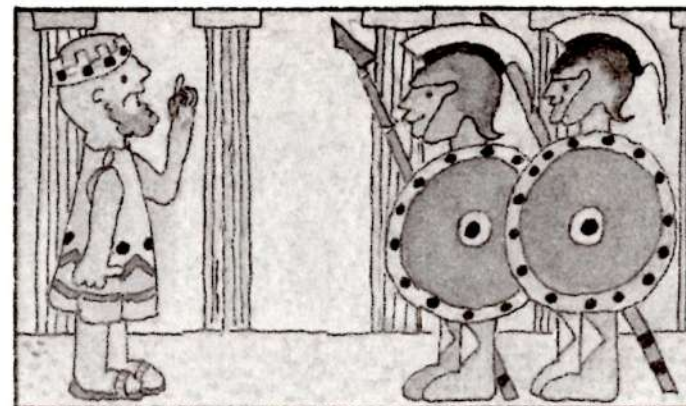


Theseus and the Minotaur



Chapter One *The Tribute*

King Minos, who ruled over the Greek island of Crete, was the son of the great god Zeus, and a mighty ruler. King Minos hated the people of Athens because he believed that they had killed his son, Androgeus, after he had won all the prizes at the Athenian games. King Minos was heartbroken, for he had loved his son dearly.



"I'd like to see them all dead!" King Minos roared and he gathered together a vast army to wage war against Athens.

The strength of this army, and the anger of King Minos, made King Aegeus of Athens fear for his people's safety. So to save Athens from destruction, King Aegeus agreed to a terrible, terrible tribute.

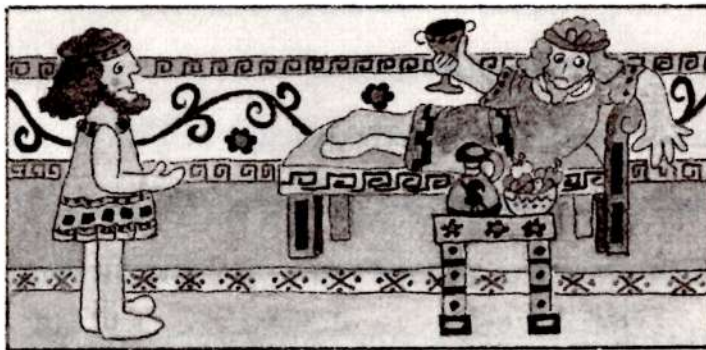
Every year, at the spring equinox, the Athenians were to send seven youths and

"Bring them to the palace, so I can bid them farewell," ordered the king. "It is a terrible death, but I gave my oath and must keep it."

The following day, there was a knock on the palace door and in marched the soldiers with seven fine youths and seven beautiful maidens.

"Yes, you are all quite perfect," declared the king with a sigh.

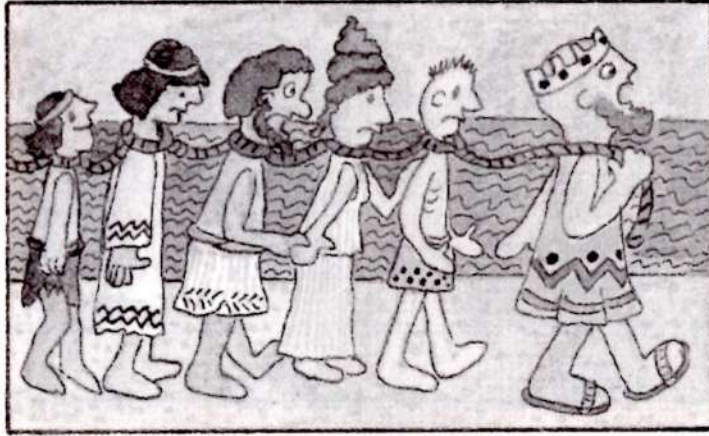
"Father!" King Aegeus's son, Theseus, cried.



"How can you let these poor young people go? It is time we put an end to this cruelty. If you won't do it, I will go to Crete in the place of one of these poor sacrifices and kill the Minotaur myself!"

"Fat chance," wept the Minotaur's intended victims. "It is well known that nobody escapes from the labyrinth alive."

"They are quite right," said Theseus's horrified father. "You will never kill the



seven maidens across the sea to Crete, where they would be sacrificed to the man-eating Minotaur.

The Minotaur was a vast and powerful beast: half-man and half-bull – a truly terrifying creature. The labyrinth it lived in had been designed by the inventor and craftsman Daedalus, and was a miraculous maze of twists and turns. Once inside the labyrinth there was no escape and all who



entered were destined to be devoured by the savage, blood-thirsty Minotaur. It was a terrible price to pay, even for the death of a king's son.

King Aegeus of Athens had already sent this cruel payment to King Minos twice – and now the time had come again. There was a great weeping and wailing throughout Athens as lots were drawn to see who must travel in the black-sailed ship to Crete.

Minotaur! You won't be able to take a sword into the labyrinth and he is too strong, even for you. You will just end up as his next meal."

"No," cried Theseus, "I will go and I will kill him. I have killed monsters before and I'll kill this one. For the sake of all Athenians, I must do this."

King Aegeus begged his son not to go, but Theseus would not be dissuaded.

"Sorry, Dad, I have to," said Theseus, hugging his father.

"You really, really don't!" wept his father.



"Oh, but I do. The honour of Athens depends on it."

So Theseus set out for Crete, hoisting the black sail as a sign of respect for the young victims. He promised his father that he would return with a white sail, as a sign of his success.

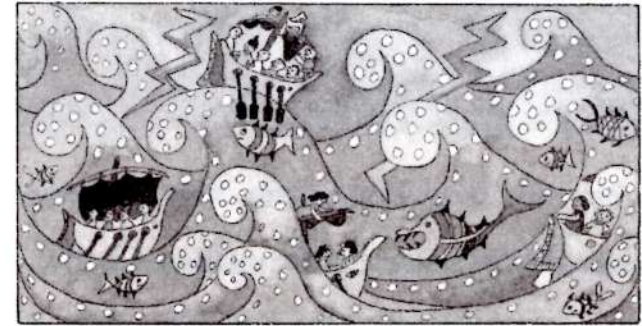


"We will all return," he reassured his father.
"Every one of us!"

"I will not sleep until you do," declared
Aegeus, distraught. "I will stand guard on
the cliff top waiting to see your white sail
returning in triumph across the waves."

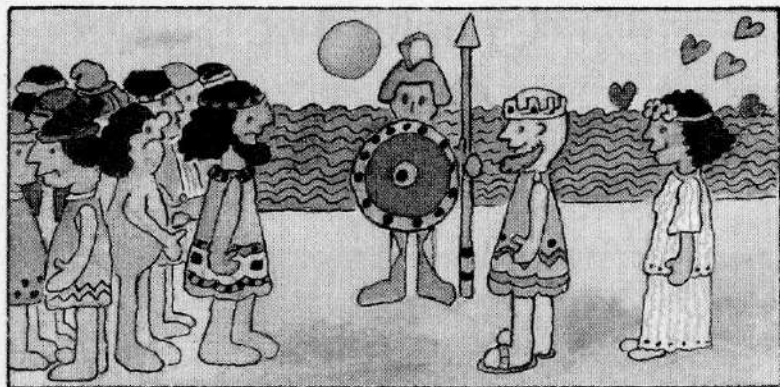
Chapter Two

Ariadne



Theseus and the other tributes sailed across
the Aegean Sea towards Crete. Great storms
battered the little ship and the passengers
were filled with fear. Only Theseus remained
cheerful, for his courage was such that he felt
invincible and was sure he could outwit the
sea, just as he planned to outwit the Minotaur.

Finally, the black-sailed ship landed on



the coast of Crete, where King Minos and his daughter Ariadne were waiting to greet the Minotaur's next feast. When Ariadne saw King Aegeus's handsome son Theseus amongst the tributes, she immediately fell madly in love with him.

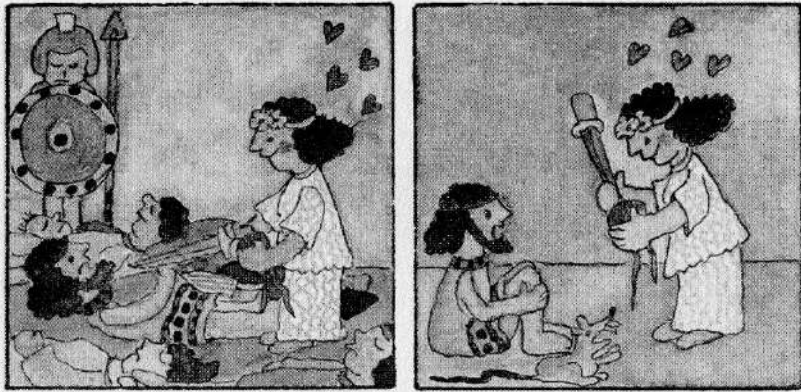
She begged her father to spare his life, "Oh Father, look how handsome the young prince is. You cannot let him die such a terrible death."

But King Minos was unmoved. "If he

chooses to sacrifice himself to the Minotaur, so be it. Throw him into prison with the others," he ordered the guards, "and let him be the first one fed to the beast in the morning."

That night the Athenians were all locked in a dungeon close to the labyrinth. They lay huddled together, weeping and wailing as they listened to the hungry roar of the Minotaur. Only Theseus slept, seemingly undaunted by the terrible task ahead of him. Then, in the darkest hours of the night, he felt a hand on his shoulder. It was Ariadne, who had crept softly past the guards and let herself into the dungeon.

"Theseus," Ariadne whispered as she shook him awake. "If you promise to marry me,



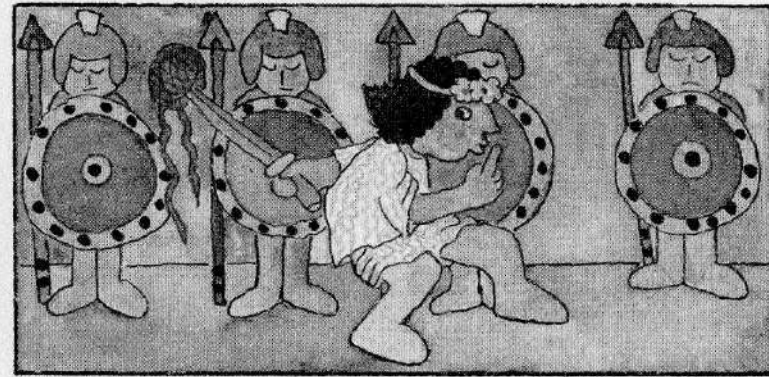
you can have this sword to help you kill the Minotaur and this ball of thread, which will guide you out of the maze.”

Theseus looked upon Ariadne and was so overcome by her beauty, that even if she had offered him neither sword nor ball of thread, he would have agreed to marry her anyway.

“Of course I’ll marry you,” he promised, “and we will sail back to Athens together in triumph.”

“Here then, hide these quickly,” whispered

Ariadne. “I’ll be waiting for you when you have killed the beast.”



Ariadne disappeared into the shadows and Theseus hid the sword and the thread under his clothes. Then he lay down again, trying to sleep and not to think of what lay ahead of him.

Chapter Three

The Minotaur



As the morning hours approached, Theseus's courage was sorely tested and he began to wonder if he would ever see his father again or behold the beauty of his wife-to-be, Ariadne. At the first light of dawn, the guards stirred themselves and unlocked the great door to the labyrinth. Theseus was the first to

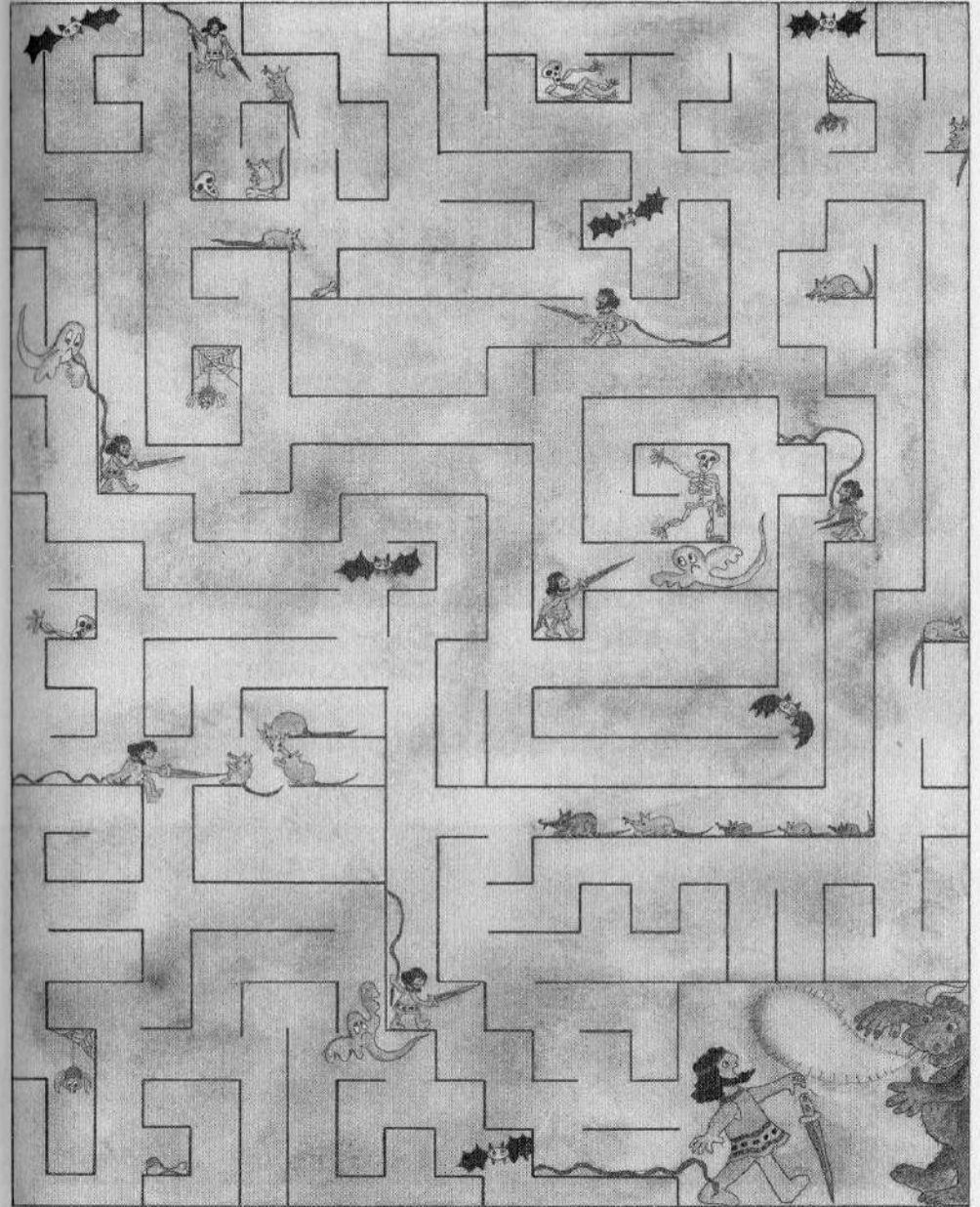
enter and the other Athenians huddled close behind him. The door was slammed shut and they were left together in the gloom.

Theseus tried to reassure the poor sacrifices, but they were terrified. They stayed close to the locked door, crying most piteously. Theseus wasted no time – he tied one end of the thread to the bars on the door and set off with his sword in search of the Minotaur.





The labyrinth was even more confusing than he had imagined, it was a maze of cold, dark passages. Some led nowhere and Theseus would find himself up against damp and slimy walls, while others took him deeper into the maze. All along the passageways, he held on



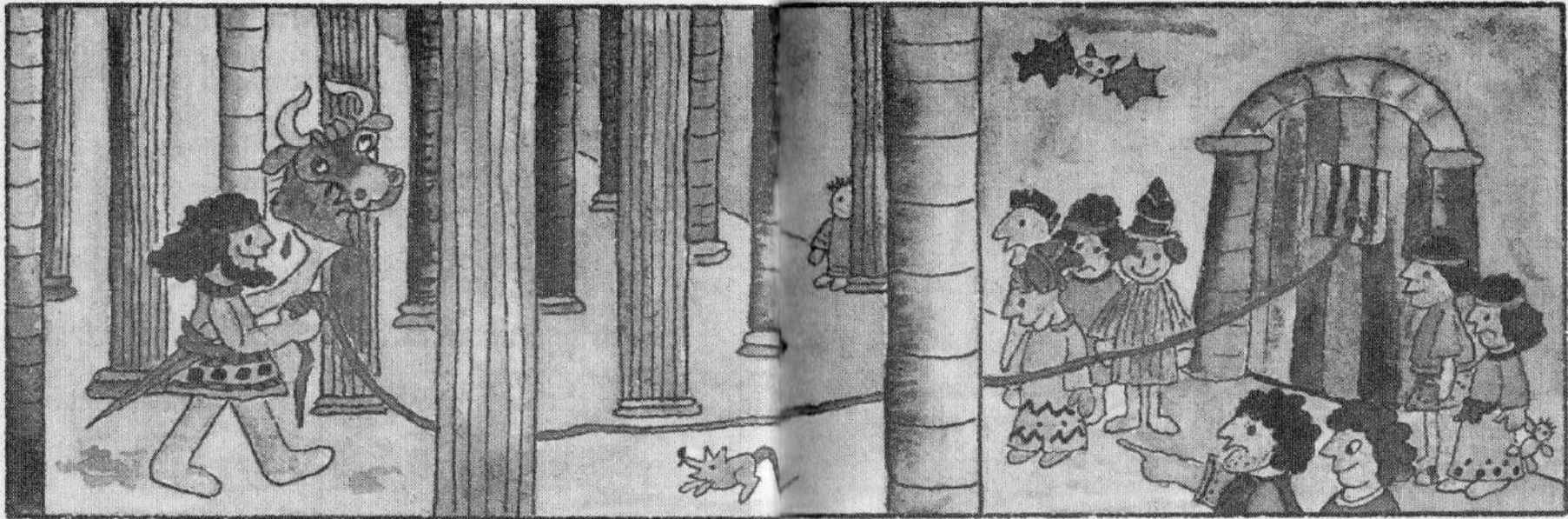
tightly to Ariadne's sword, even as the roar of the Minotaur became louder and closer.

Theseus's heart began to beat wildly in his chest. He could almost feel the beast's breath upon him. Then, quite suddenly, he was face-to-face with the hideous monster – its eyes glowing red in the gloom. The Minotaur was larger and more terrible than Theseus had ever imagined, but it was too late now – there was no escape. Gathering all his courage, Theseus charged. The struggle

was long and fierce, for the Minotaur was enormously strong, and it seemed certain that Theseus would be its next meal. But the Minotaur was caught off guard, for he was not expecting to be attacked by someone carrying a sword. Finally, Theseus drove the sword through the Minotaur's heart and it sank to the ground – dead.

Theseus followed the thread quickly back through the confusing twists and turns of the labyrinth until, with a huge sigh of relief, he





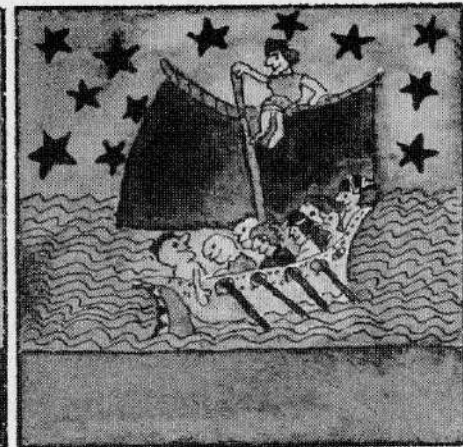
reached the entrance. The young Athenians could hardly believe their eyes, for none had dared to hope that Theseus would triumph. A huge cheer rose from their midst as they realized that they would live to see another day!



Chapter Four The Wedding

Hearing the cheers of Theseus and his friends, Ariadne quickly unlocked the door.

"Hurry, I have drugged the guards, but we must go! We must be at sea before they wake," she cried.



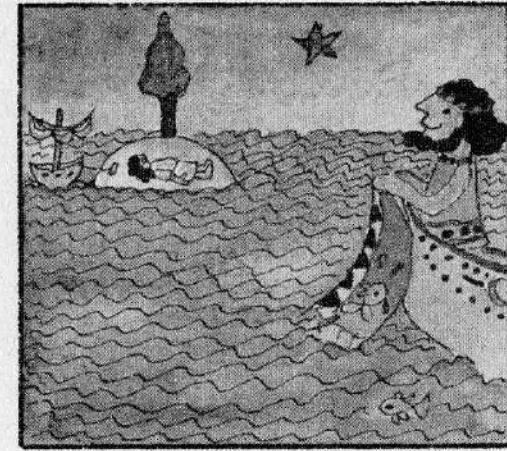
Without another word, everyone ran for the ship, quickly raised the sail and set their course for Athens. After a few days at sea, they stopped at an island so that Theseus and Ariadne could be wed, just as Theseus had promised. The wedding was a small but joyful party, for everyone was delighted to celebrate the union of their two saviours. After the wedding, Ariadne lay down to rest in the shade of a tree, while the others gathered



together enough provisions for the remainder of the journey.

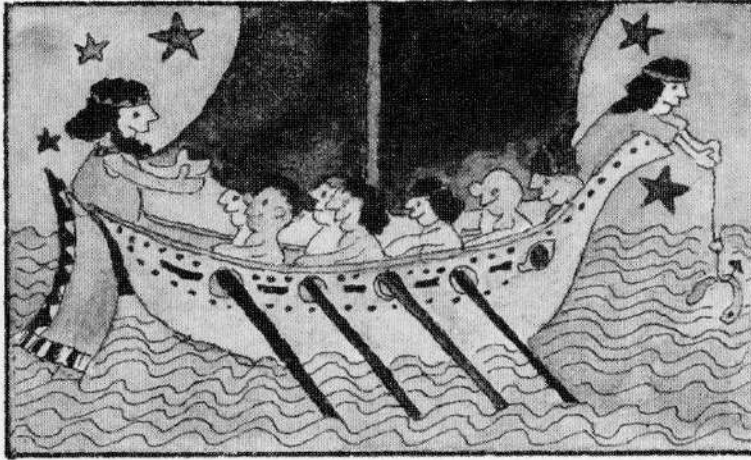
"Be quick," begged Theseus, "for we have already been too long and my poor father will be anxious."

The ship was loaded with fresh water and the sweet fruit of the island and soon they were ready to set sail again. Theseus went to wake his new bride, but as he bent to kiss her, he paused. He began to think of all the



suffering her father had caused his family and so many other Athenian families. How could he possibly return to his father and his country married to the daughter of their worst enemy?

"Dad would never forgive me," he thought. "I have fulfilled my promise to her by marrying her. It wouldn't be fair to her to take her back to Athens where she would be hated and reviled. I should leave her here, sleeping happily."

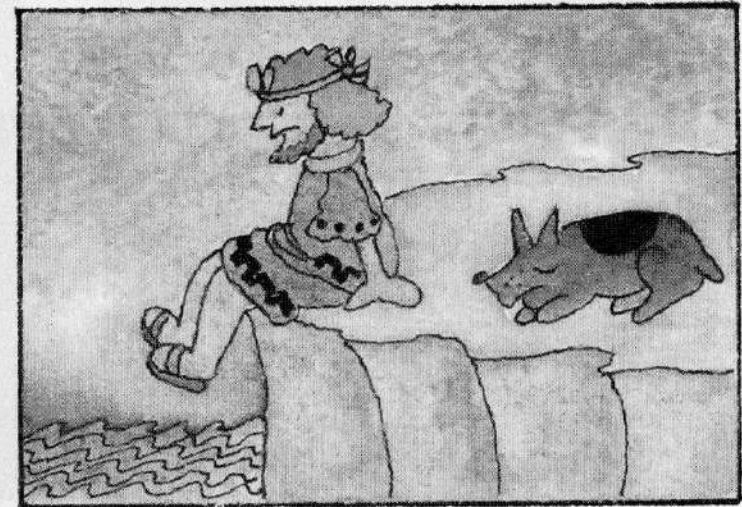


So Theseus blew his sleeping bride a parting kiss and ran back to the ship. The Athenians hoisted the anchor and were a distant speck on the horizon when poor Ariadne awoke.

Chapter Five *The Homecoming*

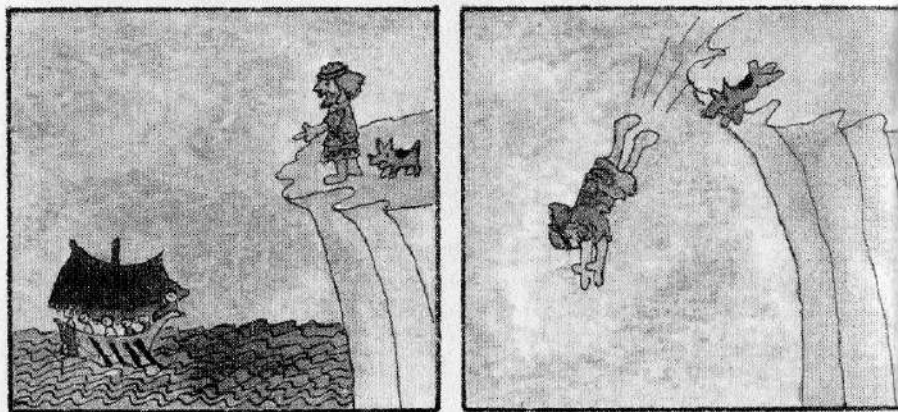
Meanwhile, King Aegeus watched anxiously for his son's ship to return.

"Theseus should be home by now," he muttered to himself each day, as he paced up and down along the cliffs. "He must be dead –



I told him not to go. Ah, but I mustn't give up hope, maybe he's alive. Yes, yes! There is still a chance. I must wait to see the colour of the sail. My heart may yet be filled with joy."

Unfortunately, all was not as it should have been, for in his haste to return to his father, Theseus had forgotten to change the ship's sail from black to white and, as the ship came into view, the first thing King Aegeus saw was the black sail! Theseus's father was overwhelmed with grief. Certain that his beloved son was



dead, he threw himself off the cliff, onto the rocks below, where the waves took his body and buried it in the ocean depths.

When Theseus's ship anchored, he was greeted with the terrible news. Poor Theseus, he was filled with sorrow and regret.

"How could I have been so thoughtless?" he wept and he mourned the death of his father.



As other parents celebrated their children's return, the whole of Athens hailed Theseus as a hero, and after the funeral of King Aegeus he was crowned the new king of Athens.

"I will try to be a great king in honour of my father," promised Theseus, "and the killing of the Minotaur will not be my last victory!"

