

ASTERION: The Minotaur Memoirs

“Man is condemned to freedom, a freedom from all authority, which he may seek to evade, distort, and deny but which he will have to face if he is to become a moral being. The meaning of man’s life is not established before his existence. Once the terrible freedom is acknowledged, man has to make this meaning himself, has to commit himself to a role in this world, has to commit to his freedom.”

-Jean-Paul Sartre

Chapter One: The Labyrinth

On a brisk night such as this, when the sky is purple, and there is no wind, I can still hear The Voice. The singing, sad and soft, nearly erased by the water pounding eternally nearby, but it drifts near and over my wall, reminding me of my ancient torment. Along with sun and storm, it is all I have, and so long ago, all I had, besides the prison labyrinth.

When I woke on the cold blonde marble floor of the prison I was a week old, perhaps less. Next to my basket, a bowl of water and a plate laden with cold meats. Upon my tiny wrist, a bracelet bearing the mark of my ancestry, a golden bull, and in my ears, the sound of nothingness. I remember that I did not cry, nor toss myself out of the basket, I simply laid staring up at the red yellow sky turning dark then black. Somehow I knew I had been abandoned, but there was peace and courage.

I grew rapidly, as a calf in meadow, and soon I was walking, then running, even jumping with an eternal joy of being alive. Strong, tall, a dancer in the gulf. The sun, my bright and shining mother, night my father, moon my friend, and cold hard stone walls my guardian. I played with my own voice attempting to mimic those small beings flying overhead. Sometimes those soaring beauties would land on my tall wall and jump down, delightfully exuberant with red feathers and yellow beaks. I was not impelled to catch them, nor eat them, but I was eternally hungry. The meats of that plate long since gone. I yearned for a gift, something, anything, even a shadow. When the season changed a terrible storm pelted me all through the night, with nowhere for me to cower, I woke in the morning to an offering. Bright sweet berries

lay strewn about my marble floor. It took days, but I collected every single one and treasured them. Eating just a single berry and smiling, then a single berry and laughing, a single berry and dancing. To find every berry I had to, once again, follow the twisted and broken paths to endless dead ends and mighty towering stone walls, with no entry or exit, no crack, nor scar in the barrier showing. Smooth high perfectly balanced fortress, and a sky top. The walls so thick as to be penetrated only by weathered sounds, such as wind, and rain. Oh blessed blessed wind, which brought with it the soothing sound of trees whispering and ocean waters upon strange grounds invisible to me.

I leapt. Leaping lifting loving movements turning twisting trying flying in and out of the paths of my prison home. What more did I know but this confinement? And yet in this brief youth there was a feeling of joy in being alive. Wild. Unbound. That night I dreamt. I dreamt of a great body of water upon which stood a grand white and golden animal, two horns jutting forth from his head, nostrils wide and breathing hard, his leg stamping the waves beneath him, and his eyes staring directly into mine. At sunrise when I awoke I cried for this feeling of emptiness and longing, discovering the very same horns growing painfully from my head. Their growth angry, as if to burst forth suddenly and escape my skull. The pain made me scream, more like roar, out loud and despairingly, like never before.

It was then, in this new pain, when the wind picked up and I heard The Voice. A song high in melody, soothing, gentle, kind. With it, a florid aroma delighted my senses. I swam inside its' current and ran swiftly after it fading from my presence. That Voice, so swift, so fleeting, a haunting, both beautiful and awful for I could not touch the vocalist. But worse, this ambiance dangerous for it arrived in concession with another offering.

As the sun set hurriedly and began to go dark over my walls I heard a creaking horrible sound of metal and stone scraping against my prison floor. Before I could find the source a rush of air and sound blew me back and onto the ground. I felt then the pounding of many feet and the beginning of a never ending cry. The crying pitch of seven maidens and seven boys sent to their death in my prison. As they rounded the corner to find me standing in wonder agog at their beauty they began to flail at the walls. I leapt back away from them. I was terrified and

electrified. I had never seen anyone like myself and so found them to be celestial. Dressed in virgin white fabrics, wrapped with silver ribbons, skin unblemished, and eyes the color of the sky, I reached for them. And they mangled themselves tearing at their flesh, making bloody the walls with their scraping fingers and clawing. As they cried I cried. As they fell I fell. As they died I died.

Death came immediately for some for they committed heinous murder suicide against one another. Strangling or beating each other to death in fear of what they thought to be their coming fate. The few that survived that first night limped themselves to a cold corner to tremble and whimper as I studied them. They screamed when I came near which made me cover my ears with my hands and hate them. So I found the dead. Their bodies in a chaos near the labyrinth center where they lost themselves that night. Under moonlight I bent slowly to a beautiful maiden. Her face was so smooth and still. Her hands very tiny and still warm. Her lips bright red from the blood. I tried to hold her. I rocked her. I held her tightly trying to see if she would open her sky eyes to me. I fell asleep amongst them, as if I could gather some of their life around me, feel spirit in their stillness, my head upon her lifeless belly.

Days and days passed, and as I tried to communicate with the three living others, they became weaker and weaker, and more and more forlorn. All I could do was sit in a corner opposite them and stare. If I came any closer the screaming began. I could not take the screaming. All of them hugging each other tightly, making sounds I could not understand, and motions to the sky in a plead. Two more died. Finally, only one girl remained. She came walking towards me very slowly, but determined. She stopped and I sat very very still. She was so alive. So beautiful. Her white feet sticking out from under the garment. So unlike mine. Her wheat colored hair in disarray. Blood on her face. She motioned towards her mouth. She kept dipping her fingers into the air in front of her, then to her mouth. I shook my head with instinct, no. No, because I did not have the berries any longer. I had eaten them many days before. Why, why hadn't I saved the berries? Perhaps I could have given them to her. Perhaps they would have lived. It was my fault. I ate the sweet fruit of life for myself in greed and took theirs so easily away just days later. She motioned no more and as I stepped near her she slit her throat with a shard of

stone she had hidden in her hand. Her falling dead body upon marble earth a sound of impact I would never forget.

Oh, maiden. Brutal. Savage. Why? Her blood ran fast to my feet, staining the stone with its redness. I mourned, but for what I did not know. For her or for myself?

I learned nothing from their deaths except to leave them where they lay in the South Western corner, a pile of suicide and murder. Bodies wasted, stinking, fetid, and covered in death bugs.

I left them for many days. I could not approach their senseless lifelessness. I simply hovered in a surreal mourning in a small labyrinth pathway most dark and silent. Strange that there was no wind or weather, no birds or berries, no dreams or shadows, just my hands and feet to stare at, into a blank. Then the smell began to override my senses. Laying them gently one next to the other, very close, as if in embrace, I made them an eternal rest in the center of the labyrinth, farthest away from my sacred and favorite outer walls. And said goodbye to their presence.

I fell into a slumber so deep that time was nonexistent and exhaustion my friend.

When I next woke surely months or even years had passed for their bodies were bleached bones scattered amongst tattered fabrics and ribbons.

I had healed the sorrow, but a new emotion much stronger crept into my heart. Hate. Who had done this to me? Why?

Lost. My emotions were flooded and I yearned to escape. I pounded on the walls with my bare fists clawing at the cracks, and in my fit, seeking to break the walls with sheer will, I punched repeatedly with my head upon a weak stone. Beating it until I fell unconscious. It was only in this state of darkness, I could escape my confinement and nightmarish vision. There I stayed wishing to die, becoming stone, as my surroundings. Then the rains began. I could not hide from this season. Month after month of rain. Winds unlike any before whined and roared through the caverns of my prison. Saying what I could not with their vigor.

When the season finally broke, a golden light warmed me and led me to tears. That's when I heard The Voice. Again, this resonance of echo and sweet timbre. Singing

so soft, a caress, made me filled with joy and fear. I held on to that voice. Voice of voices. Someone, something divine, was singing to me. Beautiful lovely. I was entranced with calm. It washed over me, soothing all questions and grief. Giving me pause and holding my breath in happiness. A visitation. It was a present only one who has been lost can understand. It is untouchable but so very valid. A voice which gave me pleasure because it was the most exquisite sound I had ever heard. An excruciating delight.

It went on and on. And on and on I listened. I imagined it was a massive bird with many colors, with silver wings and eyes a magnificent azure like the sky after a storm. Along with The Voice there began a rise in the violent waters nearby. Water that sounded vast and in upheaval, attempting to destroy its captivity. In my prison I could not even begin to envision its wonder but its volume at this moment was momentous, nearly drowning out my precious Voice. I was quaking with awe and wonder at these two sudden illuminations.

Why then did They, the Unknowns of the outside choose this moment so achingly rapturous to let upon me another course?

Stone door creaking open so slowly I thought I could reach it before closing. No! Not again! I ran, slipping on my own sweat, flaying and crashing into labyrinth walls, heading towards the sound that was so near, but around too many corners. Around and around one must go, knowing over one wall is another, longer, more fortified than the previous. I felt it clatter closed and knew what had been left for me.

Descending upon them, I was angry, more so in a rage. Who to blame, but the very victims of this terrible game. I was breathing hard, my eyes felt very dark and cruel, my whole being so full of threat, I saw only red. I did not fight the beastly urge to run towards the sacrificed youths awaiting their deaths before me. I rushed upon them steering half into a corner. I paused only to gather my breath. Exploding, they were no match for my instincts as I rammed and stabbed soft flesh without regard or even whole sight in choice. I heard nothing. No screams or prayers, just a memory melody of song and waves in my ear, as I gouged and gored, making their virgin gowns black. Behind me the others amassed and attempted to ride me down, beating and pummeling me. STOP! STOP! I cried to myself. Stop this killing! But they kept thrashing me and

I kept gouging . With each blow I gathered strength in hate. I plowed through them, arms piked on my horns, bellies open to gushing, wounds of rivers in every one. Until, in a moment, winded, I paused. The blood blinded my eyes as it ran down to my cheeks, and I tasted the sweetest flavor. It touched the basest part of me. The aroma so warm and potent that my yearnings, my deep and unbelievable hunger, began to be satiated. The monster inside of me embraced it. My human nature turned away, eyes tight, shameful. I knew myself to be beast. The horrible reality of this notion is striking, for it cannot be ignored, and its' guilt makes for a valid stew of hate. Resist? As if to resist sight or joy. And then I saw my face reflected in the blood sea at my feet. Shock. Dismay revulsion disgust dreadfulness terror.

I was no beast at all, but man, made of fair flesh, and curls on brute shoulders, eyes dark and wide. Only the black horns betrayed me.

I dropped the body in my arms.

There was finally silence. The screaming had stopped. The blood dry, and I was still. In the distance I could hear the violent lap of waves crashing against shore and cliff. The wind was brisk and clear. The constellations were ablaze in the black purpleness above me.

I contemplated. Shall I try yet again to climb the sheer white walls that rose as my prison stones? My claw marks still appeared, ten gauges, in their heights. I tried to build a ladder with the virgin bones, but it would not hold. I opened my mouth and roared, begging my soul to exit the gape. A thousand times I tried to kill myself, and a thousand times my blood ran black, wounds healing within days. No matter my eternal hunger, or my indescribable yearning for The Voice, I was alone. So very alone that I did not know language. I did not know god, nor gods, nor creature, nor demon. I had no brother monster to drive my madness away, only the labyrinth to drive it deeper. Corridor after corridor, a dance of brilliant turns. I laughed hysterically at its' perfect design. Who was my keeper, and why? So many questions. Why did the animals who looked so much like me, run from me, ripping out their hair and eyes, until lifeless? Why did they wear fabric decorating their bodies? A fabric very soft to touch, and many colors. Why couldn't I resist eating their flesh and meat, ravenous, after they had killed themselves in terror, or my hate destroyed them? Why did I feel a horrible sickening ache

afterwards? Why were they so beautiful? Where did they come from? Why were there animals that flew in bunches overhead, and make wondrous sounds in the morning? Why did my body burn and hurt after many days under the globe that glowed so brightly, for so long? Why did I hear a beautiful Voice outside my prison, but they not answer my constant calling? I stopped asking why.

Inside of me, inside my heart, there came a weighted dense black structure. It turned and twisted and evolved replacing the labyrinth and became a translucent vision. Separated but clear, I reached out and touched ALL. With focused power I rose above myself and found the void, the knowledge of connection. I felt, I embraced, I responded, and released in heartbeats. Surging breath and darkness laid paved pathways beyond me and back again, circling out and back, out and back again. Always back to ME. I was one universe, a sky, a globe, a pattern, mist. Tear it apart and it becomes more grand. I ripped and ripped and ripped at the skeleton of consciousness. No beginning. No ending. No middle. No wonder. No escape, no prison at all. Corridors? Turns? They disappeared, replaced with darkness so bright I was soon engulfed in its' soothing embrace. Unimaginable bliss lifted my existence so that my body was no longer necessary. My wakeful consciousness no longer empirical. One whole. I reached out and touched the Truth.

There is no one but Me...

I am a desert. In this core I will stay. There is no more questions. No more wonder. Just solitary emptiness. My companion.

Soulless. I drifted in silence.

The Voice was chanting somewhere in the distance. I did not move, just felt the night fall. Stars circling overhead, moon a cusp. Languid. The Voice continued. I closed my eyes and waited.

I hear the stone door yawning open and one strong set of steps approaching. Through one hall after another the steps swing north to south until finding the center, where I reside awaiting my assassin.

I feign sleep. I will not look. I hold my breath as they draw close. I can smell their fear.

“Asterion, πηγάινει σε! Asterion, go to Hades!” He screams.

I open my eyes then and watch in slow motion as the young warrior lifts and stabs a great sword into my chest, through flesh and bone, grinding its metal point on the stone beneath me. As fierce as I thought I was I was no match for this object. So much pain. I grabbed at the blade, cutting open my palms in an attempt to grip it. The boy stood aghast, wordless, at his murder, watching me die. He could take no more and ran from me into the dark corridors. I turned on my side and pulled with all my strength. It came very slowly out of my muscle and finally my flesh, ringing as it clanged to the marble floor. I held the wound, crying, without words. I waited for death, for surely this was my time. I slept.

I was cold. I shivered. Black blood, crusty, constricted around the deep gash. Dawn was turning lighter on the horizon. Before me lay the object, the sword, which brought me to this end. Beside it a golden ball of thread nearly finished with its length. I reached for it. Pain! I grasped the ball, squeezing it in my fist.

I began to crawl, claw, tear at the stone, moving inch by inch out of that bloody hall to find the thread leading away and into another one. All so familiar. All exactly the same as the one before. So many times I thought I had found the door, only to turn upon wall after wall, opposing my path. This time there was no confusion. The golden thread lay revealing the path. Blood in my mouth. Barely able to breathe. Desperate. Frantic. I tore my nails off dragging myself around another corner. Suddenly I felt a gush of humid air so unlike the winds of my corridors. I rushed towards the breeze. Around a final corner and I spied the sight. A massive gaping hole in my prison. The door flush wide, and beyond its' barrier: land. Blue, where the sea meets the sky. And green! A color I had never seen, so luscious. Trees bending softly in the dawn whisper. And what's more, steep ragged cliffs of rock not far away.

There is no more memory of the splendor outside my labyrinth. I saw only a pure destination. A womb of blue to carry me upon its white rapid waves into the unknown. With one last pull I dropped with splendor into deafening riot of ocean, escaping captivity at last.

In a labyrinth one does not lose oneself.

In a labyrinth, one finds oneself.

In a labyrinth, one does not encounter the Minotaur.

In a labyrinth, one encounters oneself.

-anonymous