

PART FIVE

But Theseus was no ordinary man. He was the son of the King, he was brave and he was stubborn. As the Minotaur bellowed in his ear and grabbed at him with its hairy arms, Theseus found a strength which he did not know he possessed.

He grabbed the animal's huge horns, and kept on twisting the great head from side to side. As the animal grew weak, Theseus gave one almighty tug on the head, turning it almost right around. The creature's neck snapped, it gurgled its last breath and fell to the floor with an enormous thud.

It was over, he had done it. The Minotaur was dead. All he had to do was make his way out of...and then he realised the awful truth. In the struggle, he had let go of the string, his lifeline. Theseus felt all over the floor in the pitch darkness and kept thinking he had found it, only to realise that he all he had was a long wiry hair from the Minotaur.

Despair set in and Theseus wondered if this was where his life would end, down in the dark, all alone, next to the stinking body. Then, his hand brushed a piece of string and, with a whoop of delight, he knew he had found the thread which would lead him back out. As he neared the entrance of the labyrinth, the darkness began to fade and he made out the figure of Ariadne, waiting for his return.

"You must take me back to Athens with you," she cried, "My father will kill me when he finds out that I have helped you."

"But of course you must come with us," said Theseus, "it would be cruel to leave you here." Quickly and quietly, they unfurled the great black sails of their ship and headed for home.

"I cannot believe how my life has changed," said Ariadne, as they sailed across the calm seas towards Athens. "To think that I am free of my cruel father and that I will soon be married to a great prince."

"Married?" said Theseus, "Oh, yes, that will be...er... wonderful." But in truth, Theseus did not really find her attractive.

So, when their ship docked at an island on their way home, to collect fresh water, Theseus sent Ariadne off to find bread and fruit. The moment she was gone, he set sail and left her on the island. Now, you might think that this was a bad way to reward someone who had helped him and had saved him from certain death.

The Gods clearly thought the same thing, for they had a further horror in store for him, as a punishment for his ungrateful treatment of the young girl.

In his haste to get away, Theseus forgot to change his sails to white. King Aegeus, waiting on the headland, saw the ship approaching with its black sails flying in the wind.

"My son has failed and he is dead," he cried. And in despair, he flung himself from the cliff into the raging waters below. From that day on, the sea was named in memory of Theseus' father, and to this day, it is known as the Aegean Sea.