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Kleos, Aidos, Nostos, & Penthos

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Kleos, Aidos, Nostos, & Penthos

I.

Patroclus met Achilles in modern dance class in ill-fitted sweatpants, their forespoken oracles plaguing the plausibilities, the woulda-couldas, & their sickening thoughts left the subjunctive, refracted on mirrors like light.

II.

Quicker than anything, he was blowing him in a blue minivan parked in an arboretum, Patroclus's brow sweating into Achilles's pubes, breathing heavy through the crevices of their war helmets, the sweet crotch smell of fifty ships.

& later,

with Ach's sword in Pat's hands, he could feel his heartbeat, felt for the first time like he could fight or conquer anything, seize the country he once thought sinking like a body on taut sheets.

III.

Then it was the tenderness of text messages, & the way they sometimes held hands at parties & other times avoided eye contact in the King's Hall.

IV.

Skip ahead 7 books. 29 little fights, 1 big. 5 picnics, 40 bottles of sauvignon blanc, 24 friends introduced, & 28 nice salads. 11 angry gods, 13 storms, 2 suits of armor, 2 semesters, 1 road trip, 1 broken mast, 4 books borrowed, 3 irreparable wounds. 66 cups of coffee, 76 staggering breaths & 9 times someone came & made a dishonest

sound, crooned a name that was losing its arête, its visceral newness.

V.

They went to Achilles's house for dinner & his mother brooded like a chicken stock. The appetizers were wrapped in pancetta but Patroclus didn't eat meat. With pangs in their lower intestines, our heroes survived with a few glasses of wine, but Mother knew (too cruel) that things would work out her way, that Zeus owed her a favor.

VI.

Patroclus left for school & so began the longer distance, the late-night placid phone chats & hurried lovemakings made in bathrooms & backseats & maybe too hard & Ach smacked Pat's ass & called him a Faggot & laughed about it later & Pat laughed too.

The pit feeling in Patroclus's stomach when he looked in the morning mirror & no longer knew his own tired mouth, saw himself the warrior he never wanted to be. His eyes watered as he picked the dried blood from the soft hair under there.

VII.

The Chorus would have said to our heroes here, Ware Your Loved Ones. A broken bird can't help another broken bird, or something, & it would be sung like a Mills Brothers song but it wasn't, they had no Chorus.

VIII.

Achilles called with a tone like a hot tendon. Said that One Thing.

You what.

I didn't mean to carve the marble this way or hurt you hard & I should treat you like the art you are & I'm sorry (I guess) about the wagon I've hitched to your planet.

I.

Please. This, I can fix. I can break this mistake, you will & I will.

*I will
call you later.*

IX.

It Never Hurt To Try was a lie your teacher told you because they never thought you'd be sitting in this car, with Achilles beating the steering wheel & screaming beyond recognition & he's asking Why & the car swerves some & the lights flicker like in apocalyptic movies & you realize for years now you have been "trying," trying to cut things out with an X-acto knife, & so you pick up your scraps, you put on his armor & you take his face in your hands like a porcelain plate. He pulls over & you charge the gate & open the car door & you are not heading north & the horns are ringing & the gods are singing & this will be the song he keeps until the next song.

X.

No dead body could be dragged through the sand long enough to contest ten thousand pains. No glory can gild the clotted wounds, the blood of the seas between.

Go on, bury the thing.