

Excerpt from **Hercules: Road to Redemption**

(my comic book adaptation of *The 12 Labors of Hercules*)

Logline: To redeem himself for slaying his own family in a fit of madness, Hercules must complete 12 impossible labors set forth upon him by King Eurystheus and the Goddess Hera.

The 1st Labor ~ The Nemean Lion

Scene 1 ~ Pilgrims in the Desert

Two parents and a son hold hands as they traverse the arid plains of Nemea. They clutch at their mud-colored cloaks, trying to pinch them shut as howling winds blow up clouds of dust. They are making a pilgrimage from Cleonae to the Temple of Zeus near Nemea. The parents wish to pay tribute to Zeus out of gratitude for their son overcoming a deadly illness.

The boy points off into the distance and says, "I can see it, Mama! The Temple of Zeus!"

The mother pats the boy lovingly on the head. They can see the temple in the distance, far removed from the city.

Just then, they hear a terrifying roar from somewhere nearby. They hunker down and scan the surrounding plains in a panic, a fearful look on all their faces. The father whispers as he points, "There. Behind that boulder. We must hide." They all duck down behind the large rock and quiet themselves, hoping to go unnoticed by the beast that had just bellowed so fiercely.

The crunching of gravel and sand can be heard as something with a heavy tread draws near. The father peers over the edge of the boulder and spies the mighty lion of Nemea, which is larger than any normal lion by far.

Never before have I laid eyes upon such a fearsome creature in the natural world, the father thinks to himself. *It must be a pet of the Gods.*

The Nemean Lion halts to sniff the air. It has detected the family's scent.

We shall soon be discovered by the beast, the father thinks. *I must do something to protect my family, but what?*

A grim look overtakes his face. He knows what he must do. He holds the heads of his wife and son close to him and whispers, "I will lead the lion away. You stay with your mother, boy. Do as she says."

"No, Papa, don't leave us," the boy hisses as he clutches at his father's arm.

The father gently removes the boy's hand from his sleeve. "This is something I must do," he whispers to his wife and son, and then quickly kisses both of them on the tops of their heads. He rushes out from behind the boulder and the mother covers her son's mouth as he calls out to his father.

The father stands in plain sight of the lion and waves his arms in the air, yelling, "Me! I'm the one you want! Follow me!" The lion growls as it glares at the father. The father runs off and the lion bounds after him.

"Quick!" the mother says to her son, "We must hurry."

The mother and son run in the opposite direction that the lion ran, clutching hands as they go. They hear the death cry of the father—they sob and cry, but they keep running. Soon, the mother looks behind them and is startled to see the lion chasing after them—its mouth and paws crimson with the father's blood.

The mother squeezes the boy's hand tightly so he'll pay her heed as she says, "Keep running! Never look back, no matter what you hear!"

"But, Mama—" the boy starts.

"Hush now! If you love me, then do as I say." She relinquishes her grip on his hand.

The son reluctantly obliges to his mother's final wish, running onwards as tears stream down his cheeks. The mother stops and turns to face the lion. She closes her eyes and spreads her arms wide, offering herself up to the lion in place of her child. The lion pounces upon her.

The boy runs off into the distance as his mother's screams echo across the plains.

Scene 2 ~ Court of King Eurystheus

In the throne room of Tiryns, a stronghold in Mycenae, King Eurystheus sits upon his throne. He is rather scrawny, looking withered by the passage of time, and he has an aquiline nose. His royal guard surround him.

A soldier carrying a spear approaches from the entryway and announces, "My King. Hercules has arrived. Shall I show him in?"

“Yes,” King Eurystheus says, “you may.”

Hercules enters the throne room through towering double-doors and walks up the length of the room, stopping to kneel at the base of the steps that lead up to the throne. Hercules humbly states, “It is an honor to meet you, King Eurystheus. My name is Hercules. I have come to offer my services to your lordship. I was sent here by the oracle of Delphi.”

Eurystheus smugly declares, “I know exactly why you have come all this way to Mycenae. You wish to redeem yourself for past crimes, and you must perform ten labors while in my service to properly atone.”

Hercules has a shocked look upon his face. “You know much, my King. I am at a loss as to how you know so much about my personal journey.”

Eurystheus says, “Hercules, you are famed for your physical strength, but knowledge is true power. You would be surprised at what the King of Mycenae knows, of how knowledgeable I am of this land and its people.” He finishes by saying, “There are few secrets that are beyond my grasp... even the mysterious will of the gods... I can see it as clearly as a map drawn on a piece of parchment.”

Hercules says, “Since you are a man from whom secrets cannot hide, then I shall speak plain. Yes, my family was slain by my own hand—in a fit of madness that I am unable to explain. My only wish now is to make up for what I have done by being of service to Greece and its people. The gods guided me to your court, and I trust their wisdom that you are the man who shall lead me along the righteous path.”

Eurystheus gently applauds. “Well said. I appreciate your sincerity and openness,” the King says. “Though you have admitted to committing one of the most egregious sins, I am a virtuous king, so I shall graciously accept you, Hercules, as a citizen and loyal servant. As the gods have decreed, your journey of atonement shall be comprised of 10 labors that you must perform, each one a seemingly impossible challenge you must somehow overcome. And alas, the first labor is already upon you.”

The King proceeds to tell Hercules, “A man-eating lion is terrorizing the desert near Nemea. It started off rampantly killing the livestock of the local farmers, but after feasting on a few pilgrims, it has developed a taste for human flesh. The Temple of Zeus is located in that area, and while the lion yet stalks the land, none can safely go worship or pay tribute to the king of the gods. Who

knows what disasters may befall Greece if such a neglect of reverence towards Zeus is allowed to continue?"

Hercules nods in understanding. He says, "What I must do is clear. I must hunt down this lion and slay it, for the good of Greece. I will return when the task is completed." Hercules bows before King Eurystheus.

"May the gods watch over you," Eurystheus says with reverence.

Hercules stands, turns away, and departs. After he leaves, the guards close the heavy double-doors at the entry to the throne room.

An advisor to Eurystheus scurries to his side and asks him, "Forgive this query, my king, but why did you not tell Hercules that this lion is no ordinary beast, that they say it is the offspring of Typhon and Echidnae—the mother and father of all monsters! Hercules would be better prepared to face such a monstrous creature if he knew more about it, such as the rumor that no mortal weapon can pierce its pelt."

Eurystheus answers, "Hercules is in need of humbling. He sees himself as a god that walks among mortal men, but he is just a bastard that should never have been born—a god's mistake. He will learn what it truly means to be unkillable, how mortal he actually is, and that lion will teach both those lessons to him."