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The Fall of Anteaous

The Fall of Antaeus

by

Ryder W. Miller

Antaeus lay on the ground searching for strength, but his body was now broken and wet with blood. The end was near, but he had a few minutes left to reflect before he would die. When he moved he winced in pain. He could not find the sustenance and healing power from the Earth now. His end would be soon. The crowd that had seen him wrestle with Hercules had almost dispersed, but Antaeus's wife waited there with him.

She was no longer angry as she had been for months, but also not quite sympathetic.

Antaeus adjusted his body on the ground so he could face her.

"Why did you do this to me?" he asked.

"I did not do this to you. You did this to yourself," Tinjis returned.

"You summoned him."

"No, you did by your actions. I was different. You did not speak for me."

"You were supposed to speak for me."

"I no longer wanted to."

"Did I deserve this fate?"

"You offered others less."

Antaeus turned on his back and looked at the sky.

Antaeus remembered back to a few weeks ago. Things had been going fine. His crops were thriving and everybody seemed to hold him in high esteem. They had gotten over their fear once they got to know to obey him. He was a protector of the village and the Earth. His large size was a deterrent. Most who passed by the town sought to avoid him. He had collected the skulls of those who had disobeyed. He had magical powers and was a child of the gods. The son

of Poseidon and Gaia he was, but he was especially a land lover.

Such a position gave him the authority to dictate to others. Those who defied him might lose their skulls to him. He also ruled the village in his role as a protector. There were other dangerous men in town, but Antaeus was a head taller than them. If there was ever a problem he would be contacted. Most who passed by knew that he was the protector of this village. Many avoided him and the village if possible. He was known to pick the random fight, but that had not been anytime recently. Some would say that he was a bully, and he liked to be in charge.

Antaeus had thrived as a farmer and an important person in the town. He would spend his time in the fields planting and removing the unwanted shrubs and trees. He could usually pull a bush or small tree out of the ground with his bare hands. Their field, where he had planted Olive trees and built a house, was once a wild scrubland.

He had piled up the scrub trees high one day and had a bonfire. The villagers, seeing the smoke, gathered to hear Antaeus promise that he would protect the village. It was quite the party on the windy Fall night with wine and dancing. Antaeus brought a pig for all to share.

"Why do you choose these parts?" one villager asked.

"The weather is nice, the hills are fertile, and it is not too far from the sea," he said.

"Do you expect us to eat pig? Why no fish?" one asked

"The fish are my kinsman," Antaeus

said. "I would rather eat pig or cow."

Anteus was annoyed, and those around could see it, but it was a party and he decided to shrug it off.

"You should be happy that the gods supply us with food," he said.

"And why should you decide what we eat?" asked one timidly.

"I do not decide, but this is my party and I will feed my guests as I please. If we eat all the fish of the world then we will destroy the kingdom of my father."

The man grew timid and nodded, but that was not enough for Anteus who grabbed him by the shoulder.

"Not questioning me now," he said.

The man tried to walk away, but Anteus held his arm firmly. He tried to shake his arm loose, but Anteus yanked him towards him and squeezed him in his arms.

"What are you doing?" one yelled.

"I will not be questioned," Anteus said.

"But this was supposed to be a party," said the man in Anteus's arms, who winced as he was crushed.

The assembled crowd gasped as they heard him scream.

"I will have your skull," Anteus yelled as he ripped the man's head from his body.

The crowd from the party was too shocked to walk away.

Now covered with blood, with a broken body at his feet, Anteus began to laugh. He lifted the head for all to see.

"I can protect this village, but I will be obeyed."

The crowd looked on in shock.

Pointing to his feet he continued.

"Here is a man who disobeyed me. He is not the first skull I have taken, but I will take more if necessary. I am the son of gods and I will be obeyed. I offer you protection in return."

"But what of the marauders?"

"Any man that passes this way will need contend with me. In return some of you will

need help plow and harvest my fields."

The crowd grew silent and then one said:

"Sounds fair to me."

"Enjoy the party. I will go wash up,"

Anteus announced.

The mood had dimmed, but many were hungry and they ate of the offerings made by Anteus.

Tinjis followed Anteus to the stream where he would clean himself.

"Why must you do this?" she asked.

"I am the son of the gods. I need take responsibility. The gods are blamed, but I can only help if I am obeyed. They need to know that they must fear us if they wish to be protected."

"But why don't you leave us alone. Why do you not return to the sea and be with your father?"

"What of my mother? I preferred the land to the sea. He was angered."

"You can be with both of them at the seashore."

"I must find my own way. I am no longer fully a child of the gods. I chose a less rewarding path."

"But you are taking too much responsibility."

"I am the son of gods; protecting a village is not too much for me. If I am listened to I will succeed."

"What of me? Am I not to be listened to?"

"You name the person and I will take their skull for you. I am here because of my love for you."

Tinjis smiled, but she was not completely pleased. She felt Anteus was not quite human in his certainty. He was not always from the village. He had wandered there from the ocean and made a home for her after they had fallen in love. He also was a head taller than all the others in the village, and though not widely popular his will was heeded. The people in the village did not

want to be warriors or soldiers. Anteauss made their life safer, but he had an emotional edge that was not quite normal or always predictable.

Over the years he had collected many skulls and those who passed through the area knew to fear him. He could challenge anyone who passed by to a fight, and he was strong enough to break bones with his hands if necessary.

The village had become quiet, almost to the point of seeming haunted because of him. There was no need for a freestanding army, because of him, but everybody in the village was subject to his strange moods. After a time he began wanting to collect more skulls. He thought it would be a way to get mankind to fear the gods more and if he collected enough he might someday impress his father and regain his acceptance. His father did not like that he chose to forgo the sea.

Tinjis thought something needed to change, but she remembered the stories of his childhood.

Anteauss did not fit in with the other children. From an early age everybody feared him. It did not help that he was the child of the gods and was therefore partly one himself. From outward appearances he resembled a child like any other, but there was a certain power about him and he displayed a sense of entitlement. He was stronger than the others and everybody eventually learned not to bother him.

"I will be king some day," he said to a teacher.

"What makes you think you will be ready?"

"I am of divine origin. Why do the others choose not to be friends with me?"

"You are different."

"I don't want to be. I will protect the people."

"From who? We need protection from your parents. The seas are dangerous. The land is unruly."

"I will change that."

Anteauss tried to talk with his parents about this but they were taciturn.

"So you wish to be one of them. You give up much in doing so," said Poseidon.

"I can help them," Anteauss responded.

"You can also help us. You can be an envoy between us and mankind," Gaia said.

"So I will be able to keep human form?"

"If you choose, but you will be saying no to the life of a god. You will not learn all our powers."

"They may need me," Anteauss said and he walked away to sleep.

Gaia called out to him before he left.

"As long as you are touching the ground you will have the strength you need. The Earth will give you power. You must also stay nearby or your power will recede."

Gaia comforted Poseidon.

"He is needed as a god," he said.

"He may be able to help them."

"We must make sure he does not know things. He cannot be another Prometheus."

"He will someday return. This decision will make him a person with no community. He will not be accepted as a human and he will not belong among the gods. He will try to marry and have children, but he will not belong."

"He will seek to come back, but he will need to prove himself first."

"What will you ask of him?" asked Gaia.

"I will let him decide, but they are more likely to fear him and heed what he would say."

"He will live with distinction."

"He will be able to best any man in combat."

"Yes, but there are other children of the gods. Zeus may not accept him."

"Let's not mention him often at Olympus."

They found a human mother for Anteauss and he grew up in Libya not far from the sea.

He tried to fit in, but most chose not to be friendly. He also was bigger and stronger than the other children. Most learned not to start fights with him, but he liked to wrestle and started fights with others himself. From an early age he had broken the bones of a few of his challengers.

Then, in his late teens, he met Tinjis, who seduced him with the opportunity to have a normal life. She was tall and fair. She was sometimes fearful of the boys from the village and gravitated towards Anteauss for protection. She became smitten by this large man who wished only to be like the others. He built a large farm and a house for them to share.

"Together we can be happy. Together we can have a normal life," Anteauss said to her.

"But you are not really human."

"The gods have had children with mortals before. I have grown. I have aged. I may be more human than we know. I am also an animal now."

"You will expect me to obey."

"Yes. The whole village must so I can protect you."

"From who?"

"From those who do not heed the gods. From godless people. From marauders."

"We are lucky to have a giant here. You are needed."

Though they tried, they could not have children. Anteauss spent much of his days in anger about this and grew bitter. He would rip the shrub trees out of the ground and replace them with orchards. The subject was not brought up with the other men in the village, even though they met regularly to train for combat and to harvest the fields.

Anteauss excelled as a farmer and had a deep understanding of the offerings of the earth.

"The Earth will provide for those who treat her with care. Every few years, let the fields lie fallow so they can regain their power to nurture and create life," he taught.

Anteauss liked to spend time in the fields, but they nurtured him despite his resentment because he could not as yet father a child. He also grew jealous of the other villagers who had children. He also knew that Tinjis had grown dissatisfied with him for not being able to impregnate her. He thought that maybe she would try to have a child with another.

They would need to be threatened. Maybe he had been wrong to spend his life with mortals? Maybe he could have better helped them as a god? But he knew his father would not accept him under any circumstances. Some in the area were distrustful of Poseidon and refused to live by the sea. Many would not even visit the shore for fear. These people preferred the fields and the deserts.

Anteauss made them pay for this disrespect of Poseidon. This was what he would likely need to do to regain his father's acceptance.

Word had gone around that Anteauss's village was dangerous to travel nearby. Strange stories arose about a giant that collected human skulls. Local marauders came back with tales that the land had become dangerous. They had left the area and decided to pursue their practices elsewhere.

There was speculation about the number of skulls that had been collected. The giant, who most did not have a name for, was widely known to be strong enough to rip off one's head. Anteauss would not reveal his name or his origin, but some had a suspicion that the gods were at work. Who else could have produced such a killing animal. There were some warriors that traveled that way to challenge the local champion, but they had not been heard of again. Some thought Poseidon was at work. If not obeyed by the land lovers, he would be feared.

High on the mountain, in a palace at the top, Zeus looked down into the image in a

agitated pool of water. He was intrigued, but not quite amused.

"I always knew that someday he would trouble me," he said to his wife Hera.

"We are not the only ones who want greatness," she returned irritated.

"Yes, but don't you remember what we were told of him? He wanted to help mankind. That is why he went to live with them, to be one of them. He could have really been one of us."

"We are not the only ones who change," she replied.

"But he has become such a bother. Who does he think he is?"

"He is not one of our children. He is not one of us any longer."

"But he wants to be. That is his motive."

"He is not the only one who seeks to impress us."

"Yes. This is our concern. We will need to teach them a lesson."

"Send him again if you would like," said Hera.

"Yes. His tasks will never have an end. This would be a worthy challenge."

Hera replied with only a smile. She looked forward to see Poseidon angered again.

Things seemed to have been normal until he arrived at the village with a lion's pelt hung over his shoulder. He was bigger than most of the travelers that passed by and different in a way. He seemed so much more confident than most of them. He looked very strong, but so did many who had passed by the village to challenge Anteaous and never return.

Most did not recognize him, but a few knew and whispered that he was Hercules. Now the village was really in trouble. Zeus must be annoyed, they thought. Many chose to leave town to avoid the potential contact.

"Why are you here?" one of the villagers asked the newcomer.

"I am here to challenge the giant of Libya."

"Why?"

"He has harmed many. I seek to set things right."

"Is Anteaous your enemy?"

"In a way, but more of rival. Please let him know that one has come to accept his challenge. Do not let him know who has come."

Anteaous was not fearful, having never been bested, but he had heard whispers that Hercules came to challenge him. He decided to meet him where he waited by the cross roads.

The two men sized each other up. Anteaous, the Giant of Libya was a head taller. He was not thin, but he was not as broad as Hercules. Hercules had sat at the cross roads waiting for his challenge to be answered. He has waited for hours under a tree and the sun beat down on the valley. They were both now hot with sweat.

Anteaous did not come alone. His colleagues were hushed as Anteaous made to greet the challenger. Anteaous also brought his pet bird, a trusted companion that he was proud of. A small group had gathered to watch the contest.

"Why are you here?" Anteaous asked.

"I am here to best the giant of Libya."

"Who told you of me?"

"Word has spread of your prowess. I hear the you can rip the head off of a man?"

"I have to those who would disobey me."

"Well, you won't have mine, Anteaous."

"We shall see."

"You have chosen to be one of the animals. Not all the Gods are happy with you."

"All the animals needed our help. I also seek to do the gods' bidding, but I have not heard from them for some time. I seek to serve my master Poseidon."

"He is not the one in charge," said

Hercules moving towards him.

"Yes, but like the animals, you disrespect him at your own peril. Why hurt what does not seek to offend? We have needed the animals as they now need us."

Hercules began to say something.

"Enough of this talk, yes, but I warn you that I do the will of the gods as well," said Antaeus who dropped in stance and spread his arms wide.

Hercules stepped towards him, but Antaeus was quicker and lifted Hercules off the ground and tossed him aside.

Hercules started laughing from where he fell on the floor.

"Such strength for an animal, I was not prepared."

Hercules jumped on his feet with a seriousness that the onlookers noticed. There was a gleam in his eye which was disconcerting.

One of the onlookers said to go get Tinjis, because Antaeus might need her.

"I will kill you before her if I must," said Hercules, the smile disappearing from his face.

They circled each other; then Antaeus lunged forward and they embraced in struggle.

They both sought to dominate each other with their strength, and it almost seemed like the ground trembled while they fought. Antaeus was the stronger and Hercules would step away before Antaeus could push him to the ground.

"I serve the Earth and the Sea," Antaeus said.

"You once did," said Hercules.

"Collecting skulls, what kind of honor is that."

"I and the gods will be obeyed, if not, feared."

"But there are other ways. This territory ceased to need heroes. You stopped being a hero."

"I offered them protection. The gods have rewarded us with bountiful harvests."

"Zeus is annoyed with Antaeus, and my tasks are not over. You also killed the innocent."

The two embraced again in struggle, but this time Antaeus pushed Hercules to the ground. Rather than be caught, Hercules quickly scampered away.

"You will never best me on the land. After what I have done for my father, you will probably never best me on the sea as either."

"So sure of yourself? I have never lost a battle. I serve those from the sky. People, not birds, fish or plants for me."

Hercules realized that Antaeus was stronger than him, but now he remembered that he gained his strength from the ground, from Mother Earth. Would he not be like any other mortal man if he was thrust up into the sky? Yes, now he remembered that being mentioned to him over drink before he took on this task.

This time Hercules rushed him, bending down, almost if to tackle him. Antaeus was not prepared and pushed his arms down after Hercules grabbed his waist, but he found himself lifted into the air.

"How do you like the sky?"

Now he felt Hercules' strength. Antaeus felt the air go out of him while he was being squeezed. With his legs he tried to reach the ground, but Hercules leaned his back backwards and the ground was too far away. Antaeus's arms flailed back and forward, but it did not stop Hercules who held him in a death grip.

Antaeus hips were the first to break. Antaeus was in too much pain to think and Hercules adjusted him in his arms to crush his ribs. Antaeus screamed and Hercules laughed.

Tinjis had now arrived to watch Hercules break Antaeus's limbs before dropping him to the floor.

"The ground will not serve you now," Hercules said. "You tried and you failed with all. You inspired fear, not respect. The animals have been put here for us. Not us for them."

Tinjis was surprised at the outcome. This had been their time to gain power and they failed all.

"Who sent you?" she asked Hercules.

"Not the animals. You would do wisely

not to disrespect me," Hercules said to her with a shocking and awful smile.

"What of the village?" Tinjis asked.

"You will have the fish and chickens to protect you," Hercules said laughing while he walked away.

Maybe someday Antea's message of communion with all of creation would inspire others, Tinjis thought, but it might not be possible for some time.

