A Tattered Line of String

by karrenia_rune

*A Tattered Line of String (Alice in Wonderland-Carroll) meets Ariadne, Theseus, from Greek Myth

If she hadn’t experienced falling farther and further than she had ever imagined possible Alice might have thought that was happening to her now was impossible. Of course, impossible was all in the eye of the beholder, down here in the land below ground.

When she got up off her knees, bruised and a bit scrapped, but surprisingly none the worse for from her fall; Alice looked around at her new surroundings.

It was a maze, but one made of stone instead of green and growing hedgerows. The walls formed a sort of crude pentagon instead of a true square as if they whoever had constructed this place had either not been able to properly align them or perhaps had made it so it would appear to be a kind of optical illusion.

Whatever the case, she certainly was not going to accomplish much by standing around and admiring the scenery. Instead, she dusted herself off as best she could and choose a direction at random, and began to walk.

Alice comforted herself with the fact that if the path continued in a straight line and it turned out that she had chosen badly, she could always reverse course and go back the way she had come.

And if it came to a branching corner, she could continue to take left turns from then on. She did which that she had had something more in her pockets than the crumbled bits of cake with the words “Eat Me” written on them in white icing.

If any of the crumbs were still edible she could take one out and use to grow up to just over the height of the walls and peer over them, just to see what lay on the other side.

Alice popped the crumbling pieces into her mouth and the effects immediately took effect, she began to feel a whoosh, than and then the top of her head became level with the topmost level of the wall; then another sudden upsurge and she was now head and shoulder where she could just make out a kind of golden luminescence. She decided to follow it.
The golden line which had now become much like a ball of wool the likes of which would have excited the imagination of her pet cat, Dina, back home to new heights of adventures, led in and out, over and around walls, which made her lose all sense of direction; but Alice was committed to following the path to wherever it led, and continued unerringly.

Eventually, the glowing path led to an aperture with symbols in a language that she had never seen before, a vague stirring in her memory, said that she had perhaps seen these letters in one of her older sisters lesson books, but if she had, Alice pushed the thought to a back corner of her mind.

She walked in through the entryway and into a spacious chamber. Seated in the center of the chamber in front of a glowing brazier with a cheery fire and a decanter of an amber liquid was a woman.

“Greetings, I’ve been expecting you,” the woman said.

She had wheat-blonde hair restrained by a leather cord.

Alice was more than a little bit startled by this, but remembering her manners she managed to stammer out, “Hello and how do you do, Ma’am?”

Alice curtsied as much as she could with tattered skirts and torn gloves.

With a start she suddenly realized that she was still as tall as the wall and wished she could shrink down just a little bit. However, if the woman noticed she did not seem to find this altering in size at all remarkable and made no comment upon it.

“I would hazard to guess that I’m not at all what you would find at the center of the labyrinth”.

The woman shrugged and then tossed her head back and laughed, “That is all right, the regular denizen of the maze is out taking a cigarette break. I would not recommend the habit, but it does get incredibly boring in here, so I think he’s perfectly all right in indulging every once in a while.”

“I don’t understand,” Alice replied. “Please, if you will, could you explain?”

“Oh, of course, dear, I don’t expect that you’re familiar with our backstory, but my brother and I have both a history and a unique understanding.”

Alice nodded and came closer, sensing that this would be a long story and that the woman would go about it her own way, and at her own pacing.

“My name is Ariadne. You see, it all began thousands of years ago in a place called Thebes, our father was a very rich, very powerful man.”

Alice nodded, and rubbed her hands together. “May I come closer to the fire? It’s a bit chilly in here.”

“Oh, of course, the woman replied. “He was a good man, but alas, even good men can fall prey to the vices of fortune and power, for in order to aggregate more glory to his name and kingdom he was coerced, tricked by the Gods to build this Maze, and in the center he placed a Minotaur. The minotaur is my brother.”

“Pray tell, what is a Minotaur, this is a word I have never heard of before,” said Alice.

“I forget sometimes, how long it has been, Time in here either goes so slowly or so fast. Ariadne smiled and gestured for Alice to come closer to here, getting up from her chair as she did so.

“If a seat, little one,” she invited.

Alice nodded and sat down.
“A Minotaur is a hybrid; a man from the neck down, but with the head of a bull.”

“How can that be?” Alice exclaimed, trying to imagine such a thing and not quite able to wrap her head around the image.

“Be that as it may,” Ariadne continued, as the myths would have it, a hero would have to come along and slay the monster.”

Alice, who was a tender-hearted girl, and couldn’t bear the thought of any animal harmed in any way, gasped. “Did he?”

“No, no, that the thing with stories, they grow, they change, they evolve, my role in all this was to supposedly help the hero achieve his goal. Instead, by means of own wiles, cunning, resolve, and the bit of magic I possessed, I made it appear that the monster had been slain.”

“What happened then?” Alice asked, intrigued.

“The powers that be, well, transposed, transported us here. The modern terminology lacks the proper nuance,” Ariadne replied, shaking her head.

“Well, in any case, the upshot of all this is; is that we are trapped in here until the proper time and person comes to set us free.”

Alice pondered this, a tight line of concentration furrowing her brow, wondering if perhaps that she had been meant to discover the maze, and from then it was not happenstance that she had stumbled upon the glowing line.

For who else could have created that glowing line if not Ariadne herself. And if so, it followed that she, Alice; herself would be the one to brother and sister free. It was a heady thought. Aloud, she said, “I think I understand. How to do I do that?”

“The old way of doing things, you would have to take our place,” the other woman mused.

“Alice paled at this idea.

“Don’t look so alarmed, the Fates were rather strict about the rules, back in the day.”

“No, no, all you need to do is solve a riddle.”

“Fairly straight-forward, as these things go.” Ariadne paused, I think you’re the one, most people wouldn’t have had got a tenth this far into the labyrinth, After all you saw the glowing lines, did you not?”

“I did,” Alice agreed. Hazarding a guess is it bigger than a breadbox, or smaller than a salt shaker. Or is it like the riddle of the Sphinx.”

“Oh ho, so you did get some schooling in the Classics, after all, if you’ve heard tell of the Sphinx!”

“No, not, really,” Alice blushed.

“Are you ready to ken the answer to the riddle?”

Alice gulped and squared her shoulders, trying to appear more confident than she felt, all aquiver on the insides. She dearly wanted to be the one to free the brother and sister, although she had not yet had the pleasure to meet the brother, but no matter. “Go ahead,” she said aloud.
“I saw four things in beautiful fashion journeying together. Dark were their tracks, the path very black. Swift was its moving, faster than birds it flew through the air, dove under the wave. Labored unresting the fighting warrior who showed them the way, all of the four, over plated gold. Alice pondered; chin in hand as she thought it over. How many guesses do I get?”

“Three,” Ariadne replied.


“No, try again.”

Alice thought some more, “A pocket-watch?”

“No.”

Alice thought harder, and then it suddenly struck here, here time in the land underground had an unfortunate habit of time of running together, but she had heard another riddle very similar to this: about why a raven was like a writing desk. It hadn’t made such to her at the time, nor did it now.

But it did spark an answer to the riddle posed by Ariadne. “I have it!” she exclaimed. “It’s a quill pen with raven feathers, isn’t it? To be honest the gold thing threw me a bit.”

“You’re correct, my dear.”

Just then a man with broad shoulders and massive arms came in and placed a hand on Ariadne’s shoulder, and she introduced him as her brother.

He rumbled something that sounded kind; however, Alice could not understand what he said.

“You’re free now!”

“Yes, we’re free and the word in any language has never been as a balm to the soul as that one. Thank you, Alice,” Ariadne said, releasing her grip on her brother’s arm and coming over to embrace her.

“You’re welcome,” Alice replied, ”but how do I get out of here?”

Ariadne nodded. “Now, that you’ve secured our freedom, we must return the favor.”

The bull-headed man nodded in confirmation.

A whoosh of clear, cold bracing air surged through the chamber and before she gasp or laugh, or cry, or any of a dozen other things she could think of, Alice was asleep.

Although it did occur to her how one could fall asleep in the middle of a dream.

Alice came to on the broad greensward in the rose garden of talking flowers and brushed her hair out of her eyes. She stood up and remarked, “I wish the two of them good fortune. Wait, where did the maze, or rather the labyrinth go. I could have sworn it was here only an hour ago.”

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