

## "There is Always a Monster"

PRIEST. A love song from the beginning of the world.

RABBI. A dream.

LAWYER. A memory. Or a look into the future.

PRIEST. Before there were priests.

RABBI. Or rabbis.

LAWYERS. Or lawyers.

PRIEST. Before that, what was there?

LAWYER. Yes...what?

MINOTAUR. There was a young girl leading a man through a maze. She didn't use GPS or Morse code. She didn't use bread crumbs or a complicated system of call and response. She didn't use poetry or an iPod that could hold a very large compilation of her favorite songs. She didn't use her mother's love, because she never had it in the first place, her mother afraid of everything she was capable of producing, or a memory of a moment from childhood when she realized she was a child but wouldn't always be. She didn't use flashlights or triple-A batteries or matzoh balls, her keen sense of smell or her sense of humor. No. Not her. Not Ariadne. She used—

ARIADNE. Yarn.

*Theseus, in spotlight.*

THESEUS. There is always a monster. I mean, think about it.

*He provides some time to think.*

Right? I mean, there is always someone—or something—to destroy. And so we all need missions. For instance, I have a cousin in publishing—her monster was her own inertia. Like, she never moved up the ladder at work because she didn't stay late the way all the other editorial assistants did, go to book parties for awful books written by unpleasant authors, buy her boss a little trinket when she was away on her brief and inexpensive vacations—bus trips to Boston or the Jersey Shore. What I mean is, there are things we can do to help ourselves.

Like me. I'm not inert. I mean, I act. I help others and in helping others, I help myself. Because I don't think life is about sitting still, you know?

# THE MINOTAUR

*A chorus of a Rabbi, Priest, and Lawyer launch into the story. Maybe the Rabbi holds D'Aulaires' Book of Greek Myths. (Note: The chorus's need to tell the story, to do their job, is intense, but they are often in conflict about who should speak and whose version of the story is the right one.)*

RABBI. And so.

PRIEST. And so.

LAWYER. And so.

RABBI. To punish the king and queen, Poseidon caused Pasiphaë to give birth to a *monster*, the Minotaur.

PRIEST. He was half-man, half-bull, and ate nothing but human flesh.

RABBI. Scary, right?

LAWYER. Revolting.

PRIEST. Such a fearful monster could not go free, and the clever Daedalus constructed for him a labyrinth under the palace. It was a maze of passageways and little rooms—

RABBI, PRIEST, and LAWYER. From which nobody could ever hope to find his way out.

LAWYER. And if you think that sounds bad—

PRIEST. It gets worse: King Minos had to wage war with the neighboring islands so he could supply the Minotaur with the prisoners of war for food.

RABBI. Theseus became the hero of all of Athens when he offered to take the place of one of the pitiful victims who was to be sent to Crete.

THESEUS. (*Entering.*) "I shall make an end of the Minotaur and we shall return safely. We sail with black sails, but we shall return with white sails as a signal of my success."

*He exits and Ariadne enters.*

PRIEST. King Minos also had a lovely daughter, Ariadne, as fair a maiden as eyes could see. She could not bear the thought that handsome Theseus should be sacrificed to the ugly Minotaur.

ARIADNE. And we fall in love and live happily ever after.

LAWYER. No! There's no happy ending. This isn't a fable. It's a myth. And myths end badly.

*Ariadne, dejected, exits.*

RABBI. Poor Ariadne. After she helps him, and falls in love with him, Theseus carries her away from Crete only to abandon her on the island of Naxos.

LAWYER. You see? I'm telling you: Life can really be a piece of shit. When I didn't pass the bar for the second time, I—

RABBI. (*Cutting him off.*) Yes. The best thing is never to be born, and if born—

RABBI, PRIEST, and LAWYER. To die quickly.

*Lights up abruptly on the Minotaur.*

MINOTAUR. Am I this fearsome monster, you ask? I don't know. I am and am not the Minotaur, I guess, in the way you are all everything and nothing, light and shadow, boat and mooring, wave and tide—

*The lights dim abruptly on the Minotaur, cutting him off.*

RABBI. Because you think you have options—

PRIEST, RABBI, and LAWYER. And really you don't... Really you're reading from a script.

RABBI. All trapped...like the Minotaur in his maze.

*The lights dim and then rise to reveal Ariadne and the Minotaur playing Connect Four. Ariadne must reach through the bars of the mouth of the labyrinth in order to play.*

ARIADNE. (*Taunting him.*) So, I've been thinking a lot about life. Like, what I want from it. I mean, what do you think I should do with my life? It's just...I have so many options.

*He doesn't respond.*

You're not talking to me again?

*Long beat.*

Will you at least move? We're not playing chess, after all. This is

## Side 2: Connect Four

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*He doesn't respond.*

You're not talking to me again?

*Long beat.*

Will you at least move? We're not playing chess, after all. This is

supposed to be quick.

*He sits very still. Stares at Ariadne.*

What? Do I have something on my face?

*All of a sudden he growls at her ferociously. She jumps.*

Why'd you do that?

MINOTAUR. I don't know.

ARIADNE. You're trying to scare me?

MINOTAUR. Of course not.

ARIADNE. Do you want to talk?

MINOTAUR. About what?

ARIADNE. Anything. Your day?

MINOTAUR. *(With false, exaggerated eagerness.)* Okay, let's talk about my day!

ARIADNE. Really?

MINOTAUR. No.

ARIADNE. Oh.

MINOTAUR. Don't I repulse you? Doesn't the idea that if I were to escape right now I'd have no choice but to eat you, repel you?

I mean, why do you visit me here, under the palace, in this prison into which I was born and from which I will never escape? I mean, look around you—

*She doesn't.*

Do it!

*She reluctantly looks around her.*

It's dark, isn't it? So dark it almost obscures things. But not quite. Not dark enough—

ARIADNE. You think it's so much better where I live?

MINOTAUR. I know it is.

ARIADNE. It's not. It's disgusting. To live a life filled with death. The smell is everywhere... The wailing of the prisoners is everywhere—on my pillow, streaming in my window with the first light of day, lodged beneath my tongue and in my teeth. Sometimes I can't see straight, there's so much death in my way.

MINOTAUR. Poor Ariadne...

ARIADNE. Don't do that.

MINOTAUR. Don't do what?

ARIADNE. You know.

MINOTAUR. Nope. I might eat minds, but I can't read them.

ARIADNE. That's not funny.

MINOTAUR. Connect Four.

ARIADNE. Damn it!

MINOTAUR. I win again. How does that make you feel? That I always win. That you never beat me. That, try as you might, I master you in every task. In every way.

ARIADNE. Don't say that.

*She begins to leave.*

MINOTAUR. (*Quietly.*) Don't leave.

*She looks back at him, with longing, then exits.*

PRIEST. Days, months, years it goes on, much the same.

RABBI. Ariadne is eleven and fourteen and twenty-one. She is everything all at once and so is her brother—the moment of birth *within* the moment when he realized he would die—everything within itself, a memory that contains the future.

PRIEST. The past, the future, the present...

LAWYER, PRIEST, and RABBI. Our story.

RABBI. Takes place on the island of Crete, where once there was a despot, King Minos.

LAWYER. He was of the warring despotic variety, the kind of despot who made those on neighboring islands fear the appearance of sails in the distance. Sails were never a good sign.

RABBI. King Minos had an endless appetite for war. For conquer and the spoils of it all. For coming home red-cheeked and bedecked with the jewels of another land. Boxes of iPhones, Prada handbags, the firstborn daughters of firstborn daughters.

PRIEST. But it wasn't his fault. Not really.

LAWYER. Really, Queen Pasiphaë was to blame.

# Side 3: "They Made Love, Humanly"

ARIADNE. (*Baffled.*) Okay.

*She turns to go.*

So am I still supposed to walk away in a huff?

*She stands, frozen.*

RABBI. Yes—walk away.

LAWYER. That's right—scram.

MINOTAUR. Right. I mean, why are you staying? We can't change anything. Not really. I mean, my story will always be my story. The one that hangs in my heart like laundry that will never dry. It involves our mother and a bull and a large, open field at the tail end of autumn.

*The Rabbi enters dressed as autumn, the Lawyer as a bull, and the Priest concealed entirely in a rolling wooden cow.*

But it starts before that.

*They all exit, grumbling.*

ARIADNE. (*As in "not this again."*) Brother—

MINOTAUR. (*To the audience.*) One day, in the middle of a harsh, cold winter, a watchman was staring out to sea from the high walls of Crete. He saw a swell of snow and ice, a wave bringing winter closer and closer. So he put on his gloves and his winter hat and waited for the storm to begin. It didn't. Instead, right before his eyes, the swell of ice and snow took shape. In moments...

ARIADNE. (*Grudgingly.*) It was a stately white bull trotting across the water, toward land.

MINOTAUR. Yes! And then the bull stood on the beach, gazing up at the city, until King Minos himself came out to see it. He was planning to order it sacrificed, for what better sacrifice could there be than returning to the gods their own gift.

LAWYER. Re-gifting: in favor then, frowned upon now.

RABBI. You're telling me—when my sister found out I gave away that slow cooker, we weren't invited for Chanukah for three years straight—

MINOTAUR. (*Shutting them up.*) But Minos didn't "re-gift." When he saw the bull, he could not look away. The bull—my father—was

so beautiful. And so Minos ordered it taken to the meadows outside of the city, outside of harm's way, outside of the greedy eyes of villagers in search of a feast. But—before the bull was relocated, Pasiphaë, Minos' queen, caught sight of it. Oh yes. She traced the curves of its strong hindquarters, noted the shadow hanging like a bees' nest from a branch between its legs.

ARIADNE. Disgusting.

MINOTAUR. *(To the audience.)* Was it love? you ask.

ARIADNE. No.

MINOTAUR. That's right. Not love. One rarely has to be in love. Yes, it's true—you all have a place within you that can be opened up, jimmied out, pried apart. You can be brought to the brink.

*(To Ariadne.)* Yes you. Even you. So yes. One late afternoon in autumn, in a wooden box designed for her by Daedalus to look like a cow—

*The chorus returns and enacts the scene while the Minotaur describes it.*

The Queen, our mother, seduced my father.

And then they made love, humanly.

It was the night that I was conceived.

ARIADNE. And the night my chance at happiness ended, before I was even born.

MINOTAUR. Happiness is overrated. It's what you *do* that's important. How you'll be remembered.

ARIADNE. You of all people would not want that to be the case.

MINOTAUR. Well, what do you plan on doing that'll be so virtuous?

ARIADNE. You want to know?

MINOTAUR. Not really.

ARIADNE. I think I just want to be good at whatever I choose to do. Or to choose what I do based on what I am good at—and I don't mind what it is—weaving or tech support or SAT tutoring or falling in love.

MINOTAUR. Falling in love isn't something you can be good at. It's not a skill.

ARIADNE. It is. And I happen to be very good at it. For instance,

## Side 6: "Are you supposed to just ask that?"

ARIADNE. I don't think I would fall in love with a bull, if that's what you're asking.

MINOTAUR. You're no different.

ARIADNE. Yes I am.

MINOTAUR. You're fooling yourself.

ARIADNE. Don't say that!

MINOTAUR. I can say what I want to say! It's the one luxury I am afforded.

ARIADNE. We don't have to do everything we are capable of doing!

MINOTAUR. I do!

ARIADNE. Well, sometimes I think her disgusting mistake has ruined my life!

MINOTAUR. (*Hurt.*) You mean me?

*Beat, and then quietly:*

Well you don't have to worry too much longer. I get thwarted.

RABBI. And then he arrives.

*Lights shift. There is Theseus, in a spotlight.*

PRIEST. He steps off the boat onto Cretan soil and stares around him: up at the sky, down at the ground, and then at the city looming on the hill, as though, just by looking at something, he can understand it.

LAWYER. And then he looks at—

ARIADNE. Me.

And I fall in love with him, just like that, realizing what I felt before was a mere crush, a girl's fancy... It is the way I have been falling in love with him at this point in every telling of this story.

*Theseus' hands are held behind him by a member of the chorus; he is being walked to his prison. He tries to get around Ariadne, but she stands in his way, staring intensely at him.*

THESEUS. Excuse me—

ARIADNE. Oh no—don't say anything. Please.

THESEUS. Why not?

ARIADNE. It might affect the way I feel about you. It might change my mind.

THESEUS. What do you feel about me?

ARIADNE. I can't tell you that.

THESEUS. Why not?

ARIADNE. I think it would destroy a kind of pleasing tension.

THESEUS. I'm here to destroy a monster.

ARIADNE. The Minotaur?

THESEUS. You know him?

ARIADNE. Yes. He's my... I mean, he lives inside my father's kingdom.

THESEUS. You're not Ariadne, are you?

ARIADNE. Yes, I mean no—I mean yes.

THESEUS. Oh wow. Wow. I mean, you're beautiful. I didn't know you'd be beautiful.

ARIADNE. Thank you?

THESEUS. You sent me all those emails, and I didn't know... I mean, it's important, what someone looks like, you know? That doesn't make me shallow.

ARIADNE. No. Of course not.

THESEUS. Your emails were...intense.

ARIADNE. I know. Maybe I shouldn't have sent them? The internet is so dangerous. Its call is like a siren song. You can get lost in it.

THESEUS. You used emoticons. A lot of them. Smiling faces, frowning faces, faces reflecting a kind of bizarre surprise, as though a joke was told somewhere far away and the punch line had just begun to make sense. Sometimes I received only emotion from you, emotion unattached to meaning. Nameless emotion poured from your computer, your soul, into mine.

ARIADNE. My emotion is in your soul now?

THESEUS. Are you in love with me?

ARIADNE. Is one supposed to just ask that?

THESEUS. I don't know. I was curious, so I asked.

ARIADNE. (*Turning away from him.*) Oh... Well it depends.

THESEUS. On what?

ARIADNE. Are you in love with me?

THESEUS. Why does that have anything to do with *your* feelings?

ARIADNE. There's obviously no sense in falling in love if the other person isn't in love with you. What sense would that make?

THESEUS. But love doesn't make sense.

RABBI. Long nights waiting by the phone.

LAWYER. Text messages sent but not responded to.

PRIEST. The sneaking suspicion that your very worth is on the line.

*A breath.*

ARIADNE. (*To Theseus, a lie.*) Well, then... No. I don't love you. Just so you know.

RABBI. Poor Ariadne.

PRIEST. Poor girl.

RABBI, PRIEST, and LAWYER. She thinks we have a choice.

ARIADNE. (*To the audience, or to herself.*) For some reason, I have a memory of a long train ride even though I've never taken a train for more than twenty minutes in any direction. Crete is not so large. Anyway, a man sits next to me. We strike up a conversation. He's very forward.

LAWYER. Where are you going?

ARIADNE. He asks. He says:

LAWYER. It's a shame that you're getting off so soon because I'm going to be on this train until the end of time.

ARIADNE. And when I leave, even though I'm leaving him, I feel like he's leaving me by staying on the train, by keeping moving. I turn back once and he gives me this sad little smile and I can tell that we both know in that moment that we'll never see each other again.

*Beat.*

So...I mean, do you think you can have a memory of being in love without ever having been in it? And is being in love always about getting left behind?

THESEUS. It's funny, you remind me of someone.

ARIADNE. Who?

THESEUS. I can't place it. It's just a feeling.

## Prometheus

ARIADNE. (To Theseus.) Maybe we keep meeting, over and over again.

THESEUS. (To Ariadne.) What makes you say that?

*The chorus, nervous, launches a distraction tactic, aimed at Ariadne.*

RABBI. When my daughter was six, I started reading her myths. She loved that big book of D'Aulaires' Greek myths. When she didn't understand something, or felt something was unjust, I tried to respond with questions. Is the *world* just? Isn't tyranny sometimes rewarded? Don't bad things happen to good people? She was only six, but I think she appreciated the notion that the world wasn't divided into neat dichotomies.

I like myths that make you think about why things are the way they are.

LAWYER. Growing up, I wanted to be Zeus. You know, the thunderbolts and all that? I dressed up as Zeus for Halloween one year but everyone thought I was just Superman or something. It got too tiring to keep explaining it.

PRIEST. I've always been strictly anti-pagan but there are a few myths I appreciate. For instance, the one about Prometheus. You know the one. He was the Titan who disobeyed the gods and brought fire to man, only to be punished forever. He was tied to a rock and every day a vulture would eat out his liver.

I like this myth not because it's gruesome but because it's unfair. I think it serves as a good reminder that—

LAWYER. Life sucks?

PRIEST. Life can be hard.

RABBI. We can do the right things and still be disappointed in the end.

LAWYER. Or mauled by hungry birds.

PRIEST. It's a metaphor.

LAWYER. Ask Prometheus how metaphorical it felt to him.

*Getting bored/frustrated, Ariadne turns to Theseus.*

ARIADNE. I want to help you.

THESEUS. Oh. That's okay.