

# BLACK SAIL



Brenna Lyons

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By

Brenna Lyons

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Black Sail

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## Dedicated to....

Ms. Harrigan, who assigned Edith Hamilton's Mythology to her Sophomore class and fed my love for mythology.

Ms. B, who taught me careful research and cross-checking facts.

All the people at the Mystic Moon, who will understand this story better than anyone else who knows me.

## Notes from the author...

All my facts come from Edith Hamilton's Mythology. Initial readers challenged the facts I used to weave the web of this story, but careful examination showed that cross-referencing the facts does tie the basic premise of Black Sail together. I hope you enjoy the story, and rest assured, there are more like this to come.

NOTE for those who don't know the story of Theseus intimately... Theseus was killed at the home of his friend King Lycomedes. I will leave it to the reader's imagination to decide exactly how that happened after reading this tale.

Happy reading!

*Brenna*

## Black Sail

The birds were loud that morning. Ariadne opened one eye a slit, viewing the lush vegetation of Naxos. Did the blasted birds have to celebrate the day so early? Apparently so.

She rolled over with a sigh and pushed the woven blanket off. It was a warm, sunny day with a brisk breeze — a good day to hang the blanket to air and wash the meager clothing she had created for herself in the last year.

Naxos was a beautiful place, a fitting exile for a princess, she supposed. Ariadne laughed at the pampered life she once had. *A daughter of Minos! A princess of Crete!* “Ha,” she barked at the clear, blue sky, startling a family of birds into hasty flight.

“A princess!” Of course, that had always been her problem. Ariadne was simply *a* princess, not *the* princess. She had never been *the* princess.

When Theseus had come to her father’s kingdom, Ariadne had not known he was the prince of Athens. She saw a wealthy man, a beautiful and fearless man, a man unlike any she was like to have on Crete.

With her sister Phaedra around, no man was interested in Ariadne. If only the pampered toy had married, perhaps one of her lovesick throng might have glanced Ariadne's way. Phaedra, however, would not deign to simply choose a husband. She was like to taunt the men endlessly, raising the stakes of her affections until some fool set the stars at her feet in homage. By then, Ariadne would be an old woman.

*When beautiful Theseus boldly offered himself as a sacrifice to the Minotaur's labyrinth, Ariadne saw her chance. She sent for Daedalus and bribed him for a way to allow Theseus to escape the deadly maze. That her actions were treason affected her not. Anything was worth escaping Crete and having a life away from Phaedra.*

*Hiding herself in the rough cloak of a commoner, Ariadne approached the prisoners with food. The guards looked through her, as they usually did with commoners who came to care for the offerings to the Minotaur. She found her golden man in private rooms and offered him a simple trade, the secret of the labyrinth for his promise to take her back to Athens as his wife.*

*"Who are you that you have such knowledge?" he asked her in hushed tones.*

*"I am the younger daughter of Minos. Do you accept my bargain?"*

*His eyes glittered in the near-darkness of the room. "You have my vow. Hide yourself away on my ship and do not show your face until we are away. We set sail immediately after I best the trap. What is the secret?"*

*Ariadne explained the string Theseus must tie at the entrance and play out behind him as he moved. His fingers brushed hers as she gave him the ball of string to hide*

*within his clothing.*

*Theseus touched her face and drew Ariadne to his body to kiss her. With words of thanks and love, he took her maidenhead in his darkened room. Theseus was a gentle lover, erasing her pain with wave upon wave of pure bliss. As Ariadne left him, he gave her a memento off his person, his embroidered sash, to prove to his men that she was coming aboard under his protection.*

*Ariadne went to the docks with a small pack of her belongings and the sash before Theseus even set foot in the labyrinth. She knew her father would not miss her presence with his jewel at his side.*

*For almost a day, Ariadne paced his quarters, afraid that Daedalus' plan had failed and she would be denied her promised husband, her gentle lover. When the cry went up that Theseus had boarded, Ariadne longed to run to him, but she had to remain hidden as he ordered.*

*At last, she heard his voice in the corridor. "...the princess of Athens...all the wealth you could imagine..."*

*Ariadne threw open the door but stopped short of throwing herself at him. She stood frozen in shock. Phaedra was on his arm.*

*For a moment, no one spoke, though Phaedra's face was set in a smug smile that announced her perceived victory. Ariadne raised the sash to him wordlessly. It was a plea, a question, perhaps of his honor. Surely, Phaedra could not take this from her, too. Theseus gave his word. He took her maidenhead.*

*Theseus looked from one sister to the other with a pained expression. Ariadne knew then. He was weighing his vow to her against his longing for her sister.*

*"I will go," she decided, reaching for her pack.*

*At least with Phaedra gone, Ariadne might still have a*

*happy marriage with one of the broken hearted men her sister left behind. Better that than holding an unwilling man to a vow he made to the wrong sister in a dark room.*

*"It is too late," Theseus breathed. "We have already cast off."*

*Ariadne nodded. "I will expect to be returned to my home as soon as we safely reach Athens. In the meantime, I will remove my belongings from your quarters if you would direct me to ones of my own."*

*Theseus looked at her in surprise and bowed his head. Apparently, he expected Ariadne to be more like Phaedra. Would that he knew what he was asking for behind that golden visage he desired.*

*"As you wish. I have suitable quarters for you."*

Ariadne sighed. The quarters had been small but comfortable. She should have been suspicious after Phaedra's visit, but Ariadne had been ill from the rough seas and sick from the enormity of her error. And so, the subtle intimidation her sister had used escaped her notice entirely — until later.

In retrospect, it made perfect sense to Ariadne. Phaedra had not wanted her to return home to Crete. If their father ever learned the truth of her shame, Minos would use the incident as an excuse to speed his armies to Athens. His real reason would have been the death of his Minotaur and the loss of his jewel, but his younger daughter's disgrace would be a reason that the people of Crete would appreciate and rally behind.

Ariadne did not see it at the time. Such was her folly. When Phaedra had approached her with promises of a marriage to one of Theseus' male



relatives for the heartbreak she endured, all Ariadne could think of was the laughing stock she would be if she stayed in Phaedra's shadow. Her sister would see to it.

When the ship pulled in to Naxos to change the black sail for the white that would announce Theseus' survival to his father, Ariadne leapt at the chance to set foot on shore and escape the endless rocking of the decks beneath her feet. The sweet wine Phaedra gave her soothed Ariadne and lulled her to a deep sleep.

She awakened with a head she would have begged a swordsman to separate from her body and her new life on Naxos. *Drugged!* The wine had been drugged, and the ship was long gone before she woke from it.

Ariadne found crocks of wine and oil, a sack of grain, two knives, and a bit of meat. Her own belongings were stowed in the pack she took to the ship with her — including the hateful sash Theseus had given her in return for her innocence.

She still wondered if the supplies were gifts to ease Theseus' conscience or the pity of one of his men for the wrong done her. Surely, Phaedra had not begged for the kindness shown her discarded sister. Ariadne had wondered at the time— Why had they had not left her the foul black sail for all that Phaedra cursed what it would have meant? Ariadne supposed that its value outweighed her own in the end.

Surviving on Naxos was not difficult, once Ariadne taught herself the skills she needed to survive. Her play at learning to weave tapestries when she was a child was a good beginning to learning to weave loose nets of wool thread from the spinning top she

carved — though it took more than her share of cut fingers to learn the skill of carving. She had seen servants set snares in her life. In truth, Ariadne had spent more time with servants than her equals. It took her only a few weeks to discover the correct way to construct and arm a trap. It was amazing what a few weeks without meat could accomplish in teaching a person to overcome obstacles.

The fish she caught in her woven nets were plentiful. Fruits grew wild. Rabbits were often caught in her traps, and a herd of wild sheep grazed the slopes of the central mountain and provided easy meat on occasion and a fine source of wool. There was a cool stream of fresh water below a waterfall and pool that seemed designed by the gods themselves. The weather was typically fair and the seas calm.

Despite her lack of companionship — or perhaps because of it, Ariadne's time on Naxos had been the happiest time of her life. No other inhabitants meant no sour looks for her dark features, so different than Phaedra's golden presence. It meant no comparisons between them and no pained looks like the one Theseus had cast at her when he realized she was not his imagined prize.

Ariadne wiped away a bitter tear and laughed aloud as she made her way to the waterfall to bathe. "He traded a vain, useless flower for the strength of the oak that saved him," she murmured, not for the first time. Ariadne often wondered if Theseus knew how foolish she found his choice.

\* \* \*

Dionysus stepped ashore, rising from the sea with a sigh. He could have willed himself to Naxos, but he enjoyed the feel of cool water on his skin, and so he glided on the back of a great fish instead. Once on shore, he could have dried his clothing easily, but the wind felt so wonderful as it skated over his wet skin and through the delicate material of his robes to his body beneath that he decided to enjoy the sensation of it.

His visit to Proteus in the depths had been a long one, and Proteus was stranger than usual this past visit. He bade Dionysus to come here to Naxos for an end to his wanderings.

Dionysus shook his head as he surveyed the island. It was a treat to escape to a place so beautiful, but even a god could go mad with no company.

He sighed. If only Proteus had not been so secretive, perhaps Dionysis would understand what dratted quest was here and fulfill it so he could be on his way.

The smell of brine assaulted him, as the sun dried his robes and his purple cloak. It had been many years since Dionysis had been to Naxos, but he remembered a cool waterfall that would wash away the smell of the sea and feel refreshing on his body.

At the edge of the meadow that stretched around the small pool, Dionysis stared in disbelief. A woman stood bathing in the waterfall, as he had come to do. The water ran in glistening sheets over her sun-touched skin and splashed away from her erect

nipples. It pulled at the dark hair that all but covered the curve of her bottom and flattened the matching curls at the apex of her long legs. She was perfection.

Dionysus barely noted that he was moving toward her while he watched, so enthralled with her presence that his mind scarcely seemed to work.

He considered the situation carefully. Was this what Proteus sent him to see? What was his purpose here? Was Dionysis to take this woman back to her people? Her presence on the isle must be some misfortune such as the wreck of a seagoing vessel. People did not live on Naxos. No mortal had ever lived on Naxos. Such was the gods' decree.

Her eyes opened then widened in shock. Dionysus felt a smile touch his lips. She was enchanting in her naiveté. He reached a hand out to her, and she retreated from him with a squawk.

Her robe was suddenly held to her perfect breasts by one shaking hand. The other held a knife, just as unsteadily. She moved nervously from foot to foot, and her wide, brown eyes completed the image of a doe about to bolt.

She found her voice. It was strong despite her obvious fright. "Who are you? How came you to my island? Have you a ship?"

Dionysus stifled a laugh at her audacity. "Your island? Are you queen here then?"

She blushed. "No. There is no royalty here. No peasantry either." She was not a peasant, he knew. She had a lady's speech and bearing.

"A goddess then?" Dionysis bowed his head, hiding his amusement. "By what name should I call

you, wondrous one?"

Her laugh was harsh. "I will grant that the gods blessed this place once, but they have long since gone from here. No gods will answer your prayers on Naxos."

"Really? What prayers of yours have gone unanswered?"

She shrugged. "Does it matter? I provide well enough for myself here."

"You wish to leave then?" If she did, he would provide.

"Where would I go?" There was a cynical note in her voice.

"To your people, of course."

"I have no people."

"Nonsense! Everyone comes from somewhere."

"But is there always a place to return to?" she answered cryptically.

Dionysus shook his head. She was fascinating — a most unusual mortal. "So, you wish to stay here?"

"I have done worse." She glanced at her robe. "Do you mind?"

"Of course not. I came here to bathe, anyway." Dionysis turned from her and stripped off his cloak. He could hear her pulling her robe on and smiled as he stripped off his own and stepped under the rush of water.

He turned to her as he grabbed his robe and cloak to rinse them under the spray. She was riveted, staring at him as the water ran down his chest. When her breathing hitched, Dionysis knew its cause. Her examination of him had stirred his half-awake

member to full readiness.

Dionysis rinsed his clothing slowly, gauging the effect of his movements on her color and breathing. Just as he threw the robe over his shoulder, she dragged her eyes to his face, and her color deepened to scarlet. Was she virginal, then? Or perhaps simply sheltered or shy?

"What is your name, woman?" His voice was low and gravelly. Gods, if he thought for an instant that she would not bolt from him—

She hesitated. "Ari."

Her quiet answer was not the truth. He could tell that much. Why would she be afraid to tell him the truth?

"And yours?" she inquired simply, her eyes still flicking between his face and the length of him aching for her.

Now, *that* was a difficult question. Dionysis thought of what the peoples of the North called him, but 'Ari' might be familiar with the name Bacchus, though her voice held not the inflection of a Northcomber. "My name is Baccs."

She nodded. "Are there others with you, Baccs? Have you a ship?"

"You do not wish to leave, but you ask if I have a ship."

"I only wonder if you are stranded here or if you will soon leave."

He bit back a smile. "I fear I am not leaving for quite some time."

"Are there others with you?" Ari asked nervously, her hands clasped tightly before her.

"No. I am the only person other than yourself, unless you know of another I do not."

Ari let out a breath that announced her relief clearly. "Are you wrecked or somehow lost here?"

"Wrecked on the rocks. And you?"

She hesitated again. "My ship left without me."

Dionysis stared at her in disbelief, but it was the truth she told him. "Without you? You must be joking. How could someone misplace such a jewel?"

Her eyes were suddenly sad. "I thank you for your kindness, but I am aware that I am no jewel. I have seen jewels. I should hope never to be so useless, and I know I am not so beautiful."

Again, she believed she spoke the truth. Had the woman never seen her own reflection? "How could you be missed?"

Ari dropped her eyes from his. "It was not by accident that I was left here, Baccs. It was — a misunderstanding about a wedding that caused this."

A half-truth. "You have no one here?"

"Now I have you, I suppose." A wry sort of smile half-lit her beautiful eyes.

"How long have you been here?"

"Yours is the first face I have seen in a year."

*By my father's name, that was the truth!* His heart ached for her.

\* \* \*

Ariadne reminded herself to move a step away from Baccs as her shoulder brushed his. It had been so long since she had company that she could scarce believe

he was real and not some dream or the imaginings of a fevered mind.

Proving that was only part of her drive to touch him, though. Seeing his blatant arousal caused a tingling deep inside her. It was not a sensation she had encountered with Theseus, though she was sure that her body was craving the simple pleasures lovemaking unleashed in her.

She surveyed him out of the corner of her eye. Baccs was much younger than Theseus — perhaps six or eight years her senior, unlike Theseus who was almost twice her age and with a son as old as she. Baccs was a simple man though obviously of a good family, as his speech and dress attested.

Where Theseus was a golden, god-like man, Baccs was a man of the earth with dark curls that brushed his shoulders and intense black eyes. While not a soldier — or so he attested — Baccs was taller and broader of chest than Theseus.

As if reading her thoughts, Baccs turned his face to her and smiled. "I am real, Ari."

"I know you are." She flicked her eyes to the still-visible erection beneath his robes and suppressed a shiver. Oh, how real she wanted him to be. "What is your business, Baccs?"

"I am a merchant of sorts. I deal in wines."

Ariadne sighed. "That is one thing I do miss."

"Well, that is one wish I can grant you."

"What do you mean?"

"I have pulled several small casks of wine from the sea and hidden them on the other side of the island while I investigated the best place to settle."



"You had a shipment of wine with you when you wrecked?"

"I did. I do not know how many will wash up, but I already have three casks in my possession."

Her heart tripped in excitement. "Would you share one with me? Such a thing is more precious than gold, here."

Baccs laughed lightly. "Would you share your food and shelter with me? It seems we each have something to trade of almost infinite value."

Her heart took up a choppy rhythm. He wanted to share her shelter? "Yes. I think we can reach an agreement."

\* \* \*

Dionysus watched Ari, as she waded in the water, netting fish for their meal. The garment she wore barely covered her upper thighs and was sleeveless. As if the memory of her naked in the waterfall were not bad enough, the sight of her in the tunic robbed him of sanity.

He rubbed at his erection impatiently, trying to ease the tension he felt. Dionysis was a creature of comfort. Tension was not something he enjoyed overmuch.

In frustration, he hiked his robes and took the problem in hand. He watched Ari move in the water as he stroked himself, and his mind formed a fantasy for him.

*He waded out to her, stripped of his robes, and pulled Ari into his arms. She was sweet and responsive, her lips*

*parting to allow him to taste her.*

*His hands strayed down her spine to her firm bottom, drawing her up his body to tease his aching member at the heat of her. Ari arched to him, and he drew the offending tunic off and tossed it toward the shore. She looked after it, not in embarrassment for her nude body, but in concern of losing what little possessions she had.*

*Dionysus cupped her face back to him. "If it washes out to sea, I will fetch it from Poseidon's depths for you," he promised.*

*Ari smiled, and her eyes glittered as she shifted her body, playing the tip of him in her warmth. "Can you do that? Are you a god, then? What name should I call you, wondrous one?"*

*"Yes, I am, and you shall have your fondest wishes, for I am Dionysis. Tell me what you wish, Ari."*

*He leaned to take her mouth again, but she pushed him away nervously. There was fear in Ari's eyes.*

*Dionysus' head snapped up. "What in the name of Olympus?" he cursed. After all, how does a fantasy go wrong? He grumbled in frustration. "Aphrodite," he warned, putting his power into it to send his complaint to her, "I am not a mortal to be played with thus. If this is your doing, end your treacherous games."*

*His sibling did not answer him directly, but Dionysis was sure that he heard her lilting laughter carried in on the waves. He cursed soundly at yet another interference in his life.*

*Still, his anger had solved one problem. He had no need to relieve his arousal at the moment. Dionysis straightened his robes and looked back to Ari.*

Was there a message in this? Would revealing himself to her bring only disaster? Certainly, his father had bad enough luck revealing himself to women. Dionysus was the perfect example of that.

\* \* \*

Ariadne watched Bacchs over the fire he built up. He had been helpful and not afraid of a little hard work, fetching water from the stream and firewood from the treeline. Still, he seemed distracted.

She sighed. Perhaps he was pining for his home and dealings. A man accustomed to gatherings and the challenge of barter would be expected to miss the loss. Would Bacchs try to leave her, then? Would he fashion a raft and brave the sea back to his home?

Ariadne met his eyes over her plate of wild fruits and fish brushed with herbs. "Where are you from, Bacchs?"

"Thebes. And you?"

"Crete. Have you family there?"

"Not there, but I have family — a father and many brothers and sisters."

"Your mother?"

"She — died when I was born."

Bacchs seemed pained, and she felt for him. Ariadne's own mother had died when she was but an infant.

"I apologize for my prying," she mumbled. "I am sorry for your loss."

"No need to be. I took her home long ago. She is at peace, now." A smile curved his lips.

"I suppose you will want to return to your family. You must miss them." She fought to hide her fear that he would do just that.

He laughed lightly. "No. I miss my father, but I do not often see him. As for my brothers and sisters— As the youngest, they tend to meddle in my life too much."

"Why do you not see your father more often?"

His jaw tightened. "His wife does not care for me."

"Then she is a fool." Ariadne said it confidently. It was too much like the reasons her own family had not prized her. "But, you will try to return to them, will you not you?" she persisted, praying all along that his answer would be no.

Bacchs shook his head. "I am no shipbuilder, and I know nothing of sailing. I simply ride the winds with others at the till. I am your mate for some time. People rarely pull in here, as you have seen."

Ariadne sucked in her breath at his use of the word mate. Gods, but she wished Bacchs meant that in the intimate sense of the word.

If she were as worldly as Phaedra, Ariadne would know how to make her wishes known to a man, but in Phaedra's shadow there had been no men to ply such games on, and games of that sort had been her sister's life, not Ariadne's.

"Does that distress you, Ari?" His voice was low and rough again, and his eyes were like smooth seawater on a still, dark night.

"Not at all. I enjoy your company."

His smile was slow and dangerous. Ariadne had never seen such a smile, and it took her breath away.

"Good. I am glad I do not unsettle you."

Unsettle? Baccs rattled her. He made her feel empty and needy.

"What of you? Do you have family somewhere?" he asked.

She sobered. "No. No one will miss me. There is no one for me to miss." That much was true. Phaedra's treachery was proof of her heart, and her father seemed to forget he had a second daughter most days.

Baccs eyed her suspiciously as if he did not believe her, but he nodded and questioned her no more on the subject.

Ariadne felt the sudden need to move the focus from herself. "Where were you traveling from when your ship wrecked?"

\* \* \*

Dionysus hesitated. Proteus' watery realm would go too far. "Athens." It was the last mortal place he had been.

Ari stiffened. She spoke the truth when she said she was from Crete. Why would Athens rattle her?

"I have heard it is very beautiful," she whispered.

"No more so than Crete or Thebes. It is but a place," he dismissed her belief.

"I met the prince of Athens once — when he visited Crete." Her smile was slightly strained.

"Really? I was not aware that Hippolytus had ever traveled to Crete."

"Not Hippolytus. I met the other prince —

Theseus."

Dionysis nodded in understanding. "You have been here more than a year. I forgot." He took in her look of surprise. "Theseus is king now."

Ari blinked away tears and seemed to be hiding some deep emotion. "I thought Aegeus was vital. I heard as much. Did he die of some mishap or a sudden illness?"

"Ah. That is a sad tale. Aegeus and his son had arranged a signal — one that could be seen even when his ship was still far out to sea —"

Her eyes widened. "Good gods! The sail. They were supposed to change the sail. They never did, did they? Did his heart fail in his grief?" she asked urgently, her words tumbling one over the next.

Dionysus stared at her in shock. Her color was high, her eyes full of tears for a foreign king she had never known, which stunned him, but it was more than that.

"How did you know about the sail?"

A deep blush touched her cheeks. "I told you. I met Theseus when he was in Crete."

"In what fashion?"

"I brought him food." It was another half-truth.

"He confided such a thing to a servant?"

Her spine stiffened, and Ari raised her chin proudly. For a moment — an instant in time, Dionysis could have sworn he knew her. Then the haughty expression was gone and the sense of familiarity with it.

She looked into the fire with sad eyes. "I — overheard it while I was nearby."

That part was a lie. Ari confused him. Why was she so intent on hiding her true self from him? She was hiding on Naxos in more ways than one.

"Did his heart fail him in his grief?" she repeated.

"No. He threw himself from the cliffs near the Acropolis." Dionysis cringed, remembering the cry from the gods at his loss. Aegeus had been a most loved son of many of Dionysis' siblings and his father alike.

Her face hardened. "What a foolish thing to do," she stormed. "Losing someone does not mean you give up on life."

The determination on her face solidified the image, and Dionysis knew why he thought he knew her. Still, he had no idea what the resemblance meant. Ari had not been lying about her lack of family, though the fact brought her great sadness.

"Aegeus acted on a moment of grief and weakness."

Her eyes softened at the thought of it. Ari obviously understood moments of pain.

"Theseus was distracted," he continued.

"One should hope so!" The bitterness was back in her voice.

"No. He felt guilt and grief, of course. He was distracted and forgot to change the sail. It was not his intention to do harm. Something unsettled his mind."

"Good. At least he pays for his sins like everyone else."

"You know, I met Theseus' queen when he returned to Athens. She was from Crete as well. Did you know her?"

"Of course. How does one not know one's princess?" There was a bite of sarcasm in that question.

"You look quite a bit like her," Dionysis noted, laying bait for a glimmer of truth he knew was eluding his grasp.

Ari's eyes went wide in surprise, and then they hardened and reminded him again of the resemblance between the two women. "We are both women of Crete. 'Tis nothing more than that." She looked away to her shelter, while he reeled from the outright lie she told him. "I am fatigued. I will bid you good night now."

The sadness in her voice touched him, and Dionysis found it hard to be angry with her for the lie. "I admit to being worn by the day as well. I will join you."

She looked at him in confusion. "Join?"

"Our deal? If you do not feel comfortable with my company, I will sleep elsewhere," he offered.

"No. Of course not. Please, you are most welcome here." Ari retreated into the structure with a look of —

By his father, Dionysis prayed he was right. Her look seemed to be one of anticipation.

Dionysus gave her a few moments to collect herself before he followed her in. Ari was wearing her fishing tunic and was in the bed box under a woven blanket.

She looked at him shyly. "There is only one bed, I am afraid, and the blanket was not really designed for two."

A smile touched his lips. "'Tis a chilly night. You share your bed. I will share my cloak. It is large



enough to cover both of us.”

She nodded and moved to the far side of the bed box. Her eyes widened, as Dionysis stripped off his robes, and her eyes traveled the length of him slowly in the firelight filtering through the doorway. He settled into the bed with her and fanned the cloak over them.

Ari seemed frozen in fear, and he softened. Taking her would not be easy, but he had all the time in the world to put her at ease with him. Dionysis wrapped his arms around her and eased Ari into the shelter of his body. She did not protest the move, and he stifled a groan of pleasure at that.

“It is all right, Ari. You do not have to fear me.” His voice was hoarse in his need, but unlike some gods, Dionysis was not in the habit of taking an unwilling woman, no matter how much he might desire her.

“I do not fear you,” she whispered, her breath teasing at his chest.

It was the truth. Ari was quaking, but it was not him she feared.

“You do not need to fear anything. Nothing will touch you unless you wish it. You have my vow on that.”

She raised her face to him and looked as if she wanted to say something, but she held back. “Thank you,” she said instead.

He held her for hours, as the fire burned down to embers, but she did not sleep. Ari did not even relax in his arms. Finally, Dionysis feigned sleep, hoping to put her at ease.

Ari relaxed against his body. She ran her fingertips over his jawline. Her voice was a whisper in the darkness that touched the spark of his arousal like the caress of a breeze on kindling, stirring the fire for her in his blood.

“Did the gods send you to me, Bacchs? Perhaps they did. Do you think they will show me how to be happy as well?”

Dionysus moved in the darkness, turning to wrap his body around her and striving to make it seem a random act done in sleep.

Ari sighed as she pressed her lips to his chest. “Surely, only the gods could craft a man like you. Would that others were so honorable. I hope you are not another who is lovesick for Phaedra. It would be a gift to meet a man who is not so short sighted. If only the gods would give me a sign—”

She fell asleep shortly after that wish. Dionysus lay for a long time, considering her words. Ari had been hurt by a man — or by men in her past. Was Phaedra responsible for it, or was that unconnected?

Dionysis shivered, as his mind connected what little he knew of her. Ari met Theseus in Crete, but Theseus took Phaedra as his queen. Was Theseus the man who hurt her? It would not surprise Dionysis to learn that he was. Theseus had been unwise in many ways in his life, up to and including the oversight that cost Aegeus his life.

But, why did the two women bear such a striking resemblance when Ari had no family? And, why was Ari hiding on Naxos? Or was it her choice to come here at all? She only said that it was not by accident

that she was left on the island. Did Phaedra exile Ari here to win Theseus for herself?

Dionysis sighed as he kissed her brow. Ari was an intriguing mystery, and he would not rest until he unraveled every one of her secrets. Then he would make her his alone. Dionysis smiled. He had promised her wine. This would work out well.

\* \* \*

Ariadne looked to the horizon for the hundredth time that afternoon. "He is coming back," she assured herself. "He has simply gone to bring back a cask of wine." Still, she looked to the treeline, fearful that Baccs would not return. Ariadne shook her head in disbelief that she had come to depend on his presence so completely in so short a time.

She shivered at the memory of waking in Baccs' arms. Ariadne had opened her eyes slowly, her heart beating rapidly as her position became clear to her. She was stretched against Baccs, held to him by his hands on the curve of her buttocks, her fishing tunic pushed up almost to her waist.

*As Ariadne came fully awake, his hand stroked across the skin of her bottom. Breathing suddenly seemed difficult, and when his touch came again, she moved her hips to him, needing to feel Baccs pressed to her.*

*Feel him, she did. The length of his shaft, resting on her thigh, hardened as she moved. Ariadne gasped, as his hands pressed her closer and the rigid heat of him brushed into the liquid gathering between her thighs.*

*Baccs' eyes opened. His gaze was intense. He searched*

*her face for an answer, though he asked no question. No, he did ask a question with his body, but Ariadne knew not what answer he was looking for.*

*His mouth covered hers, tasting her slowly. This question, Ariadne knew how to answer. When his tongue touched the seam of her lips, she opened for him. Baccs groaned as he explored her mouth, and the feeling of it sent a wave of heat to her already aroused core.*

*He was not gentle in his discovery. Perhaps gleaned her knowledge of the art in her reactions, Baccs' tongue moved in quick strokes that mimicked a man's possession. Ariadne moaned into him, her hands seeking the dark locks tangled around his cheek.*

*Baccs turned until his body pressed down on her and drew his length against her, moving his hips in a rhythm that made her ache for his possession. His mouth kept time with his hips, in mute promise of the loving to come, a fierce mating of their bodies that she longed for.*

*His mouth traced her ear, nipping at the lobe. Ariadne cried out and arched to him.*

*"Baccs, please." She was begging for his touch now. She would do anything to feel his body inside her, his passion unleashed.*

*"Who are you, Ari? Who are you that I burn for you this way?" Baccs' tongue played at a spot behind her ear that scattered her thoughts. "Please tell me. I must know you."*

*"You do know me. I want you to know me." She wanted him to know every finger width of her body, inside and out.*

*"Your name, Ari – Tell me your name that I might call to you as I climax in you."*

*Ariadne stilled in Baccs' arms, the force of his request burning through the haze that gripped her mind. He knew*

she lied about her name. What else did he know?

*"Who are you Baccs? Did they send you to me?"*

She ached that she suspected him, but her past experiences proved that her judge of a man was not sound. Would Phaedra stoop to this? Would she send Baccs to Ariadne to win her love and quell some unease between Athens and Crete?

*"Who? The gods?" he asked in confusion.*

Ariadne hoped it was truly confusion. *"If they sent you, you know who I mean. There is no need for me to speak their names."*

Baccs hesitated. *"No one sent me, Ari. No one. Trust me."*

She nodded. *"There is nothing, Baccs. I am no one. I have no home or family or past. My existence here is all I am."* It was all Ariadne wanted to be – all she wanted to remember.

His eyes hardened slightly. *"I want you, Ari, but I will not take a woman who does not trust me – or who deceives me."* Baccs rose and pulled on his robes, facing the doorway angrily.

Terror rose up in her at his withdrawal. *"Baccs, where are you going?"*

*"To collect one of the casks of wine. I will gather fruit as I walk, so you need not worry about a fire for me this morn. If you wish, we will still share the wine this evening over a meal?"*

*"Of course. I will arrange it."*

*"And share your shelter?"*

*"Yes. Of course – if you still wish my company."* Ariadne clasped her hands tight under her woven blanket, praying to the silent gods that he still wanted that.

He nodded. *"I only want to know you, Ari. Please, do*

*not deny me this."*

And so, he had walked away, leaving her in the bed aching for him. Ariadne had not seen him in all the hours since then.

As she prepared the rabbit she found in her snare, Ariadne fingered the packet of herbs she took from her pack. Arol, one of the keepers assigned to her when she was a child, told her of the uses for various herbs. Arol gave Ariadne the packet when she was fifteen and the old woman saw her struggle to attract any man away from the brilliance of Phaedra. The herbs were an ancient mix designed to fire a man's lust, Arol had explained. Ariadne had never considered using them — until Bacchus. She kept them all these years out of love for Arol, the one woman who would care enough to give Ariadne such a gift.

Ariadne wavered. Was such a thing right? She sighed. Could she do this to him?

"Not a full dose," Ariadne decided aloud. If she used half a dose and it was split between them, it would only be the barest nudge.

\* \* \*

Dionysus watched Ari from the treeline. He had not gone to get a cask of wine. There was no wine to collect. Being a god had its advantages. Producing a cask of wine out of thin air was a simple matter. Dionysus could have done so the previous night, but he was presenting the appearance of a mortal for Ari.

He had watched her all day. Ari checked her traps and gathered herbs and fruit. She cooked and

collected water. Better, she preened for him – and she thought.

Thinking was the important part. She wanted to trust him. Dionysis could feel it. Ari had to be willing to open up to him for his plan to work. The magic he would place on the wine would only magnify her willingness to comply to his wishes, not instill it in her.

It was a push, a simple push to help her trust him. Dionysis sighed, wishing there were other alternatives. No, there was no other way. Then, why did he feel so guilty for doing it? Dionysis hefted the cask, creating it as he rose. He had to go to her before he could talk himself out of the deception.

Ari smiled at him, as Dionysis entered the open area around her fire. Her eyes glittered, and a comely blush stained her cheeks.

“The food will be ready shortly,” she informed him.

“Good. Let us enjoy a cup of wine while we wait.”

She nodded and turned the rabbit on the spit before collecting two cups from the shelter, the newer made only the day before, when she realized the need for more than her solitary setting. Ari had carved the piece in earnest while they talked, a rough but functional cup, which she used herself, granting him the better of the two. He remembered her nervousness, as she hid the scars announcing her dedication to her own survival, handing him a drink of water and pulling her hand back almost before he saw those scars clearly. His urge to uncover the truth had only grown.

Dionysus knocked the end cap of the cask free and dipped the cups. "To love?" he asked.

Ari's eyes were suddenly sad again. "I do not believe the gods grant such frivolous wishes."

Dionysis nodded. The gods rarely did. Would that all mortals were so wise. "What then?"

"To a comfortable life on this beautiful island with our thanks."

"Agreed." He watched as she drank the first quarter of her cup then sampled his own.

Ari beamed at him like a child with a favored gift in hand. "Oh, Baccs. This is wonderful."

"My own vines." A half-truth, but not a bad tale to spin for her. "Drink. We should drink as much of this as we can, so we do not waste it."

She was halfway through her second cup before Dionysus started seeing the evidence that his magic was at work, and it was more than simply the wine affecting her. As he refilled her cup a second time, Dionysis sat close beside Ari and fed her fruits from the platter she filled. It would not be long before she was ready to tell him the truth of herself.

Near the end of the third cup, she started to sit forward to tend to the meal.

Dionysus eased her back with a slow, sweet kiss, knowing that Ari was more unsteady than she realized. "Let me take the rabbit from the fire," he offered. In the condition he had placed her in, it was dangerous to her to let her attempt it.

Ari smiled a lazy smile and touched his cheek, as he moved away. She was ready for his questions.

"Where did you get the name Ari?" he inquired as



he cut a slice of meat and tested it. The herbs she used were unusual but tasty. He cut another slice immediately and ate it, too.

She hesitated. Perhaps Ari was not ready to answer, after all.

"It was a pet name one of my keepers used for me," she admitted, her voice slow and measured.

Dionysis turned with the spit in hand. Very soon, Ari would be ready to tell him what he really wanted to know.

He offered her meat, but she declined in favor of another slice of fruit. Dionysis asked her about her keeper, a woman named Arol who was more a mother to Ari than anyone had ever been. He ate ravenously, plying her with the magic-laced wine all the while and watching her resistance to answering fade with every sip.

When her fourth cup had disappeared, Ari laughingly took a slice of the meat from his fingers. Dionysus hardened, as her lips closed around his fingers. He shook his head as he tried to clear the visions of her from his mind and looked at the cask suspiciously. His own magic would not work on him this way. Was this Aphrodite's doing, then? He decided to forego more wine and took another bite of the succulent meat.

At any rate, Ari was ready for his questions. "Ari is a pet name. What name is it short for?"

"Ariadne." There was no hesitation that time. "My father named me."

Dionysis smiled widely, leaning close to her and rewarding her openness with another slow kiss.

"Who is your father?"

Ariadne adopted a stern look that was no doubt one her father often used. When she spoke, her voice had a gruff edge to it. "Minos, King of Crete." Her face crumpled as she thought about him. "Dread ruler of his people," she whispered miserably.

"Was he dread to you?"

"Disinterested," she slurred. "His jewel was all he saw. I might never have existed."

For a moment, Dionysis was certain he heard her wrong, but as he replayed the statement over and over, his anger claimed him. "He cared more for his treasure than his daughter?" If Minos had, he would lose that treasure. Dionysus would see to it.

Ariadne shook her head and took a drink from her cup. "Not his treasure. Just a single jewel."

He leaned close to her. "What jewel could be fairer than you?" He wondered at that, but he did not wonder at the sudden urge to kiss her again. She was so beautiful and trusting.

She scowled. "You have met her. Phaedra. My elder sister. Nay! She is *not* my sister. What sister treats another thus?" Ariadne waved her hand at their surroundings then shook her head, the anger fading from her as abruptly as it had come. "I would rather be here than in her shadow, so I suppose I should give thanks for this fate."

He did kiss her then, a less restrained kiss than the last few had been. Dionysis would not allow Ariadne to doubt herself. "Yes, I have met Phaedra. Do you know what I saw?"

Ariadne shook her head and ran her fingertips

down the folds of his robe over his chest.

"I saw a spoiled child who pouted and fussed to get her way. I saw a woman unfit to wear a crown, so interested in her own whims that she ignored the needs of her people."

Ariadne nodded and kissed him. Dionysus cupped her head to him, eager to consummate. She wanted him. The magic could not create a want. It could only intensify an existing want. He would not use any other type of magic.

Some measure of sanity broke in and reminded him that he had many questions still to ask while she was under his magic, and making love to Ariadne could well take all that time and more. Questions first. "Ariadne, you must tell me. Was Theseus yours? Did Phaedra take him from you?"

A tear spilled down her cheek. "No. He was supposed to be mine, but it was all a dream. I saved his life to make him mine, but he never was — not really. All along, he thought he was making his vow to Phaedra. She was the only one he saw. Phaedra was the only daughter of Minos any man saw." She looked at him hopelessly. "What good would holding such a man to his vow be when he would be dreaming of my sister all the time?"

"None," he agreed, aching for her. Dionysus furrowed his brow. "How could Theseus make such a mistake? You bear a resemblance, but not so much that he would not know the difference."

Ariadne blushed. "It was dark, and I was wearing a hood. Had he seen my accursed hair, Theseus would have realized I was not the woman he

believed."

"He vowed to marry you?"

She nodded, but a pained expression crossed her face. There was more.

"How did he come to have Phaedra instead?"

"He sent me to his ship with orders to hide and wait his arrival. When he came out of the labyrinth, Theseus saw her and brought her along, believing Phaedra too lovesick to wait as he ordered.

"For his part, Theseus did not realize his mistake until he was faced with me holding his sash. Phaedra knew, but she also knew a smitten fool when she saw one. She hoped Theseus would break his vow for the woman he thought would be — that he wanted to be his queen. By that time, we had already cast off. I released him from his vow, asked for quarters away from him, and demanded to be delivered home once he and Phaedra had reached Athens safely."

His head spun. "Quarters away? Of course. Why would he think —"

Ariadne blushed and looked away.

"It was dark, and he took you thinking you were Phaedra." Dionysis did not question that it was the truth.

She nodded.

"Were you a maiden?"

Her voice was a choked whisper. "Yes, I was. I thought— But, what does that matter? All his sweet words and gentle touches were for Phaedra. When he saw me in the light, the look of dismay— What woman would want him?"

Dionysus pulled her to his chest, wavering

between the pure fury at Theseus and Phaedra and the torment for Ariadne warring in his soul. "How came you to Naxos?" He had to know. How guilty were her persecutors?

Ariadne laughed a hearty laugh with an edge of hysteria. "We came to change that fateful sail — or so I was told. Phaedra and I came ashore with some of the sailors while they got fresh water. She fed me drugged wine."

Dionysis cringed inwardly at his offering of wine. How he had wronged her.

"I woke to find myself stranded with a minimum of supplies and the rest of that horrible wine. I wonder sometimes if Phaedra thought I might use it to finish myself off." Ariadne barked a short laugh that showed how close she came to giving in to that very thought. "So, you see, Bacchs. Were it not for poor Aegeus, I could almost find the whole story of the black sail very funny."

Dionysus found his anger blooming into something of a living thing. "Theseus allowed this? He knew?"

"When he left Naxos? I know not. Phaedra could have lied to him for a day or even two. By the time they made harbor in Athens, he had to know. In that, Theseus allowed it. Had he wanted to send someone for me, he has had ample time to do so.

"You said he was disturbed when he reached Athens. I can only hope that means he had just learned that I was left behind — or that he saw Phaedra as she really was when she convinced him not to come for me. That is all it is — a vain hope. I

know that."

"What did they leave you with?"

"Enough to support me until I learned to support myself. A few crocks of wine and one of oil. A bit of meat and grain. Two knives and my pack from the ship." She laughed that heartbreaking laugh again.

"What is it?"

"Phaedra did not check the pack before she left it with me. The sash was still in it. I do not remember putting it there. I must have been so upset that I left his quarters with it still in my hand—"

A crooked smile touched Dionysis' lips. "You still have it?"

She nodded in confusion.

"Get it for me." It was more than a request, less than an order. His mind was set on a course, and he would not be turned from it.

"So we can burn it together?" Her eyes glittered at the prospect of it.

"No. So I can wear it."

Ariadne shuddered. "Bacchs, no. Why would you want such a thing?"

He kissed her, not gently now but with a fierce need. "After tonight, you will only remember me when you see the sash. You have my word. Get the sash, Ariadne."

Her eyes widened, but she did not voice a complaint. Ariadne disappeared into the shelter and came back with the offending sash in her hands. It was black as Theseus' sail with ships embroidered in gold on its ends.

Dionysus smiled as he took it from her. He led

Ariadne to a young tree and swept off his cloak to lay it on the ground. He kissed her, demanding all of her passion and reveling when she gave it freely.

For a single moment, he wondered if Aphrodite had a hand in this affair. Then, Ariadne's hands began to trace the muscles of his chest, and Dionysis decided to thank his sister for this moment, if it were her doing.

He stripped her robe from her and watched her in the firelight. Ariadne blushed, but she raised her chin proudly and met his eyes.

Dionysus sucked in his breath at the sight of her. "You are so lovely." He smiled as he silently called on the elements to aid him in his plan for her.

"Why will I remember the sash, Baccs?" There was a teasing tone to her voice now.

"Do you trust me?"

She nodded.

"Then I will show you."

Ariadne watched in confusion as he bound her hands with the hateful sash, but she did not balk the move. Dionysus lowered her to his cloak and bound her hands to the trunk of the young tree by her head.

That accomplished, he stripped off his own robe. Ariadne surveyed the length of his body. The stark hunger in her eyes drew him, and he captured her mouth. She arched beneath him. Dionysus groaned as he felt her wiggle toward his erection, trying to capture him within her.

"Too fast," he chided her, nipping at her lower lip. He pushed to his feet.

"Baccs?" She was concerned but not frightened.

He smiled to reassure her. "I simply need a few things. I will be quick."

Dionysis brought the tray of fruit and a cup of wine to the edge of the cloak. Before she could question him further, he lowered a slice of fruit to her lips. He pulled it back so Ariadne could only take a small bite. She met his eyes and smiled as she chewed the offered treat.

Just as she swallowed, Dionysis rubbed the bit edge of the slice over her nipples. The cool breeze he called stirred over her body, caressing her skin and teasing her nipples, sensitized by the fruit, to rigid peaks. Ariadne cried out as his mouth closed on one taut nipple. He sucked them clean then played at them, warming them and allowing his breeze to tantalize them before he returned to warm them again.

She writhed beneath him, trying to find purchase. Ariadne bit her lip as she watched the motions of his mouth. "Baccs, please."

"I am far from done, my love."

Dionysis reached for the cup of wine next, cradling her head to offer her a drink. He kissed her, reveling in the taste of the libation mixed with Ariadne's personal flavor. Her feminine musk was rich and drugging.

He raised the cup to his own lips and drank from it. "It tastes sweeter when I drink it from you."

Dionysis poured a bit over each nipple, ordering his wind to caress her again. He started at the hollow between her breasts, laving the drops that raced over her body, while Ariadne stifled another cry.



Dionysus met her eyes. "Still," he instructed her. "You must be still, now."

The wind was slightly colder now, bringing the rain he wanted, but Dionysis still had time to play. He poured a bit of wine into her navel. Ariadne stilled and her head came up to watch what he was doing, just as he hoped she would.

She was still until his tongue started to trace the edges of the dip filled with wine. Her muscles tightened, and wine skittered over her body. Dionysus cast her a look of mock censure before he started chasing the droplets over her stomach and hips.

Ariadne gasped, as his tongue played at her dark curls, stealing droplets that carried a hint of her musk to his starved senses. She shivered, spilling more of the burgundy liquid over her creamy skin.

He laughed lightly at her groan. "If you are not still, it will take me all night to finish," he teased her.

A blush touched her cheeks, and she arched her body to spill most of the wine left toward her curls. It was a blatant invitation that Dionysis could not ignore. He cleaned her stomach first, swirling his tongue in her navel, while Ariadne moved against him and pulled at her bound hands.

She grumbled in frustration. "Baccs, please untie me."

"You will have your chance, Ariadne. I will use this sash in so many ways that you will not remember it has any purpose but allowing me to make love to you."

"My chance?" she panted, as he returned to

capturing the wine from her curls.

Dionysis smiled as he ran his tongue over her core, giving her one jolt of intense pleasure that caused her to jerk against her bonds.

"My chance?" Her voice was a gasp of delight, uttered as she shifted toward his tongue again.

He favored her with another slow lick, smiling as Ariadne shivered in response. "After I have shown you the many ways to please a man, I will let you return this favor." His voice was raw in his need for such a thing.

"Show me. Please show me how to please you."

"Next time. This time, I intend to pleasure you." Still, his erection jerked at what he wanted from her.

"It would please me to scatter you as you scatter me — if only for a moment."

Dionysis smiled. "I admit to a certain — hunger." That was an understatement, and he knew it very well. The urge to have her mouth and hands on him was almost all consuming.

"Show me." Her voice was silk seduction.

"Would you like a drink of wine?" he offered.

Ariadne smiled in understanding. "It would taste sweeter from your body."

Dionysus shivered at the invitation in that simple statement. He moved further up her side and immersed as much of his member as he could fit into the cup of wine. He set it aside and played the tip of his erection over her soft lips.

Ariadne's tongue darted out, cleaning the wine from him in long strokes that had him aching to take her. "Like that?" she asked shyly.

"Do you want to make me forget all control?" His breathing was already ragged in the last of that control.

She nodded. "Very much."

"Take me in your mouth as I do your breasts."

"Will you feed me some wine?" Her eyes glittered in the knowledge of what she was doing to him.

Dionysus groaned as he complied with her request. Ariadne took his length in her mouth, sucking at him and running her tongue around the head until he felt he might go mad from the sensation.

When he started moving his hips to slide in and out of the moist heat, her eyes widened. Then they fluttered shut and Ariadne groaned. The vibration surrounded the length of him in her mouth and rode through his body as a rumbling that touched his soul.

As the fine mist of rain began, Dionysus laid down beside her, returning himself to her torture while he spread her legs. He smiled as the rain gathered on the broad leaf over her, just as he planned. When the first drop fell, Dionysis watched its progress. It slid down the folds of her sex slowly. He met Ariadne's eyes, as she released him and gasped. She trembled in his hands.

"Relax," he soothed her as he spread the folds to bare her sensitive inner self to the next drop.

The drop fell, finding her tender self waiting for it.

She uttered a cry that was somewhere between shock and longing. Her eyes were heavy lidded. "Baccs, what are you doing to me?"

Another drop fell and made its way down her core, and Ariadne squeezed her eyes shut, working her

kiss-swollen lip through her teeth. Dionysis smiled. The magic made her so receptive to him – so responsive.

“I am making you mine, Ariadne.”

Another drop fell. She moaned and turned her head away, trying to close her legs against his insistent hold. The fine mist of rain mixed with the sheen of sweat on her skin and made her dark hair appear nearly black in the firelight. Ariadne cried out harshly as the next drop fell on her heated body.

“Do you want to be mine?” he asked.

Her eyes opened and she nodded slowly. “How do I make you mine, Bacchus?”

He dropped his mouth to her as another drop fell, following its path over her then darting inside her to taste her musk better. Ariadne cried out, pulling against her bonds again. She was so sweet, so ready for him. Dionysis set out to drive her to the edges of climax, turning her body slightly to position her to the ravishing of his mouth.

Dionysis groaned into her body, as she captured his shaft between her lips and sucked at him as if she might die without him. For a few moments, his mind ceased to function. It had been decades since a woman had wanted him this desperately.

Ariadne did want him. There was no question of that. The magic could not make her feel something that was not already there, and even in larger doses than this, Dionysis had never seen a woman, even one who all but threw herself at him before the magic, react so intensely to him.

Dionysis pulled away. Ariadne was confused by

his withdrawal, but she was also in need of him. It showed in her eyes. She started to speak, but he covered her mouth with his fingers while he turned beside her.

He kissed her in slow, thorough movements while he covered her with his body. Dionysus met her eyes. Under the influence of his magic, she could not lie to him. He would need to know her true mind.

"Ariadne, I am going to make you mine, now." He brushed her hair from her cheek. "A woman, when she climaxes, is fully open – her heart and mind as well as her body." He seated himself fully in her and sighed as she arched against him. "Come for me, Ariadne."

Dionysis anchored her hips to his and took her in hard, hot strokes. He prayed to Aphrodite for stamina, for the ability to hold off for her. Never before had he felt the burn to climax before the women he bedded. Always, it was a given that Dionysis would bring them to ecstasy before finding his own release. Now, when it was so important, he felt himself slipping. The edges of the void sucked at him as he fought to hold back the rising tide sweeping him away.

Ariadne's shattering climax was a joy to him. *One more moment – One more thing before I follow her.*

"Ariadne, if you feel anything for me, tell me now." His voice was a plea. Never had he wanted something so much and so feared losing it.

"Oh, Bacchus. I love you. Tell me you will be mine forever."

His heart soared, and he flew off into the abyss of

color and sensation. Recovery was slow coming. Dionysis lay his face on the rapid heartbeat at her throat, as the sky gave up its load in a torrent of warm, cleansing rain.

"I am yours, Ari. You have my word that for every moment you draw breath, you will have me by your side." *And Aphrodite help me, would that I was mortal to follow after her!*

\* \* \*

The first days after Ariadne took him as her love were little more than a blur to Dionysis. He took her again and again, just as he promised he would. After every time, he would cause her to say that accursed mortal's name before teasing her that his job was unfinished. Ari still remembered the name of Theseus.

It became a game of sorts. Ari would smile sweetly as she said it, knowing he was about to tease her body to joy again. At times, she would saunter up to Dionysis with the sash in her hands and ask him to remove a stubborn memory. It never failed to make him want to do just that.

Every time, he asked her if she felt for him, and she would cry out his name or profess her love. Ari begged him to be truly hers and to tell her he loved her as he claimed her. It was never a lie for either of them.

Dionysis educated her in countless positions and techniques. He used the sash as a blindfold as he made love to her with down and fruits, the soft feathers and chill juice almost more than she could

stand. He bound her to himself as he took her beneath the waterfall. He bound Ari's hands behind her as she rode him, and he teased her with the soft material as he took her from behind. Every new experience was accompanied by the sash, as he promised.

He let Ari bind him more than once. Dionysis smiled at the memory of the first time. She brought him to climax with her mouth. Then she brought her sweet, wet body to him for his attentions. He hardened again for her, as she cried out her pleasure to his handling, and she pulled him back to her mouth. At the moment she felt her release coming, Ari straddled him and let her body's milking draw Dionysis over again.

When he found the packet of love herbs, Ari tearfully admitted using them on him the night he gave her the laced wine. She begged his forgiveness, unknowing that he had done the same to her. Dionysis shivered at the knowledge of how desperately she wanted him, even before his wine.

He closed on her, stripping off her robe so that Ari stood naked before him. His fingers teased at her, bringing her quickly to readiness. Dionysis pulled back the tunic that he had produced and claimed washed up from his wreck and settled Ari on his length. He rode up into her with a fierce need.

Dionysis cupped her face to him as his body tightened to spill in her. "I am not drugged now, Ari. See how I crave you?" He held her to him as he climaxed, feeling his seed set off her own release.

Then, there was the wine— He coaxed fine vines on the mountainside and pretended to find them by

chance on a walk with Ari. As a tribute to their first joining, she loved to tease Dionysis with wine, pouring some on herself and laying out in invitation or pouring some on him and sinking to remove it without a word.

They seldom wore clothing. The first morning, Dionysis convinced Ari to fish with him unclothed. Over time, they were unclothed more than clothed, casting appreciative looks at each other and enjoying the union of their bodies at barely a moment's notice.

Ari asked him once if Dionysis missed the things he lost when he was stranded on their island. He laughed as he admitted that he was hard-pressed to see anything as lost when he gained so much.

\* \* \*

Dionysus smiled at Ari, as she cooked at the fire in the home he built for her. She got to her feet awkwardly, the formidable mound of his son pulling her off balance as she worked.

They had almost given up hope of this blessing, but Hera put her dislike of him aside in favor of Ari's pure and simple prayers. For four years, Ari had prayed for his child, while his esteemed step-mother ignored her pleas. Ari never gave up. She never showed bitterness in her prayers. She simply continued asking for Hera's blessings day after day and year after year, until the coldest of the gods could not help but be moved by Ari's sincere love for her husband.

He started, as Ari looked at him strangely. "What



is it?" Dionysis inquired, rising from his place on the floor.

"I do not know. I am — tired of a sudden." She wavered on her feet.

He scooped Ari into his arms and to their bed. Her eyes closed as he walked, and she did not answer when he spoke. Dionysis lay her on the bed, afraid of what illness would take her from him. His fevered mind did not note the approach of his favored siblings, until Apollo's hand touched his shoulder and he spoke.

"Come, brother. Artemis has seen to her safety, and I have seen to her sleep, so your woman will not miss you."

Dionysus turned on him in anger. "What have you done? Release her," he demanded.

Athena touched his face, her gray eyes wide in concern. "Calm, brother. Dress quickly. We would protect her from those who would harm you both."

Dionysis looked to her uncertainly. If Ari was in danger, he could not leave her.

Apollo's voice was rough and commanding. "She is safe here. She will not know you have gone. You have my word on both."

He nodded and waved his hand to clothe himself, a bit of magic Dionysis had not used since Ariadne came into his life. As an afterthought, he tied on the sash and added his purple cloak. He kissed Ari's brow and tucked a blanket around her, laying his hand over his son fondly. "I will return, my love. You have my solemn vow. I will return."

Dionysis turned to his siblings and waved a hand

theatrically, indicating that they should lead the way. He followed them through the doorway, sucking in his breath as he felt himself transported through space in the way of the gods. He stepped through the other doorway – and into his father’s throne room. Dionysis looked about at the full council of all of his closest siblings warily.

Zeus looked up at the congregation before him in concern. “My children, why have you come here?”

Apollo bowed. “We ask for your mercy in granting Dionysus his woman for all time, Father.”

Aurora stepped forward in obvious agitation. “Forever young, Father – Not as I made my poor Tithonus.”

Zeus touched her cheek and nodded his understanding. “Tell me the tale,” he commanded. “I would know of her importance.”

Dionysus began to speak, but Aphrodite cut him off. “Theseus played with this woman’s heart for want of her sister. Ariadne released him from his vow. Still, that was not enough. To avoid punishment for his crimes against her heart, Theseus allowed his wife to banish her sister to the isle of Naxos with little more than her will to live to sustain her. It was an affront to me and to love. It could not go unpunished.”

“Punished? Daughter, you know how the Fates feel about interfering in mortal futures. Has the ire of the Fates taught you nothing?”

Athena approached Zeus next, knowing their father could never be angry with her. “He and his wife were an insult to my great city, father. Their

crimes had to be punished."

Zeus nodded and smiled indulgently. "Continue, Daughters."

Aphrodite continued her story. "Love for love, Father. Theseus sought to possess Phaedra, but she was a self-serving and inconstant woman. She took her own life when her bid to lure Theseus' son, Hippolytus, failed her."

Artemis stepped forward. "Theseus blamed and banished my dear huntsman, Hippolytus, his own son. He sent away my pride for the word of a devious, lying wench that showed him not even faithfulness."

Zeus nodded. "We must set things right for Hippolytus."

Apollo met his eyes. "My son, Aesculapius, waits my orders to do what needs be."

"Aesculapius," Zeus roared, his face darkened in rage. "You killed him? Hippolytus was innocent. You said so yourselves."

Aphrodite raised her chin in challenge. "It was necessary — is necessary. Theseus will affect his own banishment to win his son's reprieve. He must do so now that he knows his own guilt."

"Explain why this is necessary." Zeus' eyes fanned over his children suspiciously.

Aphrodite sighed, shooting a pained look at Dionysis. "With the loss of Phaedra, Theseus thinks to force Ariadne to the vow she released him of."

Apollo locked a grip on his arm, as Dionysus tried to bolt back to protect her. He stilled as Aphrodite continued speaking.

"Her maiden's blood on him means nothing," she decided hotly. "I requested Proteus to name him who should be Ariadne's true mate, and his vision showed Proteus our brother, Dionysus. Ariadne is a most loving and accepting woman, and their love is the strongest I have seen in all my years. Dionysus cannot lose her, Father."

Zeus caught his youngest son in his gaze. "Tell me, Dionysus. Tell me of the things that draw you to this woman."

Dionysis nodded. "Ari knows not who I am. She thought me a simple merchant, washed up from a shipwreck. Still, she shared her food and fire, her shelter and bed. Ari, a princess born and raised, took me to her heart — a merchant in her eyes. She asks no finery and no pomp.

"She mourns Aegeus, a man she never met, for Theseus' inattention due to his dealings with her caused the man's death. I never once heard her wish ill on Theseus and Phaedra, those who abandoned her thus. Ari is a most rare jewel, Father."

Zeus nodded sadly. "Your mother was such a jewel. If I grant this, will you bring her here?"

Apollo answered for him, a fortuitous circumstance since Dionysus had no idea of the answer to that question. The thought of bringing Ari to Olympus made his head swim. She would not care for it, he was certain.

"With your permission, Father— Poseidon has agreed to create unfavorable currents, and Aeolus has agreed to cause winds to spirit any ship away from the island."

"You mean to inhabit Naxos?" Zeus asked in sincere interest.

Dionysus nodded. "I believe Ari would like that."

Zeus sighed and steepled his fingers. "If Ariadne agrees, I give her the gift of eternal youth and health with my son, Dionysus."

"Thank you, Father."

"What will you do, now?" the king of the gods asked, a knowing smile curving his dark lips.

Athena laughed. "Now we go to Athens to seal Theseus' fate."

"No," Dionysus decided. "He is mine alone."

He sent his siblings off to the tasks they must attend to: Aphrodite and Artemis to Hippolytus, Apollo to his son to call the young prince back from death, Athena to speak to her high priests and demand that Theseus never again set foot in Athens, and Aurora to hold off the sun so that Dionysis might greet the dawn in Ari's arms. After a goodbye to his father, Dionysus visualized his route and walked out of Zeus' throne room and into Theseus' quarters on board his ship.

Theseus did not see him arrive. The old king was deeply engrossed in his amusements with a young servant. Dionysus screwed up his face in disgust and placed his hand out for the cup of wine that appeared at his thought.

"No wonder Ariadne was so affected," Dionysis announced. "If that was the extent of your performance, any man would have seemed an improvement."

Theseus rolled off his servant, grabbing for his

sword. "Who are you? How did you come to my quarters?"

Dionysus looked at the frightened serving girl sadly. "Go, child." He called her child, but surely she was at least seventeen. *So very young*, he mused.

She looked to Theseus fearfully.

"Go," the old king ordered her, "but do not go far."

The girl left, clutching her tunic to her chest.

Dionysus sighed, as she left. "You thought to go to Ariadne with the slick of another woman on you," he spat. "Of course, you went to Phaedra with her sister's maiden's blood staining you."

"Who are you?" Theseus demanded again.

"Put your clothing on, Theseus. You disgust me."

Theseus looked at the intruder in stunned silence, but he lay his sword near him warily and pulled on his robes.

"Come have a cup of wine, and we will speak."

Dionysus placed his hand up to grasp the cup as it appeared.

Theseus' eyes widened. "By Zeus," he swore.

"Ah, yes. My beloved father. I should warn you that he is no happier with you than my siblings and I am."

"The gods are angry with me? How have I injured them? What can I do to make right my misdeeds?" he asked urgently, his ruddy face paling in the knowledge that he had crossed the gods.

"To appease Athena, you will banish yourself for all time from Athens. To appease Apollo and save Hippolytus, you will deliver up the whole of your library to Aesculapius at Mount Pelion."

"Hippolytus will be returned to me?" His face lit in savage glee.

"No. Hippolytus will be returned to Athens. To appease Artemis, you will not attempt to contact him."

"I lose my son?" Theseus raged.

"You have already lost your son. Do you wish him to continue his long walk in the underworld?" Dionysis asked pointedly.

His anger disappeared. "No. Of course not. It is a small price to pay for his life."

"In retribution for your crimes, Apollo withdraws his healing. No more should you seek danger. He no longer backs you. Aphrodite has seen her revenge in your wife's own treachery, and Aurora—" Dionysis paused, as his sister's plea filled his mind. "Aurora would have you go to your friend King Lycomedes. I know not why, but it will appease her."

"And you? Tell me, mighty Dionysus, what was my crime against the gods?"

"Ariadne was your crime," he growled. "The root of your many crimes."

"I go to make it right. It is all I wish."

He lied, as Dionysus knew he would. The surety of that fact burned in Dionysis.

"You go to bury your cock in the body of the woman who should have been your queen," he shouted. "You go to lay with the true jewel of Minos' loins."

"It is my right. I gave my vow. Her maiden's blood—"

"Means nothing. She is not yours to take." His

voice was cold and hard in warning. "You will not touch her."

"She is mine," Theseus replied in frustration.

"You were willingly released from your vow," Dionysus dismissed his claim.

"She rescinded her vow. I did not relinquish my claim."

"Ariadne carries her husband's son. She has found her peace. To appease me, you will stay far from her. If you do approach her, you will anger myself, my siblings and father, Poseidon and Aeolus. Such anger is not wise to bring down on yourself."

Theseus stood transfixed for a moment. When he spoke, his voice was weak and resigned. "Why the interest, mighty one? What stake have you in this matter?"

Dionysus' smile spread, and he pushed his cloak back over his shoulders, baring the sash to his nemesis. Theseus' eyes widened in shock. He looked at Dionysus in undisguised fear.

Dionysis nodded. "A gift from my wife," he confirmed. "She is dead to you, Theseus. Make me a vow, one you dare not ever break."

"Ariadne is no more. You have my word," he choked.

"Then you should collect your serving girl, while I return to my home and wife." Dionysis stepped through the doorway and into his home with a smile of triumph on his face.

\* \* \*



Ariadne woke to the feeling of Baccs laying kisses on her face. She opened her eyes to the rising sun and listened to the restless birds. It was morning? She lost the whole evening and night?

She stretched into her husband's arms. "I am sorry, Baccs. I do not know what came over me."

"Your time is close. You must let me do more while you rest."

"I love you, husband."

"Do you love me enough to live forever with me on our lovely island?"

"Until I die," she promised.

"No. Do you love me enough to promise me forever? Do you want me forever?" His face was abruptly serious, as if Baccs feared losing her love.

"Forever," she agreed, laying a kiss on his chest. "Would that we could have forever, I would give you that long."

He laughed, a sound of ultimate happiness. Baccs kissed her, a slow kiss that heated her blood for him. "Forever starts this moment, love. Celebrate with me."

Ariadne shook her head in wonder. "I will always revel in your arms." She stilled in his embrace. "Did you hear that? Was that laughter?"

Baccs laughed as he kissed her. "Birds, Ariadne. They are but love birds singing for our happiness."

## Author Bio...

**B**renna Lyons lives in Haverhill, MA with her husband, three children and a zoo of pets. She was born and raised in the Hazelwood/Glenwood area of Pittsburgh, PA and spent thirteen years touring the east coast as a Navy wife, nine of them living in VA Beach.

She is a poet and novelist. She has written a total of 15 books so far in addition to a number of shorts and novellas. Brenna has books placed with two pubs so far and books or shorts on submission with five more.

Her degrees are in accounting and computer programming, mainly because a former teacher commented that Brenna would either make the perfect auditor or the perfect thief. Never one to pass up a challenge, Brenna has worked as an auditor, tracking down fraud suspects, finding the backdoors into exchange computer systems, creating accounting programs for government and small businesses, and as a writer — a thief of attention by redirection. Overall, it's the best of both worlds.

Brenna is a member of the Society for Creative Anachronism and enjoys camping, making cordials, baking breads, and fingerloop braiding in addition to writing period poetry. She enjoys groups such as BroadUniverse, EPIC and EPPRO.