

LYCAEUS

You haven't even met her, how can you offend her already?

TELEION groans.

LYCAEUS

In the past, son. We must do better now- prove yourself worthy of her affection.

CALISTA enters wearing a veil, followed modestly by DELIA. LYCAEUS and TELEION hurry to stand. ARCHAION pounds his spear once.

ARCHAION

High Princess Calista of Ithaca, Daughter of Aries of Olympus.

The nobles all bow lightly to each other, a performative gesture. LYCAEUS gives TELEION a look. TELEION opens his mouth to speak.

LYCAEUS

Princess Calista!

TELEION shuts up.

LYCAEUS

Come, feast at my table. I trust our accommodations were to your satisfaction?

CALISTA sits beside TELEION, who visibly tenses. DELIA stands off to the side. LYCAEUS and TELEION sit down.

CALISTA

All but few, thank you.

LYCAEUS

We at Court Eleia invite you to share in our bounty, tonight and for many nights to come. I heard tell of your...timely arrival, are there more of your party joining us in the coming days?

CALISTA

I have my party and whoever follows is without consequence.

At a motion of her hand, DELIA gingerly lifts
CALISTA's veil. TELEION does not look.

CALISTA

I would know my promised Lord.

TELEION

I would be known.

CALISTA

Is my face so displeasing to you, prince?

TELEION

No.

CALISTA

Turn your eye to me. What, do you think I have some love spell meant to bewitch you?

TELEION

Do you?

LYCAEUS kicks TELEION under the table.

TELEION jumps, and, startled, looks up- at
CALISTA. Deer in headlights. CALISTA chuckles.

CALISTA

Not so great a warrior after all.

TELEION

I beg your pardon?

LYCAEUS

All my sons have trained in the arts of war. Automedon in the south sea, Diomedes in the east,
Aethalides in the west. Teleion honed his craft on our shores, with our proud Archaeon, here.
Between the five of them, they have knowledge enough to take on the whole of Mycenea.

CALISTA

You number a servant among your sons?

LYCAEUS

Archaeon is ward to me. I owe his father a great debt, and have taken Archaeon as my own for his education. He has served our house well.

CALISTA

How kind of you. So, Teleion, you remain safe at home while your brothers face peril overseas?

TELEION chokes on his wine.

TELEION

I beg your pardon?

CALISTA

Are you part parrot?

TELEION

I don't find your remarks endearing, princess.

CALISTA

I don't appreciate your tone.

TELEION

You insult my honor in my own hall!

CALISTA

By the Fates, what did you eat?

LYCAEUS

This alliance will do much to decide the fate of the Ionian Islands, including the turn of the tide against your enemies, princess. And Teleion, control over the mercantile sect.

CALISTA

Swinging a blade around behind stone walls is hardly a show of courage.

TELEION

Did you hear that around the loom?

CALISTA

I have defended my island from a hundred foes that would rob our kingdom and burn our towns. I could do it again with one arm behind my back, you- you couldn't raise a hand against a field mouse!

TELEION stands.

TELEION

I have heard much tell of your feats, princess, but I'm astounded your manners remain uncriticized.

CALISTA stands.

CALISTA

Uncriticized? I am the most gifted woman of the sword to grace the sands of the Mediterranean!

TELEION

Gifted enough to lead an army into madness?

LYCAEUS

Children-

CALISTA

Only as mad as your own Mad Queen!

Silence.

CALISTA

If I were half as mad as her, I wouldn't need your precious artillery. I'd kill everyone, even my own child.

TELEION

She didn't kill anyone.

CALISTA

Squeak up, mouse.

TELEION

I am right here! Breathing air and wasting it on you!

LYCAEUS

Teleion!

TELEION

Squandering my time on someone so uncivilized-

CALISTA

Bold from a man half savage.

TELEION

You're so great a warrior? What about a test?

CALISTA

The games will be test enough.

LYCAEUS/TELEION

The games?

CALISTA

I will be competing in sword play and discus and whatever else you dare challenge me.

LYCAEUS

You mean you've brought an athlete you've sponsored-

CALISTA

I mean what I said.

TELEION

What- this is a complete embarrassment- I am not competing with her!

CALISTA

Aw, are you scared?

TELEION

For you, maybe.

CALISTA

Really. I appreciate the attempt at performative chivalry, that's very sweet of you.

TELEION

You wouldn't know sweet if it stabbed you in the chest.

CALISTA

He's a poet, too!

LYCAEUS

Enough! Vipers, the two of you!

LYCAEUS sighs. He is too old for this.

LYCAEUS

Calista, you know women's involvement is...unprecedented.

CALISTA

And? You're going to deny a proven warrior of Olympian blood from a sacred festival honoring that very power?

LYCAEUS

...You will both compete in the games for your honor-

TELEION

That's not fair!

LYCAEUS

-Depending on how you two behave, the wedding is planned for the event finale.

TELEION

...Why so soon?

CALISTA

(lightly) T'would make an easier husband in death, but lo. I concede.

LYCAEUS

Very well. It seems you'll have an Amazon for a bride, Teleion.

TELEION shakes his head, as if to shake away a clouded mind. He looks away from CALISTA, brow furrowed.

TELEION

Excuse me.

TELEION brushes past CALISTA and exits.
CALISTA is incredulous yet bemused. LYCAEUS
frowns. He invites CALISTA to sit. She does,
TELEION's seat looming empty between them.

...A hundred foes?
LYCAEUS

Do you doubt?
CALISTA

No! No, not at all, I only meant to ask...all at once?
LYCAEUS

Certainly not. I had forty by the sword and the rest by spear as they fled for the boats.
CALISTA

LYCAEUS takes a long drink.

Your father did not send you to train with Chiron.
LYCAEUS

Would that be so poor an omen?
CALISTA

The might you describe is akin to Achilles or Heracles. Fortitude of that kind, I believed, was reserved for great heroes.
LYCAEUS

Then I must be a heroine.
CALISTA

...So you must be.
LYCAEUS

COURTYARD, ELEIA- Later that day.
ARCHAEON and TELEION mirror each other,
swords in hand.

ARCHAEON

Widen your stance.

TELEION

If I stand any wider, I'll be sitting.

ARCHAEON

Someone is going to knock you over. Your grip is too tight. Relax.

TELEION steps out of his stance, exasperated.

TELEION

Why am *I* training when *you're* the one-

ARCHAEON launches up with his own sword and attacks. TELEION reflexively blocks. ARCHAEON smiles over their crossed blades.

ARCHAEON

I like watching you dance.

TELEION pushes against his blade and makes an undercutting counter attack, which ARCHAEON blocks but just barely. He is surprised, but recovers quickly. They fight, meeting one another beat for beat. While ARCHAEON is stronger and more experienced, TELEION is craftier, and surprises ARCHAEON again and again. They are having so much fun. Suddenly, a ball sails over and interrupts their sparring.

TELEION

Seriously?

OFFSTAGE MAN

Apologies, Lord Teleion!

TELEION

If you don't mind, I'm training for the Olympics, is that alright with you?

TELEION lobs the ball back offstage.

ARCHAEON

Ooh, noble champion, Teleion, the Olympian...

They resume sparring.

TELEION

I was born in Olympia, I'm as Olympian as- forget it. You're right about Calista.

ARCHAEON

She's an odd one.

TELEION

It seems likely she has magic.

ARCHAEON

Magic?

TELEION

God power, magic, what have you. She has something...supernatural about her.

ARCHAEON

I'm not surprised.

TELEION

No?

ARCHAEON

Only that you're the one to suggest the possibility.

TELEION

When she tested your patience, how did it feel?

ARCHAEON

Uncomfortable. She made me antsy, like- I felt no need to run, but rather...

TELEION

About to lose your head?

ARCHAEON

-Irate. Did you feel about to lose your head?

TELEION

Yes and no. I felt angry, but I knew I needed to mind my temper.

ARCHAEON/TELEION

You/I just couldn't.

ARCHAEON

Very disorienting.

TELEION

Disturbing, more like.

ARCHAEON

Do you think she's doing it on purpose?

ARCHAEON stops fighting, thoughtful.

TELEION

Hard to say.

ARCHAEON

She seems to be seized by rage just as inexplicably.

TELEION

That could just be a bad personality.

ARCHAEON

(easily) Perhaps. Or, perhaps, we ought to be kinder to our god-folk.

TELEION

She called my mother the Mad Queen.

ARCHAEON

I mean... All she knows of us are rumors, it's not her fault they're bad. She did take an attempt on your life.

TELEION

And I lived, so what matter is it to her? Kinder to god-folk- what can you possibly mean?

ARCHAEON

Maybe great power in the mortal body is both blessing and curse.

TELEION

You're too gentle, Archaeon.

ARCHAEON

Maybe you're too hard.

TELEION

(laughing) I don't want to die. I made an ass of myself and now she wants to kill me.

ARCHAEON

It is hard to be so talentedly unlikeable.

TELEION

Or kill my reputation at least, what's left of it. If we do marry, who's to say she won't stab me in some lover's spat? It's clear now she'll have my head or my hand, regardless of my appeal. Or lack thereof.

ARCHAEON

Can you love her?

TELEION

I don't know. How much can a man love a woman?

ARCHAEON

(softly) Much.

TELEION

Archaeon...

ARCHAEON

As much as he can love anyone.

TELEION is suddenly aware of the fact that they are outside, in public, training where anyone can happen upon them.

TELEION

I don't think- I'm not- ...I don't know. I just don't know.

ARCHAEON

We are the same in many things. Perhaps not all things.

TELEION

We are compliment in many things.

ARCHAEON

The same in others. This...may be more difficult for you than I had imagined.

TELEION

What, fighting my betrothed to the death?

ARCHAEON

Marriage. Marriage at all.

How much can they get away with without their closeness becoming suspicious?

TELEION

...I would be boys with you forever.

ARCHAEON

It is not becoming for a man to carry on like this into his adulthood. Much less the prince of a soon-to-be great nation. It is normal for youths to be bedmates, but for men-

TELEION

You are a fool. Did you not swear?

ARCHAEON

I swore.

TELEION

To love me always?

ARCHAEON

Yes.

TELEION

Will some old men and their petty judgments break your vow?

ARCHAEON

No, but-

TELEION

Then it is settled.

ARCHAEON

-You are a prince, Teleion. You have made no such vow- you cannot. You are not free.

TELEION

I will vow as I please.

ARCHAEON

As you did to court Ithaca? To Calista?

TELEION

I was a child.

ARCHAEON

We were children.

TELEION

Damn you, Archaeon, why do you tempt my patience? What do you want of me?

ARCHAEON

Nothing.

TELEION

(sarcastically) I bid my thanks.

ARCHAEON

You have obligations bigger than some secret words between youths. A kingdom. A war.

TELEION

I'm the youngest.

ARCHAEON

You're the favorite. Why this marriage? Why this- guarding over you, like a daughter?

TELEION

He almost lost me once, it won't be so again.

ARCHAEON

There is no surer way to keep you than make you heir. And ensure you produce an heir, with the most powerful lovematch he can find.

TELEION

I don't have the blood of young men as you do. As most do. I look upon Calista, and she is beautiful, yes, as well as infuriating, but I feel no...

TELEION sighs.

TELEION

Tell me you understand.

ARCHAEON

I understand.

TELEION

Really?

ARCHAEON

No. (Beat) I never really thought about it.

TELEION

Getting married?

ARCHAEON

There's always been you. I suppose I could get married, I wouldn't hate it.

TELEION

Truly?

ARCHAEON

Women are beautiful. They have lilting voices, they're light, soft. Not altogether different from you.

TELEION pretends not to be charmed.

ARCHAEON

I would never seek to be married, unless I met someone very special, and- ...And I had your blessing, Teleion.

TELEION

I would never.

ARCHAEON

I would never leave, I meant- ...well. No matter. (hushed) You are my beloved, my sky and moon and stars, my glorious sun, and I will never part with you. Not even if I was married.

TELEION

And if I marry? What then?

ARCHAEON

Then nothing. My heart will never turn from you.

TELEION

I'd make a wretched husband if she doesn't kill me first.

ARCHAEON

Is that a threat?

TELEION

No, I just...when I picture what marriage would be like, being a Lord, watching her dance and caring what she wears and...siring children, everything that entails. I feel...

ARCHAEON

Not even once?

TELEION

I'd rather carve out my heart and eat it while it's still beating.

ARCHAEON

(shocked) ...I cannot say I understand, but I did swear myself to you, and I intend to keep that promise regardless of your decision.

TELEION

I have no decision. One harsh word from Calista and father agreed to break one hundred years of tradition. ...He's letting her compete.

ARCHAEON

In what?

TELEION

Swordplay and I think she said discus- whatever she wants. She claimed birthright.

ARCHAEON's attention is caught by some passerby. Both wave offhandedly.

ARCHAEON

The kings and princes of the whole world are here. Allowing a woman to compete would...well, it would certainly ruffle the pride of many. Your father will have half the contestants drop out before the torch is lit, it will be a joke.

TELEION

Oh, I know. But Aries is going to skin me alive, remember? What'd you think he'd do to my father?

TELEION stands and takes up his sword.

TELEION

On your feet, beloved. Woman or not, she is a demigoddess, and frankly, she's scary. You're going to need all the practice you can get.

Reluctantly, ARCHAEON stands and takes his sword. TELEION attacks immediately; a clash of swords. Enter CALISTA in an outfit modeled after Artemis. TELEION and ARCHAEON stare at her. She draws her sword and does a few practice drills before pausing.

CALISTA

Can I help you?