I knew I'd gone up to him and he suffered me to draw the iron sword from his sheath, leaving him his spear which, like most of the company, was taller than myself. I had to have looked a sweaty wretched sight but it didn't matter, all I saw was their hesitation and the sun's beginning-gold of afternoon in their seaward eyes

—Have you seen what they've done to us? Do you know what they'll do to her now? She's not the only Cre-tan on his victory-ship. Look at my rib, our House fought for you when all it did was fetch your mothers' favorite imports! I swear to Goddess, if I have to swim after him I will and you can hide here and take the shame! What are you, women? We'll come back for your kin

I was raving, the first to believe my own words and so mad to get moving that I saw only their still stances on the sand. And they just stared! Faces I'd not seen for so long, faces shocked at impiety: professionals, not pirates, they did not need harangue before battle. All I knew was, day was going and she with it, and they might not risk

themselves for—a boy, if they saw me as one. I inhaled to start curses, yes, *turning on the others once again in my House's favor* but one of the men nudged Pemptus and *Sir?* he said. *Could you look there please?*

Three Cretan warships in perfect condition rounding the south spur of the bay, decked in cut boughs for camouflage here and there in the gunwales and tied atop the masts to look like trees—and *Sea Snake* led them with a huge green serpent rearing on the sail, the other two showing a pair of Bull's horns and a tandem of sea-blue dolphins, beautiful, beautiful! And when I saw their mid-ships full of white helmets and spears my heart was wild, like seeing the House itself alive again in power and wrath.

—Our people would want us to try sir, Pemptus said.

—But sir, if it starts to go bad, we're coming back here for them and I'm sorry

—Yes, yes, I apologize too, it's just—She is our family now

It was one living chance and my blood ran with how every detail of the world moved so slowly, the careful sidling in-shore of the ships to pick us up, the debarking of children and matrons and old fellows saved from the camps of slaves. Waiting for the crews to reef sails just so was unbearable and I plunged in with the sword and paddled out to *Sea Snake*, pulled myself on deck and saw two or three marines I knew: they respected loyalty even where it hurt and to try to control myself I stood looking toward open sea, for sails, or to measure the change in the light. Might well be long-gone

—What in thunder is taking you so long! I shouted at the clumsy thumps of men climbing and hauling others aboard, tossing foodstuff-bags and a water-cask to the

people to stay behind out here—The blackhaired oarsmen stared up from their twenty benches each side with their oarhandles poised but still, helmeted marines amidships and deck-men fussing with brail-lines, poling the ship from the stony shallows

—If we hit a rock you'll find it takes even longer, *sir*, said *Sea Snake's* captain from the curve of the afterdeck where he stood in classic methodical control. —Alright now, bring Snake down again and twice-lively on the stroke! In the Queen's name! he shouted throwing signals to the other two ships behind and now we were turning, thrusting out seaward and I was glad for the need to hold on

Stroke and lunge, stroke, come on, and now I prayed for all the south wind we could get because it'd take us where we—where I wanted to go. Yet as we cleared the harbor I knew The Breath would also push Theseus ahead: the one hope was to pit Cretan oarsmen against (perhaps) his triumphant leisure, he'd be riding low too with spoil, gold and cattle and women, his youths. So I started striding, or masterfully mincing, up and down the bridge-planks shouting, and when I tried clapping to redouble the pace I only fouled it and, professionals that these were, the men both sides started catching crabs and we lost the stroke. Curse it! Yet the captain quite civilly stopped everybody (ignoring me), gave the rowing-master the best he thought they could manage and we lunged on again: it was their best, I knew, but I still kept shouting things (*Cut north of east, we'll lay for them on Dia's seaward side*) and I could not care for the looks now. I always had tended toward the monstrous without her, she'd fix it, heal me and I'd make it up to them. They broke sweat in the hot wind and sun even with the sail's help, the fo-

liage tied to us rattled in the wind: I went forward and raked the horizon for sails. *Be there, my brother, and Snake will show you the iron in His blood*

Dia Isle's humped western end hove into sight through white glare and a gossamer sea-haze. Through these last leagues I'd been ladling water onto the oarsmen like a crazed procession-page damping down dust. Now I asked if they had somebody with the long sight and a young man with features something like a turtle's came to the prow with me, sniffed and squinted

— Well?

— Well, there's Dia sir, he said and then he turned round to the captain and said we'd better cut more north of east or we'd be spotted from Amnisos shore, and there were dozens of enemy ships in port. The captain gave orders and signals behind us accordingly. But nothing, nothing: the Isle and its few wave-raped trees swelled out of the ocean, the empty sea. They hadn't put out yet. Or we'd missed them. Or we'd have to sail to Callista and lie there for them: I was going to be sick, stuck the sword into the deck and clawed the prow's wood and the pilot looked indignantly down at the wound in his planks. Now what! To miss them, get spotted from shore and finish my life in a fight between nothing but men?

A few dozen more strokes (the men were suffering) and we'd close with the western end of the Isle, the dreaming Goddess. I was about to go down-bridge to ask the captain what to do when they pilot yelled *There they are* and I ran back, saw three squarish specks, black sails, three, it had to be him: they were already half an hour's pull past Dia's far eastern end and out into northern sea

— Think they see us sir! the pilot called to the captain.

— They were spooning and only just dipped the oars!

— You can see that? I said. — Can we catch them, man?

— Three warships riding low, sir!

— I am talking to you!

— Yes but it'll take time, will you let us handle it? he snapped

Running for it, master of Pharaoh's four quarters hiding in her skirts from islanders. Son of the mouse-god with a snake on his tail. But I realized his heirloom would be at her throat if we caught up: we'd find a way, and now I heard the sound which once had sickened me, marines unsheathing swords, passing the whetstone and buckling chinstraps, daggers out for their calming-game. I'd killed today, could still feel the plunge of the spear through leather and organs—and I had to kill more, even if those salvaged people we'd left behind lost these their men. To save her was the only way to hold the rest together and help them! But I knew, something ancient was dead inside, and yet could die still more, the very thing they killed every day. She'd make it right. We lost the wind in the lee of the Isle to starboard now, and the captain wanted his sails brailed up so we might give swifter chase till we had it again. We paused forever, and then the pilot pointed up toward Dia's black seaward cliffs

— Who's that! Up there sir, it's a woman waving at us, see? Don't you see? She's got on a red and white kilt, there, on the cliff, she's calling us I swear, right *there!* he pointed again almost jamming our heads together so I could follow

It was Diamat atop the western end's highest point, and her arms were rising and falling, then pulling air toward herself: *Come*

— *Now* what, the pilot said

—I don't know! Her they might've dumped to throw us off! Or if the Queen were with her, why wouldn't she be

No: *No*

And the ship began to lunge past her with all the pace I'd asked for: there was no place to beach, only savage black barnacled cliffs this side that'd saved Kudru and me from that wave, and to sail round to the cove and then run the length of the Isle to The Grove would take—too long, for what I knew and would not know. *Diamat*, I said, *Give us a sign, you old*—But there was only her first one over and over. She'd not call us in unless Ariadne were safe with her. Clearly they'd understood my plan and as always she was calling us back from war and vengeance. She'd got free of the hero or he'd dumped her too once he thought he'd divested her of power—and *that* meant all the worse! Blind choice ripped me every way, as those ships receded

I shouted *Let them go and meet me at The Grove*, dove and came up swimming: a half-mile of water and then those cliffs no man could climb. It was madness and the captain's voice was behind me yelling something I ignored as thoroughly as those cliffs, I'd make a way with my teeth. And the sea ran stronger than expected out here, my boots were heavy but I couldn't waste the strength treading water to be rid of them, the ship's ride had been a sort of rest and the cold bath helped. The dreaming Goddess! Ugly this side as the slimed green rip-your-flesh-off crags and yet in The Grove was the Form I lived for—*Don't do it Ariadne*, I remembered the Shepherd that day on the court with his downcutting hand, *It is over!* he'd said, *We'll find ways without that, Ariadne, Wait*

But my strength was going, there was still Mince's pain, no sleep or food today, I'd run miles and the tide

against me. To find my body inadequate to my will, or my will not more than my fate—all I had was a savage rebellious refusal now and I kept pushing, round the towering foot of the Isle, watching for a place to climb as I rested on my back, swam again, and a certain freshness still there amazed me to laughter. Was this how our killers could feel so fresh after their business? Something to this refusal, defiance of the land? The sea so blue lapped lightly at Her Feet

Just round the Cretan side I saw a steep rain-gully that promised no more than some hand-holds. *One more thing to harrow for you!* I swam for it and gasping waded in, over rocks black with spiny sea-urchins, good thing I'd kept the boots on. Confused: then I found the gully again: loose rock in half-slid heaps, dead roots sure to pull free if you tried them. What'd looked good from the water was almost pure-vertical but I swallowed the curses and pressed my palms to the rock in her name, and started to scramble. If I fell I fell but I didn't believe I would, I talked my way up, excuse me, thank you, hand me that please, where now, steady. The gully narrowed as it climbed, don't get greedy, step, hold, look, marry me: it was like caressing my way up, a snake's life and the rock smelled warm like Labyrinth limestone in the sun. Near the top a stripped broken cypress hung over like a hag's hand: the first branch I grabbed broke, and then I was over the edge. I stood and saw to my left the Shepherd's black sails sinking away, to the other side Crete, and Juktas floating above it, safe within His dream. She *had* to be here, even if everything was allowed

The utter change of the Isle, though, made it a place of no good omen. The roll of yellow-grassy hills looked draped in dark naked sheets of mud, rock stripped of soil

stuck out here and there, wreckage of oak and cypress was strewn all over except in the lees of hills, where a few still held their roots. But everything, the clumped grass and trees and runnels of mud pointed back toward Crete: I realized I had my wind and started slanting south down the lee of the hills, trotted, then ran again and I prayed. A few lonesome frigate-birds, no kri-kri, no Diamat, she'd seen me dive and had gone down (there, The Grove still standing!) to fetch her for me, of course. Pools of salt water caught the light like unreadable eyes as I ran, shouted her name: any moment she'd step out into the sunshine, curse what I'd done and offer me a way to make it up. *One's life can be an Offering too*, she'd said that herself

Diamat had heard my calls and ducked out from under the tallest willow's rags of foliage. Her face was deathly but that was just the earth she'd smeared on it, some rite they were at together. As I charged down she raised her palms to say she wanted me quiet, and grave; and my legs began to die, because I knew; and I reached her, and looked up through the leafage and saw the crimson shape

—*Get out of the way!* I yelled because there might be time but Diamat didn't move and I ran into her, *over* her—The last thing I'd wanted to bring here was shame, but—It was over and I charged in, panting. Never had it taken such effort to lift my eyes and I saw a few of the multicolored corn dollies broken on the grassless ground: I fought off a half-paralysis and without a look directly up I tore at the tree for hand-holds, and climbed, there might be time

She was hanging, still, by her neck almost three times my height above me, the soles of her bare feet dangling under the crimson gown. A long remnant of ship's rope they must've found was knotted behind her left ear and

her hair was up off her neck and I was dying and I looked to see where it was tied off, high up above the limb she must've jumped from and I couldn't stand it, profanation or no there might be a chance, the offer was potent and I climbed higher, madly, *Please don't be*

But when I got up higher I still saw no sign, no twitching foot, no flutter of the hands at her sides, I saw that her neck was broken and there was no doubt of it. She was facing away from me and I could see her slender underjaw with the tilt of her head, the delicate wisps of her bound-up hair behind the brutal knot. The wisps—and the blood plunged and drained from my face, my breath died; and my hands, two stranger's hands, let go The Tree, but I did not fall. Willow. Helice. Healing-tree. The south wind rattled the leaves

I'd thought that with all I'd seen and done—Truly now, I died with her as I looked and looked and knew it was irredeemably too late, and the words inscribed themselves upon forever. No matter how I lived now, nothing could wipe them from my hands. And this one afternoon uncoiled its hours before me like so many lifetimes, in a desert I had made. I'd held her back when the attack had come, and surely that had hurried her this day, to decide

Ageing years those moments of looking, of silence but for the sea's sounds, I felt my body slither down the trunkwork, impotent, old. I sank to my knees in the mud beneath her, and began to rock, and a hum, a low moaning came out of me as a kind of knife worked through my chest. I leant forward and put my brow to Earth, then scraped up mud and rubbed it all over my face, and rocked, alone

And then Diamat's feet stood next to me, in the slip-

pers, and new gouges of pain twisted through—How could she do this! And knowing how little it had had to do with *me* I looked up into Diamat's face. Diamat. About the last person I'd expected to be left with: she must've seen I might well kill her if she scolded me, the killing I'd done was in my face and now everybody, Ariadne, Glaucus, all the best parts of me were gone, no one to fix it

She stared down, and her eyes were full of what'd happened, and then she turned to step outside The Tree. There'd be no words in here. I got up and followed. She was sitting on the ground now and the Isle around us looked the perfect place for our lost souls

—He dumped us overboard passing Dia's feet, she said with downcast eyes. —After you—left her, you see, and she told me what you did, Deucalion—well. You'll find that man Porthaon in charge now, that was his last bit of business before we left Cnossos. Phaedra wears her crown. They're sure you'll make a King to keep order now

—I am not going back, I said and I believed it, I did not care, I kept looking at the slippers under her skirt and I did not care

—As you wish, Diamat said out of a world of her own, oblivious to the mud she sat in in those hallowed clothes. The last of mighty Crete, a Mince and an old priestess sitting in the mud

—He threw us overboard because she'd been fighting and cursing him all the way to port. She was—heartbroken too at what you did. That was one of the last things she could bear, to lose you or feel she'd lost you in that way

—And what was this, my punishment then? I roared,

beating my skull. —Did she expect me to do nothing? Watch the sea's colors? Do not say this was Necessary!

—And he was like drunk, Diamat went on without lifting her eyes or change of tone. —So full of himself and his Companions there on the ship. And that priest was making them laugh with his signs to undo every word she laid on him for taking her away. People will starve, you know, if it's a loveless season in the fields. So he grabbed her and—I don't think he wanted that priest to outdo him—so by the time we were nearing Dia he grabbed her and said *There, there's a realm fit for you then, I'll deal with it later, I don't care* and he dumped her overboard. The other men threw me in telling her not to forget her handmaid. I know how you feel, Deucalion. I wanted to go to sleep, drown. She wouldn't let me. She pulled me in to the beach. I knew what she was going to do then. I asked her not to. But she said what else was there. There was no other way she could speak to people without having it twisted. Or going mad herself, seeing people starve in more than one way. There has to be The Offering. From somebody. Without the love

—Ohhhhh! I cried aloud, my brain boiling in our men's shame, my own the worst for all I'd done to push her off that limb. I could not bear it, and *Find me another rope*, I said

But when Diamat heard, and lifted her eyes to me—I'd have given anything not to have seen that look, not to know what was true in it: the braver thing. My promise that if she—No. But I had only to see myself whining at the new harbor hours before to know that I wanted still to be worthy of her, worthy of what she'd left between the people and the House; my House, across the harbor

—But I know I'll shame her anyway! She knew we'd all

fail! I'll start looking for revenge, I *hate* them, do you understand? I want to *kill them all*

And still Diamat looked up at me, her eyes no less potent for the wretchedness: how could it be but something of Ariadne'd passed to her, her eyes said *Well, it's up to you*

And then the monstrous thing broke and I began to weep, sob, my heart cracked, split and sundered, like a seed, yes, like a seed, and hateful thing of spite that it was, a never-heal, a bleeding, it had Life inside it, glory and a flame equal to our father's. The God she'd seen in me in its first true bloom: a radiant gift and an acid curse, a flower, a blood-red moon at full, Phoenissa

— Sweet Wine, I'm going to tell you something. Maybe you know, and don't want to know. But the truth is, she never had any power that wasn't your own. If you let her awaken it in you, you can heal, and you need not fail. You can go on, and help the people

— And she didn't even say to tell me she loved me? I demanded through my sobs

— Go back in there and see what's in front of your eyes, boy! Don't you think she just gave you the best thing she ever could? The world within her? You have a thousand thousand children with her now, don't be a weakling and make me sicker than I am!

And I wavered where I stood, staggered with the weight of the thing in plain sight. Yes, I had killed, to—possess her, I had missed the point absolutely, that was what it'd been for, to make her mine and she'd been no one's but her own. So it had always been, oh my sparrow, my slippery fish, my light out of the sea, vanished before I could name

— And I'll tell you something else

— Oh please have mercy

— Why, so you can go back and help them kill our souls? Why do you think she sent me to call you from the cliffs if I could? The truth is, it was your own dream, Deucalion, all of this

— What are you talking about! I said still writhing in place; and within I felt something like a shadow, vague but stirring something deep past words, the vague cold shadow of a reptile across my soul

— About disbanding the fleet! Try remembering that day—she told us about it herself one night at your mother's villa. Eh? That day, if you dare remember, that you stabbed a man? She told us you said to her, *They have to fear us! There's nothing else!* you said. Eh? It was you, your own words put that wondering in her. *You* opened that door on all the mountains had taught the girl! She had to know if there *is* anything else, all she did was try to meet what came through the door you opened. *There's* her love for you. If you can accept it

— No, no, no, no, no! I can't! She never once, never once told me the truth! Bitch! Idiot! Dying to make corn sprout! You can't do this to me!

Diamat stood up, and there was so terrible a power about her in this simple act that I raised my arms as if against a blow. And a hundred times over, only now in plain sight, I saw the resentment and the forgiveness on Ariadne's face, and Diamat's rising was like Goddess yet alive and rising from Earth before me, too much for my eyes. I was not big enough, I could not become this world, not let in the truth I'd claimed to want

— Don't be a coward! she said. — Don't you see how she needs us now? Don't you know the lies they'll tell to get rid of what she's done? She gives The Mother's great-

est gift to the people and you'll let them sneak-thief it? Not her death, not the crops, but the memory of a love that made the world, to stand against these men! *We* have to tell it, *we* have to speak back like Cleite said! Listen to me, I already hear them saying their own Skyfather was born up in our caves

— But that's absurd!

— Of course it is, and Cleite saw too, the bigger the lie the better! So people can forget and surrender the more of themselves, just like you're doing now. We've got to live for her! After all this there *can't* be anything else but us. We have to make it up, Deucalion, that's Goddess, not letting it be a waste! I beg you! The children! Diamat cried with her own anger breaking and now she was wringing her hands, no one to hold her, weeping

And a sharp hot gust rattled the fountain of willow standing over us, and I was near choking on my bile and grief and refusal, my dream, no, not this I'd desired, but at the sound of the leaves I shivered, my hackles went up

And—Could I do it, bear—this marriage, wholly new, yet old as Juktas, us the link between all that was mortal and all that lived beyond us, where she'd gone: a dream: so old; yet once again She had Stepped Forward, and I, dying with her, it seemed I'd been sacrificed too, and yet I lived. And as my body shivered I knew the open seed of things in my heart was—a death, hers and mine, and yet we were being reborn somehow together, right now as I stood. It made no sense; but to feel it was to win

It's up to you

I covered my face with my hands, and we wept, embraced, wept more, how long I do not know. Except that when I looked to the sea again, the light of day was passing its last tinges over the world, that twilight in which

things glowed, a shining not of sun or moon and it did not matter whence it came. I loved her savagely: I could not lose now; and as I accepted, the light deepened out of the world. Itself like a sea out of which no one could ever swim. There was only forgetting, wasting The Daughter's gifts before wasting the world's. And one other choice

— We must have rites, I said

— Yes.

But we stood at a loss (we had nothing with us) until Diamat pointed east up the hills: *Sea Snake's* company had beached and were approaching, a scatter of white helmets working their way down to us over the wrack. Evening soon, blue, and the first stars.

They also wept, the captains, the turtlefaced pilot, young Pemptus. And then, What now sir. I couldn't ask them to go back to Amnisos, it would start the fight anew. I asked for one ship of volunteers, and seven of ten stepped forward. Diamat would stay here, keep the night's vigil till I could see what was possible, make arrangements: Ariadne would lie with our mother and I'd be back, if we lived, to bear her home.

Pemptus and I rowed in with oarsmen only, with sail furled so as not to frighten the harbor guard. The breeze had cooled, and the water was calm, and there was no town except for what still burned, smokes rising against the darkening mountains. What I felt now: the beauty of the world still there; and not Indifference above or behind or below, but a perfect freedom.

We came off the sea like ghosts. A double rank of fifty of the squanderers waited us with spears and shields, archers behind them on the beach. Their officer recognized me and was stilled, for a moment, with the news: I said I was going inland to see to arrangements, like it or

not. They guarded us along the trail through the swath, to see that nothing disturbed Mestor's underlings finishing day's work at the timber; and while the time for the news would come, right now they needn't have worried, for many were practically falling asleep.

I accepted our throne at Cnossos, and made do, a man of fewer words as I grew older. *Lazy and fine* they called me; yet I found a use, in private, for the mundane ciphers of the Shepherd's men, as you see. They aren't much in themselves, for the heart prefers other languages, and with them to sing of forever. For now, though, we must, this speaking-back: otherwise, his story wins.

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