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Patroclus and Achilles as Elio and Oliver

I fiddled with my thumbs as I anxiously awaited this summer's houseguest. My parents always took in a young academic each summer to help revise my father's manuscript. They would spend nearly an hour every day helping my father, and in turn, they didn't have to pay anything for their stay. Of course, I was the one who actually 'paid' for it: I had to vacate my room for eight weeks, moving into a significantly smaller one for their comfort. Last summer's houseguest was an absolute bore, and we'd had to deal with him for what seemed like the longest eight weeks of my life. I hardly knew anything about who was to come, but I had seen his photo on the application a few months ago. He caught my attention effortlessly, almost embarrassingly.

I can recall the moment my father called me to view all the applicants. I came running down the stairs, excited to see who would stay with us this summer. I spent minutes perusing through all the pictures until I suddenly caught myself blushing.

His name was Achilles. He had golden blonde hair that gleamed like nothing I had seen before. His curls cascaded down around his jawline— untamed but somehow perfectly positioned. His eyes were an electric blue, almost daring me to look away. *How could someone's photo seem so full of life, so full of beauty?* My mind wandered to places I had yet to explore until my father's voice cut my fantasies short.

"What do you think?" he asked as he reached for the computer across the table. I stammered. "I-I don't really feel strongly about any of them."

"Well, who would you choose if you had to choose someone?" I knew my answer like I knew my own name, but I shrugged nonchalantly. "Probably Achilles."

It was months later when Achilles finally arrived. Time almost stopped when I saw a rusty blue cab pull into our driveway. I caught a glimpse of his face, his eyes, and his physique—all of which made his photo seem trivial at the time. He was more bronze than in the picture. Taller. Somehow even more beautiful. I watched him step out of the cab. He wore an oversized shirt, casual linen shorts, sunglasses, and suede espadrilles.

My mother took the pleasure of first greeting him. She clasped her hands in the way she always does when she's excited. "Achilles! Hello Hello! Welcome to your new home!"

He eagerly walked across the gravel, with every stride indicating his enthusiasm. "Annella! It is lovely to meet you!" "I can't thank you enough for allowing me into your home."

"The pleasure is all mine!" my mother insisted.

I extended my hand out to greet Achilles. "I'm Patroclus. Nice to meet you." I anticipated the fleshy feeling of his hand, but I was met with the nylon of his sage green backpack.

"I'm Achilles. Thanks for carrying my stuff." His tone was curt, spoken with the indifference of someone who interacts with people transactionally.

I couldn't believe the arrogance of this guy. *Why did he think he could skip all the formalities with me?* While his application may have established him as more intelligent and skilled than a boy my age, he had no right to treat me like some bellboy. God, I'm surely gonna have one hell of a summer.

He strode past me, coolly climbing the steps to our front door. As he reached the door, he inquired my mother about my father's whereabouts.

"He's outside in the back." my mother said.

He made his way through our mosaic-tiled hallway, through the sliding doors, and into the backyard, where my father was lying by our pool.

Reluctantly, I carried his things up to my room—well, his room now, I guess. I huffed as I slung his overweight suitcase onto the bed. *Jeez*. Just as I got his things settled, he appeared in the doorway.

"What do you like to do for fun here?"

Considering our introduction, I wasn't exactly in the mood to talk to him, but I feigned a look of indifference. "Swim. Read. Transcribe music. Go out at night."

"Great, we'll go for a swim tomorrow."

Usually, I would fuss at being commanded this way. But somehow, the words sounded nothing like commands in his mouth. "Okay."

Words rolled off his tongue so effortlessly, so confidently. I realize now that I mistook his confidence for arrogance. I thought to myself, *maybe this is his most attractive feature*. I still couldn't figure it out. I still couldn't figure out if I even liked him yet. I had a habit of romanticizing people, and more often than not, it always led to disappointment. Something about Achilles was so promising, though.

We went for a swim the next day and almost every day after that in the blistering heat of the afternoon. We never said much to each other but we didn't have to. His presence brought me an unexpected peace, a sensation I had never felt. I would sit there and simply admire the curve of his hips, the slight upturn of his lips, and the way his forehead creased when he was thinking about something. Sometimes he caught me looking, but he seemed to enjoy the way my eyes scanned every inch of his body. He stole glances from time to time, but I couldn't tell if he shared the same affection. I knew better than to care. I didn't want to hurt my feelings.

Our swim dates turned into reading dates which turned into movie dates. Platonic dates, of course. "How about seeing a movie?" he always asked in a spontaneous manner. We spent hours on end in the theater, hopping from movie to movie. I listened to him analyze every single character, either eulogizing them or ripping them to pieces. We would stay up past beyond reasonable times talking about everything and nothing. Our ambitions. Our secrets. Our fears. Our hopes. Our fetishes. It seemed like there were an infinite number of affinities between us.

Achilles had already made numerous acquaintances in only four weeks of being here, although he had yet to actually remember their names. I watched as girls and boys gravitated to him, like a child that sees a playground or a dog that sees a treat. What unsettled me, though, was not the number of people that obsessed over him but rather the way it made me feel. I was envious of them. Selfishly, I wanted Achilles all to myself. I was convinced that no one in the world could possibly want him in all the ways I did. I wanted to be the one who received his smile, his throaty laugh, and the lean of his chest during a conversation. It finally dawned on me that I was falling for him in every possible way.

I sat with my feelings until I couldn't take it anymore. I couldn't pretend that his friendship was all I desired. Honestly, I cared nothing for friendship. What I felt, maybe even from the day we first went for a swim, was love. I loved him for all he was—confident, gentle, fearless, intelligent. I even

loved his subtle arrogance. I knew him as I knew myself. I was Achilles, and he was Patroclus. I was Patroclus, and he was Achilles.

As we rode our bikes to the Piazzetta, I contemplated all the different ways I could speak my truth. *How do I tell him he's the best person I have ever known?* Once we arrived, we walked around aimlessly. It was as if he knew how restless my soul was. I suddenly felt angry that he couldn't read my thoughts. *How did he not notice the way I never wanted to feel the absence of his touch?* I looked up at him, and he looked at me. I knew this was my moment. "Do you propose it is better to speak or to die?"

Achilles tilted his head in confusion. "Speak, I suppose."

The words tumbled from my mouth uncontrollably. I confessed every feeling, every emotion that I had subdued for so long. As I finished speaking, I noticed Achilles' eyes lit like a flame, his smile spread across his face. There was a new meaning behind the expression I had studied all summer, one with more intent than ever.

"Patroclus, I've loved you ever since I met you. Hell, you made me so nervous I practically shoved my backpack into your hands when I first saw you." He laughed his deep throaty laugh alongside mine. I had never felt so relieved, so seen in my life. Without hesitation, he closed the distance between us. I could hear the fast thump of his heart, or maybe my heart. Either way made no difference; we were one and the same. He touched my lip with his finger before he brought his lips to mine. I kissed him as if I had one last breath, rushing to take him all in. When we finally pulled apart, tears began to pool in my eyes. I prayed for time to stop, for summer to never end.