

Asterion's Monster: The Minotaur Myth Retold

By Ajanta Deibel

Some may say I should thank you
For ridding me of my dreadful existence.
Half beast has no place
But the dark of a dungeon.
They hid me away to keep their disgrace concealed.
If only the winding labyrinth
Could have concealed me from you.
Half man was not enough to convince them of my worthiness.
With only enough mercy to grant me a half-life,
They confined me to this dark world of Daedalus' construction.
The winding corridors of confusion and chaos
Are familiar passageways I have learned to call home.
I have long ago found my way out to the light.
Many a time have I followed the memorized route
To the entrance of my prison.
But only to look out for a moment
At the cruel world they banished me from.
Every time, I turned back to the comfort of the dark.
To keep fear alive, they sacrificed their enemy to me.
Your people sent to a dark end.
Once, then again nine years later,
They died at the hands of the labyrinth, not mine.
Though it is true their bodies fed me,
I would much rather their company.
I was starving for food
But I was starving for much more.
I dream of laughter and music,
A loving mother and loyal sister.
I wish for a proud father who teaches me
The way of honor and glory.
My mind aches to learn
And my body aches to love.

When the Athenians entered my labyrinth
I tried to act as good host.
I offered what I had for food:
Rats and bats.
I promised water from the well at the labyrinth's heart.
But crying and wailing,
they only ran from me.
I called out to them.
I tried to tell them the way out.
But they raced only deeper into the dark.
Every move I made with friendly intentions
Only brought them closer to their deaths.
I retreated, utterly powerless.
Then a third time the sacrifices were sent to me.
With you among them, this time was different.
Forgetful Theseus, let me remind you what happened.
You were the first
To come to greet me.
You took me by complete surprise,
As you walked right up to me and looked me in the eyes!
Your strong breast and lively step
Had me envying your humanness.
Your bright eyes had me captured
Before you even said a word.
In your hand you held the end
Of a long line of thread.
It was your tether to the outside world.
Your tight grasp on it was the only betrayal
Of your otherwise fearless mask.
I wondered if you were here to save me,
To bring me to the light.
But I am no damsel, despite my position.
In the end, you could only save me from myself.
"You really are a bull! Horns and all."
Your first words to me were in admiration and shock.
"I am also a man."
Stubborn, I wished to prove myself to you.

You looked me up and down
And I trembled under your gaze.
"I don't have much to offer.
Only rodents and muddy water.
But the spring is this way if you are thirsty."
I motioned towards the darkness behind me.
You shocked me again with a:
"Yes, thank you."
We turned to walk together,
String trailing behind you.
Your footfalls were almost silent
As you walked one pace behind mine.
Our shadows danced together in the torchlight.
Questions whirled through my mind
But a good host never interrogates their guest.
After ages of wordless walking
We entered the central hall of the labyrinth.
Your look of wonderment as you stared up at the high ceiling
Made me giggle.
I shrunk in embarrassment as the sound echoed through the room.
No sound like that had left my mouth since I was a boy.
I grunted, hoping to conceal it.
At the center of the room was the pool of muddy water I had promised.
To prove it's drinkability, I knelt and cupped my hands.
As I brought it to my mouth,
You mirrored my movements.
I should have known your intentions right then,
As you stood up quickly and looked down at me.
But in that moment, I only looked up at you
As a young girl would,
Grateful for your company.
"Where are the others?"
I asked, no longer able to conceal my questions.
"Safe."
You stepped away from me to inspect the room.
"Are you sure? This labyrinth is treacherous. Where did you leave them?"
You laughed coolly. "That is none of your concern."

"But I could help you. I know the way out."
You looked at me then, curiosity glinting in your eyes.
"Then why have you never left?"
"I would not be welcomed."
"You care about that?"
"Yes."
You walked right up to me and grasped my shoulder.
"You are not what I was expecting."
My mother came to mind then.
The look of disgust on her face
As she held the miserable product of her own savage act.
"I was hoping it would be more human," she had said.
Every face who had looked upon me
Did so with disappointment and disgust.
You were the first to look with genuine curiosity.
You did not shrink away from me.
"Tell me, Asterion, what is it that you desire?"
And that was the moment my mind for you changed.
How did you know my name?
It was then that I recognized the string in your hand
And knew who had given it to you.
Ariadne was behind this.
This was some kind of a plot.
She had always wanted me dead,
Despised my mother's mistakes.
You had no plan of bringing me out of this dark place.
The string would enable you to leave alone,
My lifeless body left behind you.
"Do it quick."
My words confused you at first.
But you soon understood, as the memory of your duty returned to you.
And anger came upon you.
You stepped away from me and flew about the room in a rage.
Pointing a trembling finger at me, you shouted:
"You are no woman! It is not your place to act this way!
In the name of Athena, you have horns! Why don't you use them?
Or are you not bull, but a cowering dog?"

Anger boiled up in me and came out as hot breath through my nostrils.
"You wish to make me a monster
Just like everyone else!
If I had wanted to kill you, I would have done so!
It is not a fight that I want with you,
But you can think of nothing else!
What is it that *you* desire, Theseus,
But glory and fame?
And you will take it from me!
Come here and have your way!"
You stood stunned,
But only for a moment
Before you charged me.
I lowered my horns, prepared to pierce you.
But you leapt right over me and grabbed me from behind.
You wrapped your arms around my throat, and we thrashed around the room
Until we fell together into the water
Where you pinned me down with unexpected strength.
Glory held your mind and glazed your eyes.
Water filled my lungs.
And you left me there to die.
It is you, not I
Who has a monstrous side.
I can see you now, forgetful Theseus,
As you spread lofty lies to your homeland.
You boast of your strength and glory.
Your memory has changed the story.
You, savage beast,
Sing falsehoods through perfect teeth.
And they believe what they expect to hear:
That I was the danger
You saved them from.