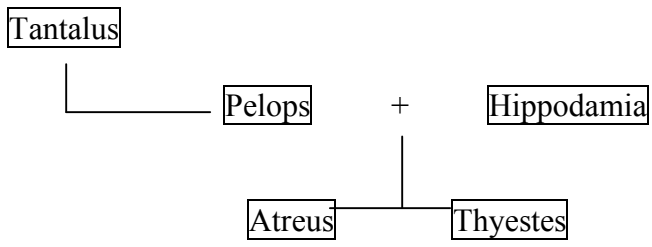


DAD & THE AXE
DAD SET FREE

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Family Relations:



(Downstage, Pelops, Hippodamia, Atreus and Thyestes (that's Dad, Mom, and their two kids) are eating around a dinner table. Upstage, Tantalus is standing in a clear tank of water – waist high, his arms tied behind him. A beautiful apple is hanging above him, just out of reach. He is parched and hungry.)

TANTALUS

When my son was ten, I taught him how to ride a horse. The principle of the thing – that you can control an animal that is stronger and bigger than you – that's what I wanted him to learn.

(The Apple laughs at Tantalus, simply. Tantalus looks with longing.)

There are ideas worth dying for. The man who doesn't agree with that isn't yet alive. You put a ten year old on a horse, you're risking his life – horses are big animals – but, you do it, so that he'll learn to be dominant, so that he'll learn to lead another species. We're the only ones that do this and it makes us Gods: horses, oxen, mules, dogs, chicken, sheep, bears, elephants, nearly anything we care to train follows us around in obedience. We've won them because we're willing to risk our lives in service of ideas. Because the animals care more about life than liberty, they live as slaves.

Then, when he was 15, I killed my son, to serve him for dinner to the Gods. He was my most cherished possession. They were the Gods. It was meant to bring glory to us all.

(Tantalus reaches for the apple with his mouth. It laughs a more intense and evil snicker.)

The Gods brought my son back to life and honored him with a family, but I'm left here as punishment for my ambition. Philosophizing. Perhaps it was a mistake.

(Tantalus bends to get a drink, but the water lowers just out of his reach. Lights change to highlight Pelops and family, discussing the first bites of an apple pie. Tantalus looks on longingly.)

PELOPS

It's alright.

ATREUS

No. I messed it up.

PELOPS
I'm enjoying it.

HIPPODAMIA
Did you put enough Cinnamon in? The apples taste kind of bland.

ATREUS
I messed it up.

THYESTES
It doesn't taste like it does when Dad makes it, that's for sure.

PELOPS
It's okay if it's a little different.

HIPPODAMIA
You always do it with powdered sugar on the top, right? It's not sweet enough.

PELOPS
I don't remember.

ATREUS
I didn't get the crust right. I used margarine instead of butter. I don't think it's the same.

PELOPS
It doesn't have to be the same. You do it your own way. That's the beauty of generations.

ATREUS
I wanted to get it right before you leave.

THYESTES
Too bad. Dad's is way better than this. Now he's gonna have to leave with this rotten taste in his mouth.

(Atreus lunges for Thyestes. Hippodamia smacks them both across the face.)

PELOPS
My father is the one who makes it the best. I'll have him make it for us when I bring him back.

HIPPODAMIA
(under her breath)
He's just going to hurt you again.

PELOPS

(to Atreus)

Don't feel bad about the pie. You know about my grandfather's axe? It's a parable. Have you heard it before?

(Atreus nods no.)

PELOPS

"My grandfather's axe. My father replaced the handle and I replaced the blade." Do you understand?

ATREUS

No.

THYESTES

Stupid.

(Hippodamia hits Thyestes across the face.)

PELOPS

It will always be my grandfather's axe, but if my father replaces the handle and I replace the blade it will have none of its original parts.

ATREUS

So?

PELOPS

But it will always be your grandfather's axe.

ATREUS

So?

PELOPS

So, you can't feel bad about making the pie the way you made it. You are supposed to replace the blade – that's what keeps the axe sharp.

THYESTES

He still doesn't get it, Dad. He's too stupid.

(Hippodamia hits Thyestes across the face.)

ATREUS

I am not.

(Atreus hits Thyestes across the face.)

HIPPODAMIA

Stop it!

(Hippodamis hits Thyestes across the face.)

THYESTES

Hey!

HIPPODAMIA

Sorry.

(Hippodamia hits Atreus across the face.)

PELOPS

Okay, loving family... I'm off.

HIPPODAMIA

(to Atreus)

When he gets back, you should get him to show you how to make the *mousaka*. His family has the best recipe for *mousaka*.

PELOPS

It's my father's recipe.

HIPPODAMIA

It's so good.

PELOPS

Just takes the right kind of meat. (beat)

HIPPODAMIA

Don't go. You're asking for trouble.

PELOPS

I'm off.

(he hugs his children and kisses his wife.)

HIPPODAMIA, ATREUS, THYESTES

We love you, Daddy.

THYESTES

(to Atreus)

Stupid.

ATREUS

Shut up!

(They hit each other, Hippodamia joining in to try and get them to stop. Pelops, on his way to Tantalus, picks up his axe and a skin of water. He approaches Tantalus so that he

can't be seen. Tantalus is frozen, lips pursed, trying to sip the water. Pelops pours water onto Tantalus' head, bathing him in it. Tantalus is so desperately pleased.)

TANTALUS

(Makes an expression of unbelievable satisfaction.)

PELOPS

I thought you might be thirsty.

TANTALUS

I am

PELOPS

You look old.

TANTALUS

I feel like a child.

(beat)

PELOPS

Hi, Dad.

TANTALUS

(nods)

Hi.

PELOPS

-

TANTALUS

You look like a man.

PELOPS

-

TANTALUS

I wanted to impress him. My father. That's why I did it. I wanted to impress him.

PELOPS

I don't want to hear about it.

TANTALUS

You must not hate me.

PELOPS
How's that?

TANTALUS
You've come to see me.

PELOPS
Don't jump to any rash conclusions.

TANTALUS
You've come to see me.

PELOPS
Some people would say it's foolish to return to someone who's served you for dinner.

TANTALUS
You have a family?

PELOPS
I do.

TANTALUS
Made something of yourself?

PELOPS
I won my wife's hand and we've made 2 children together.

TANTALUS
She good looking?

PELOPS
Yes. (beat) You met her.

(pause)

TANTALUS
You're mother was always better at conversation than me.

PELOPS
She was better at everything than you.

TANTALUS
Have you come to kill me?

PELOPS

No.

TANTALUS

Family has got to eat. You can't be mad about that. A man's got to put dinner on the table.

PELOPS

You're such an asshole, Dad.

(Pause. Tantalus reaches for the apple. The apple laughs its evil snicker at him.)

TANTALUS

If you're not going to kill me, then you should just let me be.

PELOPS

Embarrassed?

TANTALUS

Don't psychoanalyze me.

PELOPS

Can't even pick an apple from the vine?

TANTALUS

Fuck you.

PELOPS

You should apologize.

TANTALUS

I tried to explain. You said you didn't want to hear about it.

PELOPS

I came to set you free.

TANTALUS

(beat) Don't come here and dangle shit in front of my face.

PELOPS

I came to set you free, Dad.

TANTALUS

Yeah – and then what happens?

PELOPS

You could come home with me.

TANTALUS

And, what? Become part of your family?

PELOPS

Teach my son how to make apple pie. He doesn't get the crust right.

TANTALUS

Is that some kind of joke?

PELOPS

No. You make the best pie.

(the apple snickers.)

TANTALUS

You trust me now, huh?

PELOPS

Not for a second.

TANTALUS

You'll let me near your kids? I make a good *mousaka* too.

PELOPS

You're already dead. I'm offering you a chance to live.

(beat)

TANTALUS

My problem was that I loved the Gods too much. I wanted our lineage to be proud.

(Pelops nods.)

PELOPS

You could teach my son.

(pause)

TANTALUS

Do it. Let me out.

(Pelops positions himself behind his dad, then raises his axe into the air, preparing to cut his father's wrists free.)

PELOPS
You ready?

TANTALUS
Is that my axe?

PELOPS
Parts of it.

TANTALUS
What do you think freedom will look like?

PELOPS
Lots and lots of water.

(Pelops swings his axe and sets his father free.)

END PLAY.