

Children of War

A full-length play by Selah DeGering

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Children of War
by Selah DeGering
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A full-length play

4 men and 3 women

Cast of Characters

Teleion	A prince of Eleia. The least favorite son for a variety of reasons, but named heir nonetheless by prophecy. Life is worth living even if it's terrible. Blessed by Apollo.
Archaeon	Main guard attending Prince Teleion, his not-so-secret lover. Strong, brave, devoted, and true (most of the time). Life is a feast of fruits- devour it. The son the king wishes he had.
Calista	Princess of Ithaca. Daughter of Ares. Stubborn, proud, confident, vengeful. On a quest for glory and honor, but willing to do anything to get it, and hopefully fall in love along the way.
Delia	Lady in waiting to Princess Calista. Has a quiet strength, and keeps Calista grounded. Soft-spoken.
Lycaeus	King of Eleia, Teleion's father. Chaotic Evil, moderately competent Villain on an imperialistic conquest.
Cora	Queen of Ithaca, Calista's mother. Managing the kingdom and its affairs in the absence of her husband. Controlling, overprotective, fiercely loving but afraid of the future.
Chrysanthe	Mad Queen of Eleia. Estranged from Teleion, as well as her husband. Tried to kill Teleion when he was a child. Disciple of Apollo, maybe blind.
Page	Hermes, god of messengers, meddling in mortal affairs on divine errand. Disguised as a servant.

PROLOGUE

TELEION and ARCHAEON sit together,
 TELEION playing the lyre leisurely. CALISTA and
 DELIA sit elsewhere, CORA beside them.
 LYCAEUS and CHRYSANTHE lounge. The
 couples engage in couple activity, playing with hair
 and feeding each other. A pastoral glimpse into their
 more peaceful lives.
 Enter PAGE. The CHARACTERS continue
 undisturbed.

PAGE

Greetings, dear patrons, sponsors, listeners, watchers, critics— oh, creatures of marveling and
 glassy-eyed awe, welcome to this, my show. And I say, my show, for this is my auditorium, and
 my showing. An orator am I, even god of orators, so heed my word, but beware your eyes, for
 the wings on my feet are only stagecraft, and I am not known for my honest shape. Tonight, my
 people, my gods whose pleasure decides fate, you sit high on Olympus and peer down from your
 clouds of lightning and wonder; let your applause be thunder!

PAGE urges the audience to clap. PAGE bows.

PAGE

Ah, well done, well done! Almost as striking as my grandfather's bolt. That old man, mind you,
 has peculiar designs for these mortals, and two sons yet intercept. The trouble begins with this.

PAGE pulls out the mythic sword.

PAGE

A gift from Ares to his too-proud son, a sword of power, prize unwon. Heracles, child of Zeus,
 did slay the wielder with this very blade, and enmity broods between the Lords yet until this
 time. I am tasked now to wreak some mischief so divine, but Apollo's seers weave these webs,
 that Fates may cut a single thread, and all three gods have errs intertwined.

PAGE sheaths the sword, and goes between
 CALISTA and TELEION.

PAGE

Ares' daughter. Apollo's prince. Zeus's messenger. The gods' will on the earth, constrained by
 our masters, and yet beholden to our own baleful longing. I am but a messenger, and bold would
 I be to ask. But boldly so do I implore, the fates of these two, and mortals more are here...in
 godly hands. Your task, now, is to choose which of these two shall fulfill their destiny? The
 lover, or the fool? The seer, or the soldier? Which of them will become the hero the gods
 designed? To make your word known, give me a thunderclap or several. I know you know how.

The PAGE accepts his applause with feigned
 modesty.

PAGE

I remind you now, patrons of Olympus: do offer your applause with choice caution, for those favored by gods have touched fates. Gaze you here: which of these is chosen? Choose, and applaud your favorite.

PAGE goes from TELEION, initiating applause, to CALISTA. Whichever has more applause wins the ending notated at the end, "Teleion's Ending" or "Calista's Ending".

PAGE

And so divine purpose is cast on him[her], your champion. And as it is with all champions in all the tragedies writ in sacred time, this whom you have chosen by divine will shall surely die.

PAGE joins the audience.

SCENE 1

COURTYARD, ELEIA- ~700 BC Ancient Greece, a brilliant day. TELEION and ARCHAEON. They wear matching pendants around their necks.

TELEION

Please?

ARCHAEON

It will not work.

TELEION

You're about my height, from a distance, and your breadth, well— Nevermind all that. I can't wrestle for my life, and it is, in fact, my life on the line here.

ARCHAEON

Feeling dramatic today, are we?

TELEION

Please. I can't afford to embarrass myself in the arena.

ARCHAEON

You're nervous about this princess.

TELEION

Nevermind the princess, this is about honor!

ARCHAEON

Which is why you want to cheat.

TELEION

What about a bargain? An exchange, if you will.

ARCHAEON

Oh, no, not after last time.

TELEION

It'll be fun!

ARCHAEON

You and your schemes...

TELEION

You love my schemes. Deny it, if you can.

ARCHAEON

I thought they opened Pandora's box?

TELEION

Hm?

ARCHAEON

Yet you tempt me all the same. Propose your deal.

TELEION

A new chariot.

ARCHAEON

What need have I for a new chariot?

TELEION

A hunting dog?

ARCHAEON

The only game I sport after is here in my arms.

TELEION

Flatterer.

ARCHAEON

I may yet be convinced! You want to squander your chance at eternal glory in the tournament of the gods? Ask again.

TELEION

You deny the chariot?

ARCHAEON

You had best work up your courage and face the task! A little roughhousing in the arena, perhaps a laurel at the end, for your trouble.

TELEION

My dearest Arcaheon, my eternal love, my strong, dashing warrior, my champion.

ARCHAEON

Flatterer, indeed.

TELEION

My hero?

ARCHAEON

The Olympics are a ceremony, Teleion. You want to deal falsely in the face of the divine?

TELEION

You're hardly innocent– you tell my father you will champion his armies when I go to war, knowing full well I'll sooner walk into the ocean.

ARCHAEON

If you are called to war, I will attend you.

TELEION

You'll die defending my honor, but not lie for the same? Certainly not! What a fool I am; everyone knows the honorable Archaeon never lies!

ARCHAEON

You are no fool, beloved.

TELEION

(grumbling) I can't believe you refused a chariot.

ARCHAEON

You only need more confidence.

TELEION

I'm so confident.

ARCHAEON

Mhmm.

TELEION

Confident my father will have my head if I embarrass him in front of a demigoddess.

ARCHAEON

You won't.

I will.

TELEION

Beat.

It shall be as you say.

ARCHAEON

You'll do it? Truly?

TELEION

As true as Helios in the sky.

ARCHAEON

Thank you, thank you, thank you!

TELEION

TELEION kisses ARCHAEON's face.

Clever, approaching me with labor I would enjoy.

ARCHAEON

Think of it, all those eyes on you, cheering.

TELEION

Your applause will be thanks enough.

ARCHAEON

Begone, oh sword of Damocles! One of you, anyway.

TELEION

What remains?

ARCHAEON

Oh, nothing of consequence.

TELEION

Then it is nothing of consequence to reveal.

ARCHAEON

Everything is already decided, there's no need to trouble you with it.

TELEION

ARCHAEON

What have you decided?

TELEION

What does it matter?

ARCHAEON

Don't tell me you decline the marriage.

TELEION shrugs.

ARCHAEON

But you want to impress her!

TELEION

I don't want to appear weak in front of her.

ARCHAEON

Courting is no trouble. Who knows, perhaps she will surprise you.

TELEION

I have denied my father in this. Defied him, despite his rages and promises of blood/

ARCHAEON

Peace, Teleion.

TELEION

/But I will not do this. Not by command of any god in the heavens nor hells, I cannot.

ARCHAEON

A foolish vow from a rash mind.

TELEION

A fool am I, and a fool's son!

ARCHAEON

You ask me to speak against the king?

TELEION

The gods know you won't.

ARCHAEON

Have you discussed your concerns?

TELEION

Lycaeus is the king.

ARCHAEON

Lycaeus is your father. Entreat him; perhaps he can be swayed. You're a fine archer.

TELEION

My love, where do archers stand in the formation?

ARCHAEON

Behind the shields and spearmen.

TELEION

And where is the king? (Beat) He foresees my failure, Archaeon, it's the only explanation.

ARCHAEON

Then surprise him.

TELEION

He's right! Why can everyone see that but you?

ARCHAEON

To what end would you have me fight?

TELEION

To the end that cleverness is as kingly as brawn.

ARCHAEON

(flirting) And to what end does my brawn serve you?

TELEION

To- (incredulous) To the end that I do as I please!

ARCHAEON

And what pleases you?

TELEION

Can you be serious? Are you capable of seriousness in this, my hour of distress?

ARCHAEON

I tease, that the fox returns to his mischief.

TELEION

The fox bares his teeth.

ARCHAEON

The fox bares his bleeding heart. ...Most beloved, peace. Your secret keeper shall I be, and your champion, too.

ARCHAEON's soothing works.
 TELEION suddenly remembers he's playing at
 being upset.

TELEION
 Flatterer!

ARCHAEON
 Your eternal love, your dashing warrior/

TELEION
 My distractor, with your honeyed words.

ARCHAEON
 /Your hero!

TELEION
 You're a pain in the ass is what you are.

ARCHAEON
 Your father will have my head, fighting for you. I'm entitled to some indulgence.

TELEION
 My father will never know.

ARCHAEON
 And you indulge me?

TELEION
 I may yet be convinced...

TELEION lures ARCHAEON offstage with a coy
 look. ARCHAEON pursues, exiting.

SCENE 2

COURTYARD, ITHACA- same day. CALISTA and
 DELIA lounge, fanning themselves in the heat.

CALISTA
 ...It is said I will find great love in Eleia.

DELIA
 Who couldn't love you?

CALISTA
 You're cruel to tease me. No, the Oracle has spoken it.

DELIA

Then this Teleion must be a great man.

CALISTA

It could be another.

DELIA

He's your betrothed.

CALISTA

He's a stranger. An unaccomplished one, at that.

DELIA

He may surprise you.

CALISTA

Ha! And Ares loves Apollo.

DELIA

Do you have some mystery suitor I don't know about?

CALISTA

A maiden and a suitor, it's all so predictable.

DELIA

You're not making sense.

CALISTA

Why not a suitor-ess? Or a, a nymph of some kind, an ethereal god. Goddess.

DELIA

Now you're really not making sense.

CALISTA

Haven't you read Sappho?

CORA

Calista! Where is that child?

Enter CORA, carrying an ornate parcel, PAGE follows behind with a sheathed sword. PAGE winks at the audience.

CORA

Why am I not surprised? Hidden away doing nothing, as usual. The priest came to the palace to see you, but seeing as you had disappeared from your poetry recitation, I had to receive him myself.

DELIA takes the parcel.

CORA

The priests found this in Ares' temple.

CALISTA

From father, no doubt. And this?

PAGE

A gift from the gods themselves, princess.

CALISTA draws the sword. It glints in the light.
She admires it.

DELIA

You haven't received a token from Olympus in ages...

PAGE

I believe that is the sword of Haemachus. An ancient brother of yours.

DELIA

The Blood King...

CALISTA

You can hardly call yourself a legend without a sword named after you.

CORA

It is a marvelous gift.

CALISTA

Oh yes. Though, it is no gift for me.

CORA

Unabashed child, you would refuse such a mighty token?

CALISTA

The sword refuses me. I can feel its power, but it does not yield to my will. It has yet to be won.

DELIA

It was found in the temple—

CALISTA

Haemachus the Blood King was known for a tournament, whose prize was this sword. It was never won, and the king died, the sword never properly claimed by a worthy fighter. I cannot wield this. Not yet.

CALISTA returns the sword to its sheath. She opens the parcel and reveals the diadem inside.

CALISTA

This, on the other hand...

CALISTA places the diadem on her own head.

CALISTA

This is mine.

CORA

A betrothal gift!

DELIA

It's so beautiful, princess, it's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen!

CALISTA

It is fitting, no?

CORA

Ares is known for many things, not the least of which is his doting fatherhood. You ought to pray, Calista.

CALISTA

I will, I will! Let me enjoy my diadem in peace.

DELIA

Jewels as red as an altar...

CALISTA

He knows me well.

CORA

You will be a vision on your wedding day, my love. Put that away, now, there is much to discuss in my chamber.

CALISTA

Leave me to my splendor, mother.

CORA

Calista, this is important.

CALISTA

Aye, it is. Away, now.

CORA considers. CALISTA is enjoying herself,
and she is rarely so happy.

CORA

...Later, then. But you must remember to make an offering at the temple.

CALISTA

You give yourself to graying hair, mother.

CORA exits, PAGE returns to the audience.

DELIA

Your Lord, Teleion, must accept you now.

CALISTA's elation fades.

DELIA

Princess?

CALISTA takes off the diadem, examines it.

CALISTA

...Children of Ares are not born to be subjugated. They resist it, it- it drives them mad. Drives them to massacre.

DELIA

I...don't follow, princess.

CALISTA

When I marry, Delia, what will my role be? Certainly not weiding that sword.

DELIA

Marriage is hardly subjugation-

CALISTA

Oh, do tell me what marriage is, Delia. I am born of winners. Olympians, conquerors of the Titans themselves. The very elements of the earth and sun lie bound beneath our feet and you expect me to bow before a man.

DELIA

No one ought to be surprised you'd like more...authority in a relationship. It isn't in your nature to fully submit.

CALISTA

(disgust) Submit.

DELIA

Don't tell me this is about Zeus again.

CALISTA

Zeus? No! This is about Ares. This is about my kind. Blood of my blood. Would you still love me if I were a bird? An eagle or a hawk or, gods above, a shark, of all things? Would you still, ugh, bow to me? Please me? ... What good is...being born for great power, if I'm never to wield it myself? What sort of life is it, being a weapon for someone you don't know? Demigods, we're off fighting wars for other people, we're pawns, we're just... Until we can't behave.

DELIA

If you behaved, you wouldn't be you. Nevermind some other house of maids would accommodate you; I wouldn't have stood a chance.

CALISTA

I did drive off the others, didn't I?

DELIA

I thank Tyche every day for her blessing on our friendship.

CALISTA

Tyche?

DELIA

Goddess of fortune. May she bless your journey, too.

PAGE

(From the audience)

To court Ithaca, addressing Calista, high princess and daughter blah blah blah... See, this requests her presence in three days time; I, however, am on a schedule. Pardon, do you have a pen? Does anyone have a pen?

If the audience has a pen, the PAGE takes it. If not, PAGE materializes a quill from their costume.

PAGE

Alright, we...request your holy visage and company...mmm...as soon as possible. That should do it.

Enter PAGE, who hands DELIA a scroll.