

Agenor of Heraklion

Siddhartha Jagannath

The land of Heraklion was ruled by the proud but weak Agenor, son of Belus. Rather than safeguarding his kingdom like a true ruler, he wasted away his time in the company of scholars and aged Sicilian wine. He handed over his administrative duties to his ministers and locked himself in his chambers. He was hardly ever seen outdoors, but anyone in the palace gardens could hear his boisterous voice applaud the work of the poets he extravagantly patronized. One day his advisor, Doryclus along with the other ministers mustered up the courage to approach Agenor. When they entered, Agenor was intently watching a production of *Oedipus Rex* by a troupe from Crete. His bloodshot eyes were welling with tears as Oedipus plunged the brooch into his eyes, blinding himself. In his hand he held a once-full amphora of wine in his right hand. He was a picture of absolute wretchedness. Doryclus looked at Agenor in total disgust. He slowly approached the king and kneeled on the soft carpet. When Agenor saw him, he was enraged. He smashed the amphora on the floor and yelled, "How dare you enter my chambers without my consent! I command you leave this very moment."

Doryclus maintained a firm countenance and said in a calm tone, "Oh great Agenor! Oh lion among kings! I implore you to do your duty as a king and fulfill your responsibility towards your subjects." The other courtiers too expressed the same desire. Agenor, however, had had enough. He summoned his bodyguards who pushed the helpless courtiers out of the room and slammed the door shut. With nothing else to do, the dejected and humiliated courtiers left for their respective homes. Doryclus, however, headed straight to the temple of Diana the huntress and prayed for the welfare of Agenor in spite of the fact that Agenor had humiliated him. With this, Doryclus headed to his quarters at the palace.

In the mean time, Diana, on hearing her faithful devotee's prayer, approached the grand council of gods on mount Olympus. She requested permission to punish Agenor to which Zeus and the other gods readily agreed. Having accomplished this, she headed towards the kingdom of Heraklion in the guise of Agenor's personal boatman. She made her way to the personal boathouse of Agenor and awaited the arrival of Agenor. After sometime Agenor arrived in all his grandeur. He settled himself comfortably in the boat, which Diana began to row. After a while Agenor decided to strike a conversation with his unusually

quiet boatman. He asked Diana, "My good boatman, are you familiar with the great plays of Sophocles and Aristotle?"

Diana, like any boatman would, replied, "No your majesty, no I haven't."

"Oh you poor soul," he said, "you have wasted a quarter of your life. You must have at least studied the writings of Socrates."

Once again Diana replied, "No good sir, I haven't."

Why you illiterate peasant, you have already wasted half of your short life. Any literate person in our kingdom would have read the comedies of Euripides. Have you?"

Again the answer was a negative. "You unschooled wretch! I should have known that it would be wasteful to converse with you. You, my friend, have wasted three quarters of your lifetime. It really is a shame."

At that moment a storm brewed by Poseidon split the boat into two halves. Water filled the boat and it began to sink at a rapid pace. "Oh foolish king," said Diana in her true form, "you don't know swimming do you? Your whole life is a waste, and is as good as gone. May this be a lesson for you." Saying this an enraged Diana left for her abode, leaving Agenor stranded in the water. Hades prepared to receive Agenor's troubled soul with open arms. Then, all of a sudden everything went blank.

Agenor woke up to see Doryclus's loving face looking down on him. "At last! I see your majesty has finally woken up. Are you all right?"

"I am fine," said a humbled Agenor. "How did it come about that you saved me?"

"Nay, it wasn't me. I found you lying on the beach, in the most sorry state one could perceive. I picked you up and carried you to my quarters. You must thank the gods and not me for saving you."

As soon as he had recovered, Agenor performed a splendid sacrifice for goddess Diana after which he ruled his kingdom justly till the end of his days.