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WAY OUT; WAY HOME

First, a brief review of one of those ancient Greek myths you've probably heard about but don't remember in detail. Ariadne was the daughter of King Minos of Crete. Her free-spirit forest and sea-loving mother, Pasiphae, mated with an exotic white bull from the sea, and gave birth to Ariadne's half-brother the Minotaur, who was also half-human, half-bull.

The Minotaur, being a bull in a china shop so to speak and prone to rages and the eating of maidens and young men, was contained at the center of a labyrinth built by the ingenious inventor, Daedalus. Daedalus, like a dotting uncle, had made hanging marionette dolls for young Ariadne, and given her a magic ball of thread. Some versions of the myth call the thread flaxen, or gold, and others say it was life-blood red. When Ariadne fell in love with Prince Theseus, who was intent on slaying the Minotaur, she agreed to help him if he would marry her and take her away to his hometown of Athens. Using her magic ball of thread—the end of which Ariadne tied to the door of the labyrinth—Theseus killed the Minotaur and emerged triumphant. He married Ariadne and sailed off with her towards Athens, but abandoned her—sleeping—on the island of Naxos, where—once awakened—she promptly married the much more fun-loving Dionysus—god of wine and protector of the homeless.

Now, I want to tell you a story. About stories. About words. About how they guide and pull us through the torn, the thorny places of our lives. About how they falter. About how they reconnect us—to ourselves and to each other.

Ariadne stands guard. Tether yourself to her red thread. Tie the end to the threshold—there—the threshold you stepped over on your way here. Never mind the body lying inert in the doorway. It takes a while to get used to stepping over bodies. The body is there to remind you of those who went before, of those who tried to find their way out, their way home.

1.

Choose carefully which path to take.

Tread lightly between the trees. Trust your instincts. Relax and feel the fir needles beneath your feet. Follow the narrow forest path where the white-tailed deer walk quietly in single file.

*Hold the silence
like sunbeams through branches
spun in gilded cocoons
rain down
softly, reverently.*

*Hold the silence
as you enter here.
This is no solitary path
where you pass yourself
going the other way.*

2.

Remember where you came from? The dirt you first stuffed into your gummy mouth? The dirt you toddled over on your way to words? The red thread a ribbon in your hair, the laces on your soft-soled shoes?

*Shadowed self
beneath blood moon,
hoot owl calls through thickets
of scarlet poison ivy—
tendrils caress
silver grayed drifts of time.*

3.

Close your eyes for a moment. What is your earliest memory? It holds the key to who you are, and to where you are headed.

*Feathered breath
Pressed in parchment.
Chewed mulberry leaves
feed worms that spit
filaments of fiber.*

4.

Consider the beauty. There must have been something beautiful, no matter how fleeting. Something to hold onto. Consider the beauty.

*Prepare to drift in free fall
through fractured sky.
Bones stripped bare
turned to alphabet runes.*

5.

The passageway darkens. The plot thickens. There may be turbulence ahead. In the event of an emergency, oxygen masks will fall down, appearing like dancing marionettes.

Secure yours over your mouth and nose before helping others. Prepare yourself. You could lose your way.

*Going under,
shunt through searing halls
on your way to surgery
to correct the stutter
to loosen the sibilant tongue
to extract the chimera
of what is you and not you.*

6.

Although you have yet to reach the center of the labyrinth, arguably the climax of this story, you begin to feel the presence of the minotaur, smell the fetid breath. With its centrifugal force, you are pulled inextricably deeper.

*There is no refuge here.
Bats sing call and response
hymns through ink dust skies.*

*Default normals used
in place of guardian spirits
trailing
torn bandages of words
wound in fern frond fists.*

7.

Congratulations! You made it through that difficult patch. I see you doubled back and tied yourself in a knot. And your heart skipped a beat from the looks of that EKG strip. The phosphorous I was able to extract from your blood now illuminates your path—although first you must remove the

gauze covering your eyes, spit the cotton from your mouth, and learn to speak again. Raise your right index finger if you can hear me, if you understand.

*Stained silk stigmata
stored through lines of women
in mothballed cedar chests
as if a treasure.*

8.

Caution. This is where it gets interesting. This is the center. Slay the minotaur. It's up to you to decide how to do that.

*Gaze into the face of the abyss.
Chaos is a game played with spiraled doodles
that spell nothingness.*

*Trace fingerprints to their source,
etched lines ricochet
and echo through the night.*

*Gather shredded selves
stitched lovingly
with mosaic thread.*

9.

It's tempting to run back out into the world, to scream "I killed the monster! I survived to tell the tale! I win the prize! Ariadne, I'm taking you to a Greek Island for an all-expense paid vacation!" But in your excitement you forget that your odyssey is not over. And you forget that Ariadne is not the prize. She belongs to no one.

*There is no resilience here,
bounceback, bend, return to steady state.*

*The body remembers
there is no resilience here.
But there is resistance, stance, stories
And scars of our sick-sweet journey.*

10.

See, I warned you. You were so excited about reaching the center of the labyrinth, of slaying that stinking hybrid, of thinking that was your goal, that you dropped the ball of red thread. You now face a dead end, blind alley, end of the road—a different sort of resistance: you have hit the proverbial. . .

*Hieroglyphic wall; no way out.
Retrace your steps to the last glint of light;
follow it forward through blue emptiness.*

11.

All this mystic blue. Maggie Nelson writes that blue is “something of an ecstatic accident produced by void and fire.” Goethe claims we love blue “because it draws us after it.”

*Pause there
while the sea lights a candle
and stringed surf
washes you clean.*

12.

Assemble the strands together—words, images, gestures, metaphors—they are all equally important mementos. Pack them in a satchel and prepare to. . .

*Spin the way home.
And look back
to a time. . .*

*When words were poems
our body's understanding
was written in flesh;
a repose, a prayer whispered
in answer to awe.
Round marbled babbles sang praise,
danced the sun on waves.*

*Now each word is a poem,
draw knowledge softer,
suckle life from all splinters,
embrace shadows beyond words.*

*Hold the silence
as you exit there.
Quiet pandemonium
calls you home.*

Gaze into that mirror—
Listen, as Eduardo Galeano whispers in your ear:

*“Mirrors are filled with people.
The invisible see us.
The forgotten recall us.
When we see ourselves, we see them.
When we turn away, do they?”*

Gaze into this mirror—
Listen, as I whisper in your ear:

*Home is where you are known.
You are not alone.
The key is tied
to the way out and the way home.*