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David N. Gonzalez

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Breaking the Vicious Cycle

David N. Gonzalez

The dark and gloomy corridor sent chills down Theseus' spine as he stared down the open gateway into the large and foreboding labyrinth. Over the years, many had entered as sacrifices to the Minotaur, and none had ever made it back alive. Thousands of strong men and women before him had died within this wretched place, and yet somehow, Theseus was supposed to be the one to do the impossible. Somehow he was supposed to navigate an inescapable maze, kill the unkillable beast, and come out alive.

Taking a deep breath, Theseus shook his head trying to collect his bearings. This wasn't the time nor place to be doubting himself now. Approaching the black ebony gate, Theseus held up the lit torch in his hand to light his way while making sure the roll of twine was in the other. Theseus cursed under his breath as his trembling hands could barely get the twine tied around one of the many solid black bars on the gate, the thread shaking profusely within the grip of his fingers. Finally, after what seemed like forever, a sloppy bow of a knot stared back at him. Giving it a sharp tug, Theseus sighed in relief, affirming the cord's strength and stability. Now all he had to do was step foot into the maze and kill the Minotaur with nothing but a dingy sword that could barely slice a finger. It was at this moment that Theseus realized that he was screwed, but there was no turning back.

How could he when there were so many people relying on him, no, expecting him to save the day? With a heavy sigh, Theseus hesitantly stepped through the gate and into the labyrinth. He could already smell the overwhelming scent of death as the shadows from the light of his torch danced across the narrow enclosure. The faint firelight revealing overgrown slimy mold growing across the stone floor and impressively towering walls on either side of him. It almost seemed like the slabs of stone went on forever as Theseus glanced up to realize he couldn't even see the ceiling. As far as he could tell, there wasn't even an end to the roof, just an infinite void of nothing. This observation only served to tighten his grip on the unfurling twine being unraveled behind him. It was his only way out of this maze, and if it hadn't

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been for Princess Ariadne, he would have been stuck entering the labyrinth without any kind of weapon as useless as it was or any twine to guide him out, for that matter.

Turning a corner around the path, Theseus grimaced at the sight of a skeleton still rotting with flesh. Its dislocated bones growing amongst the mold. This body wasn't the only one either, as more and more skulls began to rear their decaying heads. This wasn't just a labyrinth; it was a graveyard. This fact was further proven by the uncomfortable sound of bones crunching and flesh squishing under his feet as Theseus continued to make his way through the twists and turns of the maze. Suddenly, Theseus yelped in surprise as his foot got caught in what appeared to be a large dislocated rib cage strewn in his path. Toppling over into a smelly and

slimy bed of filthy human remains was already traumatizing enough, but Theseus wasn't ready for what followed as his only source of light blew out upon impact, leaving him alone in complete and total darkness. Theseus paused and held his breath, not daring to move as his foot throbbed in pain still trapped under a heavy pile of bones. However, his injured foot was the least of his worries as a low guttural growl echoed from deeper within the maze. The growling stopped almost as quickly as it started, and an eerie silence began to sink into the air once more. The Minotaur had sensed Theseus' presence and was on the hunt to kill him. That growl was just a warning for what was to come. Soon he would be joining the ranks of the dead filed amongst these forsaken tunnels. He had failed. Of course, a small part of him already knew from the start that this was the likely scenario, yet he couldn't help but feel upset. He was going to let everyone down – the people of Athens, Princess Ariadne, but most importantly, he would be letting his father down, and that was the one person Theseus couldn't stand to disappoint. But there was no way he could survive now, not with a hurt foot and without a light to guide him. It wouldn't take long for the Minotaur to find Theseus and promptly devour him in this weakened state.

"I'm sorry," Theseus whispered softly before clenching his eyes shut to accept his fate among the dead.

"Yeah, you should be sorry."

Theseus yelped in alarm at the sound of someone else's voice coming directly in front of him.

"Huh, I didn't realize ancient Greece was so ... dark."

Not a second later, Theseus' jaw dropped open at the sight of a bright white light appearing in front of him. The light caught him off guard for

a second, but after blinking a few times, Theseus was shocked to find a small young girl standing before him.

"That's better," the girl declared as she waved around what looked to be a strange contraption emanating light from the palm of her hand. Everything about this kid looked foreign to Theseus. Her clothes, hair, and just the way she moved and talked was unsettling. He had never seen anything like her before yet he couldn't help, but feel like something about her was familiar somehow.

"A-a-are you one of the gods?" Theseus gulped, trying his best to keep his composure. "Perhaps Demeter or Athena?"

"No, and if I were going to be any goddess, I would be Aphrodite, ok? Not some prairie girl or book nerd," The girl scoffed as she knelt down to examine Theseus more closely. "Yup, only an ancestor of mine would make such an utterly stupid comparison."

"Ancestor? Who ... who are you?"

"That doesn't matter. What matters is that I'm here to help you."

"Now wait just a minute! How did you ... AGH!"

Theseus' musings were promptly cut short as the girl, without warning, grabbed Theseus' buried foot and forcefully pulled it out, causing a sharp sting to pulsate through his leg.

"How the heck did you manage to hurt your foot this bad from tripping? Honestly dude, you need to drink some milk or something because that's just sad."

Shaking her head, the mysterious girl slung off from her shoulders a curiously large sack. Theseus reeled back as it was rapidly opened with a loud zip and out sprang even more confusing items. Before he could protest anything, a large slab of blue paper was slapped across his foot. Instantly, it was as if his foot had caught on fire as an intense wave of heat burned up to his ankle. Almost immediately,

the heat subsided and was replaced with a nice cool feeling. Theseus could no longer feel any pain! Scrambling to his feet, Theseus steadied himself and reached for the sword at his side, desperately trying to unsheath it.

"Aw! Do you need some help with that?" the girl chuckled, rolling her eyes as she watched Theseus' struggle ensue against the scabbard. Finally, the sword was drawn, and Theseus wasted no time in pointing it straight at the eccentric stranger confronting him.

"I-I'm going to ask one more time. Who are you!?"

"Alright! Alright! Calm down before you hurt yourself," the girl sighed before turning her attention back to her bag. "My name is Lydia, and this may come as a shock to you, but I'm one of

Everything about this kid looked foreign to Theseus.

your descendants from the year 2081. I've come back to your time to help you in your greatest time of need, and let me tell you you're in desperate need of my help."

"You're telling me that you're from ... the future?"

"Precisely!" Now let's get to work solving our little problem, shall we?" Lydia smiled as she pulled out yet another artifact from her bag.

"Uh ... what is that?" Theseus asked as he gazed curiously at the long object comfortably fit in Lydia's hands.

"Oh this? It's just my AA12 Atchisson assault rifle! You like it?" Lydia smiled as she raised up the "rifle" and, with a quick swipe, cocked the small bar beneath it. "Ok! I'm ready! Let's go find that giant ass bull."

"You mean the Minotaur?"

"No, Theseus! I mean the bull! Real talk, though, you Greeks were way too dramatic. As an FYI, Minotaurs don't exist," Lydia snapped as she continued to gather all her things back into her bag. Quickly slinging the sack over her shoulder, Lydia motioned for Theseus to follow behind her as she stalked off deeper into the labyrinth passageways with her assault rifle armed and ready. Theseus wasn't sure it was best to follow since, obviously, this person was delusional, but as she started to disappear around the bend the light followed her. As bad as the situation was Theseus needed her to survive. Quickly bounding after her figure, Theseus stopped in realization.

"Wait! How did you know my name?"

"Like I said I'm your descendant from the future. I know you, or at least the Apple Ancestry Match App has told me a lot about you."

As bad as the situation was, Theseus needed her to survive.

Staring closer at the girl's face Theseus furrowed his eyes. Perhaps that familiar feeling he sensed really did mean something after all.

"If you really are what you say, then ... what's in my future?"

For a second, Lydia stopped in her tracks, pausing to stare at the floor.

"What is there to say? Just like everyone in our family, you tried to be someone and ended up falling flat on your face."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"You really want to know?"

Stopping next to Lydia, Theseus observed as her hands tightened into fists and her form stiffened up considerably. Theseus nodded his head for her to continue.

"You know I do want to commend you for being the only one in our lineage to actually get as far as you did, but in the end, you failed

just like all of us. You offered yourself up to Athens as a sacrifice to be sent to try and kill the "Minotaur" which had already slaughtered so many children. You stepped up when everyone else was too afraid to, but in the end, you died in the labyrinth, and your father, in his grief, took his life. Your mother remarried, and like a broken record, our cursed cycle continued. No one in our family tree ever actually makes use of their life to do anything worthwhile or special. Our whole ancestry is filled with kooks, druggies, alcoholics, abusers, and just the most retarded people you can think of. That's why I'm here to kill that stupid bull for you so that our lineage can finally be worth something. You were the closest one to actually being a hero and using your life for a meaningful purpose in our family. I'm not going to let your life get thrown away for nothing! I'm not going to let our family fade into obscurity with such a horrible legacy!"

On that final note, Lydia started to march forward again with a much stronger look of conviction on her face while Theseus stayed behind. He couldn't move, not after what she just told him. Even though he had had his doubts before about the validity of her background, all that had immediately washed away as soon as he heard her story. In some ways, Theseus couldn't help but feel the same way. It wasn't fair that people like Lydia and Theseus just can't ever seem to measure up to everyone else, but maybe this time it could be different? Theseus knew what he had to do.

"So you're not here to actually help me kill the Minotaur. You're just going to kill it yourself?"

"Relax, will you? You'll take the credit and I'll head back to my time like I wasn't even here."

"Wait! Stop!" Theseus yelled out as Lydia continued to march straight ahead. Running up to her, Theseus quickly jumped in front of the girl, effectively blocking her path.

"Listen, you can't kill the Minotaur. I have to."

"I don't think you understand. You already failed! The stories say that you never made it out alive. You can't change that, but I can!"

"No! This isn't your fight! It's mine. I came here to kill the Minotaur, and that's exactly what I'm going to do. This is my responsibility, not yours."

"You've got to be kidding me!" Lydia snickered as she took a step forward to confront Theseus. "What are you going to do against the bull with that rusty oversized letter opener? You would have died back there if I hadn't stepped in. You're clumsy, unskilled, and have no idea what you're doing! So tell me, how are you going to beat him, hm? How?"

"I ... I don't know, but I don't have to. Whether I live or die, I did my best to face the challenge

ahead of me no matter what happens. And that's really all I can ask of myself.

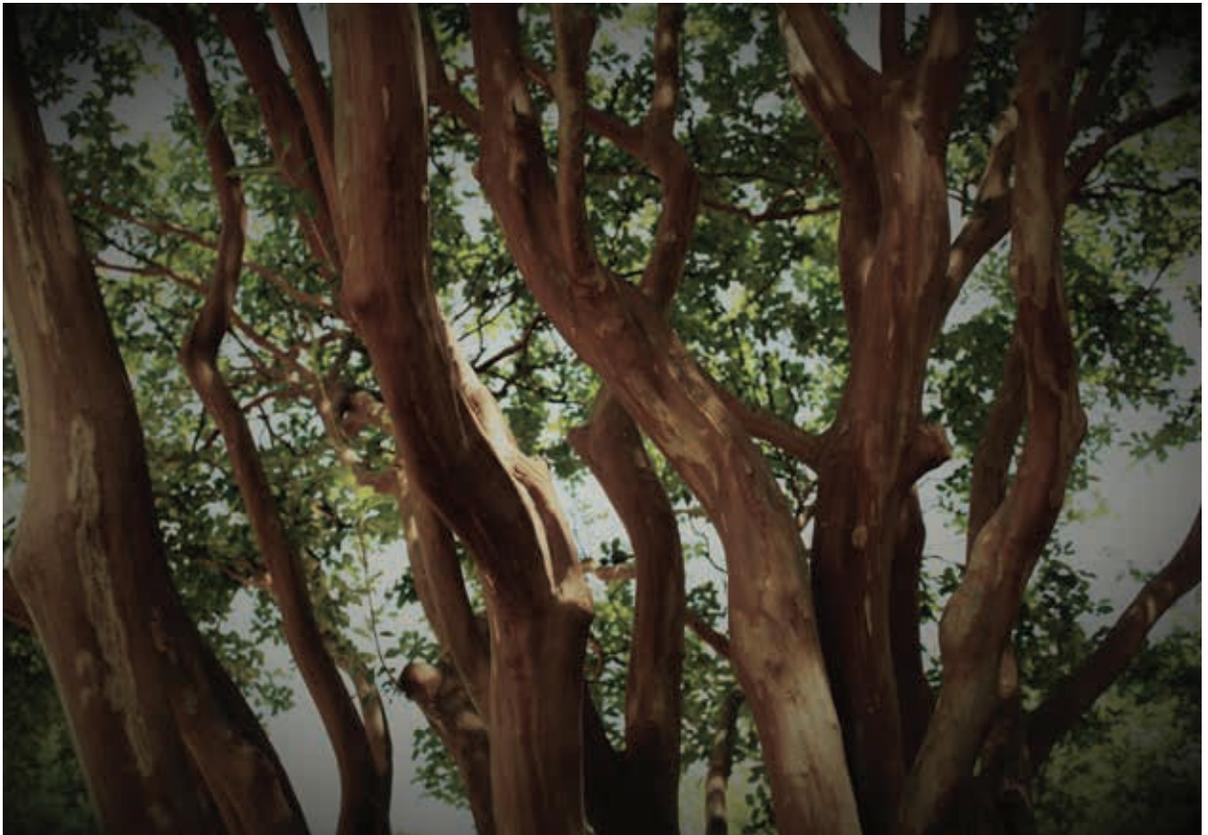
"Oh wow, so you're just going to waltz in there and take this bull down with the power of positive thinking?" Lydia shouted as she pushed Theseus back. Her hands balling into fists. "Risk all of Athens because you think 'trying your best' is somehow going to cut it? Listen here, idiot, history doesn't hand out participation trophies. Either you win or lose, and you are going to fail big time!"

"You don't know that and I don't care if historians tell you otherwise! What makes you better than history saying we're screw-ups anyway if all you're going to do is put me down?"

"Hey! That's not what I ... "

"Yes you are! You've gotten so used to other people telling you who you are that you've started

Entwine Lydia A. Pyla



to do it back to them. How many more family lineages are you going to destroy because nothing they do matters. After all, in your words they're just part of some 'cursed cycle' that they can't escape from, right? Why do you even care about the reputation that our lineage has throughout history anyway?"

"I just ... for once ... I wanted to mean something," Lydia mumbled. A silence washed over the labyrinth once more as Theseus watched as Lydia slowly put her weapon down. Her eyes drifting to the floor, not bothering to look up into his face. "Look, I'm sorry ok? I don't really know what I'm doing, and this probably isn't good for the time stream. I shouldn't even be here, to begin with, and you know what? You're right. I get it. This isn't my time period, so I really shouldn't have a say in it."

Reaching her hand into her pocket, Lydia pulled out a small remote. Staring at the device in her hand, Lydia sighed before pressing one of the buttons. Theseus' jumped back as a blue spark crackled and fizzed behind her. The wave of energy swirled and grew until it was the size of Lydia. The blue wave of energy pulsating behind her as she finally looked up at Theseus.

"I'm going home," Lydia stated, smiling sadly as she waved goodbye. Turning her back, to Theseus she was about to enter the portal when she was suddenly stopped by a warm hand that grabbed her arm.

"Lydia, you don't have to let our family tree define who you are. They already made their choices, and you can't change that, but you still have your whole life ahead of you. You can use it to do whatever you want, and if you truly desire to make a difference, then you have to be that change."

"Ugh, you sound like a Ted Talk."

"I don't know what that is."

Lydia laughed aloud at Theseus' confused face before pulling him in for a quick hug,

"Thanks Great Uncle Theseus."

Before he knew it, Lydia had disappeared through the blue energy, which quickly dissipated behind her. Theseus was now left alone as he stared back into the shadowy Labyrinth tunnels; however, this time, he held Lydia's small light source, which she had left in his hand. Its comforting glow spreading back the darkness. Reaching to his side, Theseus swiftly unsheathed his sorry excuse for a sword, but that didn't matter. What mattered was that regardless of his chances, Theseus was going to survive, conquer the beast, and bring peace back to Athens. He was going to save the day just like all the legendary heroes and demigods of fable. This was it. This was his moment to prove himself a hero not just to himself but also to all the naysayers throughout history who would try to say what he can and cannot do, but most importantly he was going to win for his future grand-niece, Lydia.

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**If You Look
the Sky is Full of Opportunity**

Uma Nair