JOANNE DIAZ

## Ariadne Speaks to Walter Benjamin

-after Catullus 64

Some say it was my mother's fault: her desire for the bull that loved her,

her penchant for disguise, and then, after the architect designed the costume

and her need was satisfied, some were shocked by the birth of my brother,

the Minotaur, half-man, half-beast. Of course others blamed my brother.

That was the easy thing to do, monstrous as he was, incapable

of eating anything unless it looked like the human part of himself. Easy

to hate what's ugly, what crosses that line. But no. My father is the source

of all this woe, a tyrant who loved beauty more than gratitude, risked

keeping the possession of the gods so that he could have that precious

animal for himself. From his vanity and blindness came every other sin:

the Minotaur's rage, the need to contain and feed him, my role as his warden in the prison where we harbored our shame. For years, I was a portrait

of idleness in a state of emergency. You can imagine how Theseus looked

to someone like me. Golden body, black hair, the strength of ten men

in each pull of the oar. I had stopped hoping for an escape,

and yet I held escape in my hands. So when he asked, I helped.

I gave him the golden ball of thread that led him in and out

of the maze. You see, I wanted to protect my brother,

but I wanted to destroy him, too. When Theseus asked me

to guide him, and then leave with him, I did, thus confusing

escape with love. Then, I was abandoned on Naxos,

island of endless abrasions. My father calls me traitor.

There is no royal sepulcher waiting for me. My sorrow

is so vast that even the stars have been disrupted. So yes, I know something about exile. I've seen that kind of desolation.

Walter, your writing takes the shape of a labyrinth,

and all your life you've wished for a map to chart your journey

through the streets you wandered, through the archives

that you would have lived in had they let you. Here, take this ball.

I can lead you as far as Finisterre, edge of the known world.

Hold this thread that drags across each mountain pass. I will get you there.

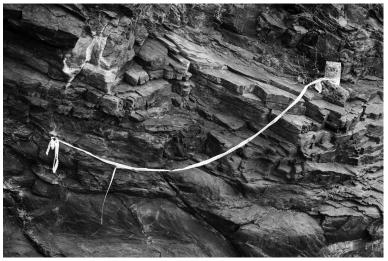


Image by Jason Reblando