The Song of Achilles

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF MADELINE MILLER

Madeline Miller was born in Boston and grew up in both Philadelphia and New York City. After completing her undergraduate and graduate work in Classics at Brown University, she taught and tutored high school students in Greek, Latin, and Shakespeare. Then she received an MFA from the Yale School of Drama, where she focused on adapting classics for modern audiences. She published her first book, *The Song of Achilles*, in 2011. Miller wanted to retell the Trojan War with a particular focus on Achilles and Patroclus; the two are commonly interpreted as lovers, but their romantic relationship is peripheral in most Greco-Roman myths of the Trojan War. The book was ten years in the making, as Miller drafted and redrafted to focus the story's narration. In 2012, the book received the Orange Prize for Fiction. Miller's second novel, *Circe*, was released in 2018; it's narrated from the perspective of Circe, a minor character from *The Odyssey*. Miller lives outside Philadelphia and continues to write and teach.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The Song of Achilles follows the events of the Trojan War, a fictional (but significant) conflict in Greek mythology. The war began when Paris, a Trojan prince, stole the Spartan princess Helen, who was known to be the most beautiful woman in Greece. Some myths suggest that she went with Paris willingly due to interference from the gods who were quarreling with each other, while other suggest that she was abducted by force. Regardless, her husband Menelaus then assembled an army to retrieve her from Troy, beginning a ten-year siege that would only end in trickery: the Greeks eventually entered Troy by hiding inside the now-infamous "Trojan horse." Along the way, heroes fell, including Achilles, the subject of Madeline Miller's novel. The war provided fodder for Greco-Roman mythology, and poets like Virgil and Ovid would also cover its events. Though Miller's novel focuses mostly on the war's human actors, the Greek gods—including Zeus, Athena, Artemis, and Apollo—are significant players, able to nudge conflicts along with their unique skills.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

The Song of Achilles is directly inspired by Homer's *Iliad*—the novel retells *The Iliad*'s events. The *Iliad*, which relays the myth of the Trojan War, follows the tail end of the Greek army's ten-year siege on Troy. (The Greeks were ostensibly in Troy to rescue the Spartan princess Helen from the Trojan prince Paris, who had stolen her away.) Achilles and Patroclus are both key figures in the *Iliad*; Achilles's grief over Patroclus's death at the hands of the Trojan prince Hector leads to the poem's climax, in which Achilles kills Hector. Madeline Miller believed that Achilles's outsized grief hinted at a romantic relationship between him and Achilles, something Homer never explicitly states. Miller's retelling imagines the origins of Achilles's and Patroclus's (now explicitly romantic) relationship and places that relationship at the forefront of the conflict in Troy—significantly, Miller tells the story from Patroclus's perspective. By retelling the classics, Miller aligns herself with contemporaries like Margaret Atwood, whose 2005 novella *The Penelopiad* told the story of Homer's *Odyssey* from Penelope's perspective, and Anne Carson, whose 1998 verse novel *Autobiography of Red* was inspired by the myth of Geryon. Their predecessor Mary Renault also often retold Greek myths in her work.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Song of Achilles*
- **When Written:** Around 2000/2001-2011
- **When Published:** September 2011
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary
- **Genre:** Fantasy, Romance, Tragedy
- **Setting:** Troy and ancient Greece (particularly the kingdom of Phthia, Mount Pelion, and the island of Scyros)
- **Climax:** Patroclus's death at the hands of Hector
- **Antagonist:** Agamemnon, Thetis, Apollo, Pyrrhus, fate itself
- **Point of View:** First person

EXTRA CREDIT

Achilles Heel. In Greek mythology, Achilles is famous for having only one vulnerable spot on his body: his heel. According to legend, Achilles's mother dipped him in the River Styx to make him invincible, and it worked everywhere except for the heel where she held him. In some myths, Achilles would later die by being shot in his heel. Madeline Miller's version of the story does not include this vulnerable heel; she felt that it stretched credibility to believe that someone could die via an injury to their heel, and Achilles's supposed invincibility wasn't part of Homer's *Iliad*.

Stage Fright. Madeline Miller credits her background in theater with helping her focus the novel. She says that she wrote the story by getting into Patroclus's skin and allowing his

lived experiences to dictate the novel's emotional beats, which she's described as writing the story "from inside, rather than out."

PLOT SUMMARY

Patroclus, a young Greek prince, grows up disliked by his father: his mother is intellectually disabled, and his father resents them both for their weakness. When Patroclus is nine, his father takes him to Sparta, home to the beautiful princess Helen—she's ready to marry, and Patroclus will make his case as a suitor. At the palace, one of the gathered men, Odysseus, worries the suitors will kill one another over Helen. He proposes a solution: Helen should choose her husband, and the men should vow to defend him. Everyone—including Patroclus—agrees, and Helen chooses Menelaus.

Later, when Patroclus is back home, he gets into an altercation with a nobleman's son, pushing the boy and inadvertently killing him. As punishment, Patroclus's father strips his son of his title and banishes him to the kingdom of Phthia, which Patroclus knows is a fate worse than death. Phthia is ruled by another king, Peleus, who's married to the sea-nymph Thetis. Thetis was forced by the gods to mate with Peleus, producing a half-god son, Achilles. Patroclus remains distant from everyone on the island, but Achilles eventually befriends him.

Patroclus accompanies Achilles everywhere, and the two become inseparable. Achilles even reveals to Patroclus that he's prophesized to be the best fighter of his generation. Eventually, Patroclus meets Thetis, who dislikes him; she tells him she wants to make Achilles a god, although Achilles doesn't want this yet. When Achilles and Patroclus are 13, they kiss. Thetis witnesses this and reacts furiously, sending Achilles away to train with the centaur Chiron on Mount Pelion. Patroclus impulsively decides to follow. While on Mount Pelion, Achilles improves his skill with the **lyre**, and Patroclus learns medicine. Chiron attempts to teach them to fight but soon discovers that Achilles has nothing more to learn, and that Patroclus would rather not be a soldier.

Two years later, Achilles initiates sex with Patroclus, who realizes that he'll love Achilles forever. But their peace is disrupted when a messenger arrives to bring them home. Upon their arrival, Peleus reveals that there will be a war: the Trojan prince Paris has stolen Helen away from Menelaus and brought her to Troy. Menelaus and his brother, Agamemnon, now demand that Helen's suitors sail to protect her, as they vowed to do—Patroclus is, of course, among them.

To keep Achilles away from war, Thetis hides him on an island, Scryos, ruled by the ailing king Lycomedes. Patroclus discovers Achilles's location and sails after him; when he arrives, he learns that Lycomedes's daughter, Deidameia, runs Scryos. Deidameia also oversees the kingdom's foster daughters—Achilles is among them, posing as a woman. Deidameia reveals that she and Achilles are secretly married, and that she's pregnant—it turns out Thetis arranged the marriage under Lycomedes's nose. But Thetis now demands that Deidameia keep silent about the marriage and the baby, which will mean giving birth in exile. Thetis will then raise the child. Jealous that Achilles loves Patroclus instead of her, Deidameia initiates sex with Patroclus.

Soon, Odysseus arrives on Scryos, pretending to recruit soldiers while searching for Achilles. To convince Achilles to sail to Troy, Odysseus says the Fates have prophesized two futures: if Achilles fights, he'll be famous. If he stays, he'll be forgotten. Thetis then shares the third part of the prophecy: Achilles will die in Troy. Patroclus tells Achilles that they'll be together if he stays, but it's not enough to convince him; Achilles will go to Troy, and Patroclus will follow. Grief-stricken, Patroclus demands more information from Thetis, who says Achilles will die after the Trojan prince, Hector; Hector's fighting is second only to Achilles's. Patroclus assumes this means that Achilles will kill him, and he tells him not to.

Patroclus and Achilles return to Phthia, where Achilles receives a new **spear**. The Phthians then sail to Aulis, a strip of land where the Greeks—including Agamemnon—will convene before charging Troy. Agamemnon expects Achilles's loyalty, but the two immediately butt heads. The Greek army is marooned on Aulis with no wind, and the goddess Artemis demands a priestess sacrifice before the war. Agamemnon summons his priestess daughter and sacrifices her upon arrival; Achilles is horrified by Agamemnon's cruelty.

The Greeks sail to Troy, where they decide to begin the war with raids on local villages instead of peace talks. Soldiers are given access to spoils, which include women whom the soldiers enslave and rape. Patroclus urges Achilles to claim the first, a woman named Briseis—the two give her free reign in the Phthian camp, and she and Patroclus become friends. They repeat the same process with other women whenever possible. Soon, the Trojan king Priam summons the Greeks for a parley, where Priam says the Trojans will defend Helen. Achilles and Patroclus wonder whether Helen went with Menelaus voluntarily, but then they decide it doesn't matter: Agamemnon would attack Troy regardless.

The war begins in earnest. At first, Patroclus has to fight, and he notices that Thetis watches Achilles on the battlefield. Patroclus begins to assist in the medical tent as the war drags on, the army finding a rhythm but not making ground. The Greeks grow restless with the pace and attempt to mutiny before Achilles calms them down, which angers Agamemnon. Thetis, now anxious, reveals a new prophecy: the best of the Myrmidons (Achilles's people) will die within two years, but Achilles will still be alive then. In the midst of this, Briseis reveals that she's in love with Patroclus, which makes Achilles jealous.

One day, Agamemnon claims a priest's daughter as a spoil. Her father offers ransom, which Agamemnon refuses; soon, a plague besets the army, revealed to be the gods' punishment. Achilles insists that Agamemnon accept the ransom, but Agamemnon declines, insisting that Achilles swear fealty to him. When Achilles won't, Agamemnon says he'll take Briseis back; angry, Achilles tells Agamemnon that he'll no longer fight for him, and that as a result, the Greeks will fall. Patroclus realizes that Achilles intends to allow Agamemnon to assault Briseis, which would provide a reason to kill him. Horrified, Patroclus reveals Achilles's plan to Agamemnon in exchange for Briseis's safety. Achilles accuses Patroclus of trading his honor for Briseis, but Patroclus insists that he's really preserving it. Achilles, ashamed, reveals that he's done far worse: Thetis asked the gods to ensure the Greek army's failure until Agamemnon apologizes.

After this, the Greeks begin to lose the war; Agamemnon sends Odysseus to broker peace with Achilles, but Achilles wants a real apology. Patroclus worries that Achilles is damaging his reputation; he may end up famous only for his pride. Patroclus tells Briseis to escape as soon as she can, and she tenderly refers to him the "best of the Myrmidons." Patroclus then begs Achilles to return to battle, if only as a favor to him. When Achilles refuses, Patroclus comes up with a new plan: he'll wear Achilles's armor into battle to fool the Greeks. Achilles reluctantly agrees, and Patroclus swears that he won't really fight.

Patroclus's appearance as Achilles rejuvenates the army, and he grows cocky. Angry at the bloodshed and desperate to end the war, Patroclus begins scaling Troy's wall, where the god Apollo stops him. Ignoring Apollo, Patroclus tries again; Apollo throws Patroclus back, which knocks his helmet off, revealing his identity. Hector then kills Patroclus.

Now a restless spirit, Patroclus observes the fallout from his death. Achilles goes on a rampage to kill Hector, tussling with a river god who tries to keep the two apart. When Hector is on the brink of death, he begs Achilles to return his body to Priam, which would set his soul to rest—but Achilles refuses and kills him. He then desecrates Hector's body and preserves Patroclus's, disgusting Thetis, who believes living with humans softened Achilles. Her only hope is Achilles's son, Pyrrhus, whom she raised and who is fated to end the Trojan War. Priam visits Achilles, begging him to return Hector's body and connecting with him over their shared grief. Achilles agrees. He then cremates Patroclus and asks the Greeks to mix their ashes after he's dead.

Many try and fail to kill Achilles; eventually, Apollo spurs Paris to shoot him, and Achilles falls, relieved to finally die. Pyrrhus arrives at the Greek camp and demands that Achilles's grave be marked only with his name, not Patroclus's—Achilles will go to the underworld, but Patroclus won't. He then attempts to rape Briseis before killing her, and her body falls underwater, lost. Odysseus tries and fails to convince Pyrrhus to mark Patroclus's grave, and the Greeks soon leave Troy after winning the war.

Thetis comes to visit Achilles's grave; the gravestone is marked with his most violent acts, and Patroclus worries that this is how he'll be remembered. He speaks to Thetis from beyond the grave, and Thetis tells him that Pyrrhus was killed by Agamemnon's son after he assaulted her wife. She asks Patroclus to share his memories of Achilles, and Patroclus tells her about Achilles's small kindnesses and acts of love. Thetis, in turn, tells him about her assault at Peleus's hands. She can't go to the underworld to see Achilles, which grieves her, as does her failure to make him a god. Eventually, she tells Patroclus that she marked his grave herself. He and Achilles find each other in the underworld, finally at peace.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Patroclus – A former prince and Achilles's lover, Patroclus is the novel's narrator. He is fundamentally kind, which leads his father to dislike him. Patroclus's mother was intellectually disabled, and his father believes that both Patroclus and his mother were weak. As a child, Patroclus accidentally killed a young boy whose father demanded that Patroclus be exiled. Patroclus was sent to Achilles's kingdom, where he and Achilles first fell in love. He and Achilles train for war together on Mount Pelion, and Patroclus eventually follows Achilles to fight in Troy. Patroclus dislikes bloodshed. His goal in Troy is not to fight nor to bring peace, but to prevent Achilles's fated death. In this, Patroclus and Achilles have opposing purposes: Achilles is destined to end lives, while Patroclus wants to save them, eventually working as a medic in the army hospital and encouraging Achilles to "claim" Trojan women as war spoils in order to free them. Patroclus's tolerance of Achilles's warrior mentality does have limits: when Achilles attempts to allow Agamemnon to assault Patroclus's closest friend, Briseis, Patroclus betrays Achilles in order to stop it. But even in his betrayal, Patroclus is trying to protect Achilles from committing a dishonorable act. Similarly, after Achilles refuses to fight for the Greek army, Patroclus dons Achilles's armor and enters battle. This is because Patroclus wants to save the Greeks, but it's mainly because he wants Achilles to be remembered kindly. Achilles's death has been prophesied, but—without Achilles or Patroclus knowing—Patroclus's death is also foretold. The gods say that the "best of the Myrmidons" (Achilles's kinsmen) will die soon, and while many assume that this means Achilles, the prophecy actually refers to Patroclus who is the best of them due to his kindness. Patroclus is, in many ways, the only member of the Greek army who understands that real honor lies in small acts of kindness and love, rather than destruction. At the end of the novel, his demonstrable love for Achilles saves

their souls: Thetis, who always hated Patroclus, is moved by his love for Achilles and marks his grave so that both men can rest together in the underworld.

Achilles – Achilles is the prince of Phthia, Patroclus's lover, and the best fighter in Greece. According to prophecy, he is prophesized to attain fame during the Trojan War. His battle skills are in his blood: his mother, the goddess Thetis, was raped by his father, Peleus, making Achilles half human and half god. As a teenager, when Achilles meets and falls in love with Patroclus, he's honest, kind, and has great skill with a **lyre**. Achilles and Patroclus, a foster child in Achilles's kingdom, fall in love as teenagers, eventually training together on Mount Pelion before the Trojan War begins. Thetis initially tries to keep Achilles and Patroclus apart and keep her son away from the fighting, sending him to Scyros and forcing him to have a baby with Deidameia in hopes of making her son a god. Eventually, Achilles learns his mother's reasoning for sending him away: the gods have prophesized two possible futures for him. He can fight in Troy and become famous or stay in Greece and be forgotten—however, if he goes to Troy, he's certain to die there. Achilles chooses to fight anyway, demonstrating that he values his honor and legacy above life itself. In Troy, he transforms into a cold-blooded warrior who's highly skilled with **spears**. He also proves himself stubborn and occasionally cruel: after the Greek commander, Agamemnon, insults him, Achilles allows Agamemnon to assault Briseis, believing he'd then have a reason to kill him. Patroclus foils this plan, but Achilles remains set on revenge, refusing to fight for the Greeks unless Agamemnon apologizes. His pride leads to the deaths of thousands, including (indirectly) Patroclus, who wears Achilles's armor into battle to save his reputation and is killed by the Trojan prince Hector. Achilles was always prophesized to die after Hector, and indeed, he's shot by Paris soon after he takes his revenge. Despite Achilles's cruelties, his love for Patroclus is his one redeeming quality. His son, Pyrrhus, is raised by Thetis away from humans, and he's monstrous in comparison to his father—largely because he's unable to love. Achilles fundamentally misunderstands honor, confusing it for pride, but Patroclus's love saves him from inhumanity.

Thetis – Thetis is a sea-nymph and mother to the demigod Achilles; she gave birth to Achilles after the gods forced her to have sex with Peleus. The assault was meant to be a reward for Peleus's piety, but the gods had ulterior motives: Thetis's son was prophesized to be more powerful than his father, so they wanted to make sure he was half-mortal. From Patroclus's perspective, Thetis is frightening and cruel, more a horrific apparition than a woman. The two are constantly at odds, as Thetis disapproves of Achilles's romantic relationship with Patroclus. She believes that it dishonors Achilles and interferes with her plans for him: she wants to make him a god, which she can only do if he achieves great fame and renown. As a result, she constantly attempts to separate the two, eventually marrying Achilles off to the princess Deidameia and forcing him to have a son with her. Thetis is also protective of her son, as she tries to keep Achilles away from the Trojan War, since she knows he's fated to die in Troy. When he chooses to go anyway, she devotes all her energy to heightening his fame, shifting his appearance so he seems more godlike and standing watch over him as he fights. She raises Achilles's son, Pyrrhus, at the same time—when Achilles loses his mind after Patroclus dies, she tells him that Pyrrhus is now her main focus, because Achilles has become too human. Pyrrhus, however, is sadistic and manipulative; his actions disgust even Thetis. She ultimately fails to make either Achilles or Pyrrhus a god, proving that she never really had control over their fates. As is the case with Achilles's love of Patroclus, Thetis's ability love of Achilles is her one redeeming quality. After Achilles and Patroclus are both dead, Thetis comes to mourn at their grave, where Patroclus's spirit remains. She asks him to share his happy memories of Achilles, and despite her hatred for Patroclus, these memories move her. She marks their grave with Patroclus's name, sending his soul to the underworld with Achilles, where she can't go herself. This final, selfless act proves her capacity for real love.

Briseis – Briseis is a Trojan citizen captured during the Greek army's early raids on Troy. At Patroclus's urging, Achilles claims her as a war spoil, but the two give her free reign in the Phthian camp. She eventually becomes Patroclus's closest friend and falls in love with him, offering to have his children even as he remains with Achilles. Though Patroclus refuses, he wonders if he could have loved her if he'd never met Achilles. Briseis is extremely beautiful, deeply intelligent, and funny. She admires Patroclus for his bravery and kindness and dislikes Achilles for his pride and his relationship with Patroclus. While living in the Phthian camp, she and Patroclus teach and care for other captured Trojan women, whom Achilles "claims" whenever he can in order to save them from being raped by other Greek soldiers. But after Achilles quarrels with Agamemnon, Agamemnon seizes Briseis, assuming she's Achilles's "bed-slave." The ease with which he captures Briseis proves that, while Patroclus and Achilles allowed her freedom in their camp, she never had any real agency. Achilles plans on allowing Agamemnon to assault Briseis so that Achilles will have an excuse to kill him—but Patroclus prevents this by betraying Achilles's confidence to Agamemnon. Briseis isn't allowed to return to the Phthian camp, however. Before Troy falls, she tells Patroclus that if the Greeks lose, she'll claim him as her husband. When Patroclus is killed in battle, Briseis is devastated and blames Achilles for his death, claiming that he never deserved Patroclus. When Achilles's son, Pyrrhus, arrives in Troy, he attempts to rape Briseis, thinking she belonged to Achilles. She tries to kill him and swims into the ocean, but he hits her with his spear, and she drowns. Throughout all of these experiences, Briseis never has a say in what happens to her, despite her associations with high-status men.

Odysseus – Odysseus is the clever, charming prince of Ithaca. In the Trojan War, he serves as one of Achilles's fellow generals, though Achilles and Patroclus distrust him and believe he's sneaky and self-serving. Patroclus first witnesses his skill with words as a child: He is the one who convinces Helen to choose her own husband, and the other suitors to protect that man from anyone who might steal Helen away. It's never entirely clear why he suggests this, but it leads to Helen choosing to marry Menelaus—and later, the Trojan prince Paris steals her away, instigating the Trojan War. It's likely that Odysseus had ulterior motives—he's favored by the goddess Athena, and she may have influenced him to suggest that Helen choose her own husband in order to initiate the war. Odysseus later uses the gods' prophecies about Achilles to convince Achilles to sail to Troy. He also immediately guesses the nature of Achilles's and Patroclus's relationship and warns Patroclus that he should accept Achilles's role as a human weapon, believing that the gods created him for battle alone. This warning is not, however, born of a failure to understand love—Odysseus often speaks about Penelope and about his deep love for her. He also frequently (and unsuccessfully) attempts to act as peacemaker between Achilles and Agamemnon, staying neutral and never showing his cards. Patroclus guesses that Odysseus hopes Agamemnon will fail as commander so that Odysseus and his closest friend, Diomedes, can take over the army. However, his slippery nature eventually gives way to real feeling, as he tries to convince Achilles's son, Pyrrhus, to mark Patroclus's grave and allow his soul to rest. He isn't able to convince Pyrrhus, but Patroclus remembers his kindness, implying that this act—beyond Odysseus's trickery or skill as an army general—revealed his truest self.

Agamemnon – Agamemnon is the king of Mycenae, commander-in-chief of the Greek army, and brother to Menelaus (whose wife, Helen, was stolen by the Trojan prince Paris). Although Menelaus is the one who was wronged, Agamemnon spearheads the war effort; Peleus tells Achilles that, regardless of Helen, Agamemnon likely would have attacked the wealthy Troy. Agamemnon is proud, stubborn, and often cruel: after the goddess Artemis demands a sacrifice, Agamemnon willingly sacrifices his daughter, Iphigenia, which causes Achilles to dislike and distrust him. Achilles and Agamemnon quarrel throughout the war—Agamemnon believes that Achilles is seeking glory for himself, and Achilles refuses to defer to Agamemnon's authority. This conflict comes to a head after Agamemnon claims a Trojan priest's daughter as his war spoil and refuses ransom from the girl's father; the father then asks the gods to unleash a plague on the Greek army. Achilles insists that Agamemnon return the girl, but Agamemnon refuses, demanding that Achilles swear fealty to him instead. When Achilles won't do so, Agamemnon steals Briseis from Achilles's camp, intending to assault her, which would ensure his own death at Achilles's hands. Patroclus warns him about the consequences of his actions to save Briseis, though his dislike for Agamemnon never wavers. Agamemnon's hot-headedness often gets in the way of his judgment, and his prideful decisions sow distrust among the Greek army and cause thousands of deaths: Achilles refuses to fight for the Greeks until Agamemnon apologizes, but Agamemnon never does so. At the end of the novel, however, even Agamemnon is horrified by Pyrrhus's monstrous deeds, suggesting that his cruelty has limits that Pyrrhus's does not.

Chiron – Chiron is a centaur (half-man, half-horse) who is Achilles and Patroclus's mentor. He's trained many heroes at his home in Mount Pelion, and the two boys live with him for much of their adolescence. Chiron is refined, intelligent, and proud. He views other centaurs as "barbaric" and has a great deal of knowledge about medicine, plants, and warfare—all of which he shares with Achilles and Patroclus. He's also a fair judge of character: for instance, when Thetis asks him to send Patroclus away from Pelion (to keep Patroclus and Achilles apart), Chiron refuses. Achilles and Patroclus imagine that he doesn't know about their romantic relationship, but Patroclus often wonders whether he might—it's likely that he understands what's happening and accepts it. He certainly understands the two boys as individuals: while on Pelion, he warns Achilles that men will want him for their army, and later, he sends Achilles a hand-crafted **spear**. Patroclus wonders whether Chiron knew Achilles was fated to die in Troy and was bitter about it; though Chiron trains warriors, he cares more for healing than for violence. His ideas about warfare are, for the most part, rebellious: he once asks Achilles and Patroclus whether any one life is more valuable than another, something most warriors in the novel don't bother to wonder. Chiron is also—apart from Patroclus—one of very few people who viewed Achilles as a person rather than a cold-blooded warrior. When Patroclus is forced to choose a fake name on Scyros, he calls himself "Chironides," meaning the "son of Chiron." Chiron acts as a surrogate father for Patroclus, whose own father despised him.

Peleus – Peleus is the king of Phthia, Achilles's father, and sea-nymph Thetis's husband. The gods forced Thetis to marry and have sex with Peleus, which was meant as a reward for Peleus's piety. Peleus is known to be clever, handsome, and a benevolent ruler; he fosters many young boys on Phthia, including an exiled Patroclus. But Patroclus eventually realizes Peleus may have an ulterior motive for doing so: the young boys are trained as soldiers and will eventually prove to be a uniquely loyal army. Still, Peleus is kind to Patroclus and seemingly deferential to Thetis, who loathes him; he has no control over her choices, including her choice to send Achilles to Scyros instead of allowing him to fight in Troy. After Patroclus becomes Achilles's companion—something Peleus personally allowed—he often tells the two boys stories of heroes he fought with, all of which demonstrate his modesty. After Achilles is sent to Scyros, Patroclus coerces Peleus into divulging Achilles's location, and

he notices that Peleus seems worn out and has little control over his kingdom. Achilles, meanwhile, doesn't tell his father that he's fated to die in the Trojan War; later, when Thetis tells Achilles that the gods predict the death of the "best of the Myrmidons" (Achilles's kinsmen), Achilles and Patroclus believe the prophecy refers to Peleus, though it really refers to Patroclus. Patroclus once notes that Peleus is what Achilles will be like when he's old, before remembering that Achilles will *never* grow old. Peleus's long life therefore represents an impossibility for Achilles, who is destined to die young.

Deidameia – Deidameia is the princess of Scyros and King Lycomedes's daughter; she's also Achilles's wife and mother to their son, Pyrrhus. Because Lycomedes is old and ailing, Deidameia runs the island, acting as its surrogate ruler. Beautiful, arrogant, and intelligent, Deidameia at first believes she's in complete control of Scyros. The kingdom hosts many foster daughters, and unbeknownst to Lycomedes, Thetis sends Achilles to pose as one of those daughters. Thetis then convinces Deidameia, who knows Achilles's true identity, to secretly marry and have sex with him, which leads to her pregnancy. When Achilles attempts to leave Scyros with Patroclus, Deidameia threatens to reveal the marriage, but Thetis forces her to keep quiet and to have her baby in exile; Thetis will then take the baby and raise it on her own. Heartbroken and jealous of Achilles's love for Patroclus, Deidameia summons Patroclus to have sex with her, which he does; he notes that she seemed to want something more from him, which he was unable to provide. Deidameia is then sent into exile to have her child—her father is furious but can't do anything to stop Thetis. Deidameia believed that she was in control of her kingdom, but this only leads to her downfall, which speaks to women's powerlessness in the world of the novel.

Hector – Hector is one of the princes of Troy, son of Priam and brother of Paris; he's also the second-best fighter in the Trojan War, bested only by Achilles. He's known for his strength, piety, and precision, and he's favored by the god Apollo. Before Achilles and Patroclus sail to Troy, Thetis tells Patroclus that Achilles will only die after Hector does. Hector is such a strong fighter that Patroclus assumes Achilles will be the one to kill him, he and warns Achilles not to; Achilles agrees, joking that Hector has done nothing to him. Later, Achilles discovers that he killed Hector's wife's family during the war—even though Hector hasn't hurt him, he's unknowingly hurt Hector. He can sometimes see himself killing Hector, though he's vowed not to, and though he constantly dodges the idea when anyone asks. As the war goes on, it becomes clear that no one but Achilles can kill Hector, as soldiers like Ajax try and fail. Achilles refuses to fight, but eventually, Hector kills Patroclus, and Achilles kills him in revenge. This renders Achilles's earlier comments ironic: Hector ended up "doing something" to Achilles after all, and Achilles had to kill him, even knowing he'd die next. It remains unclear why Hector targets Patroclus specifically; it's possible that he knows what Patroclus means to Achilles and is angry that Achilles slaughtered his family. Before he dies, Hector asks Achilles to return his body to his father, Priam, but Achilles refuses, dragging Hector's corpse around long after he's dead. Eventually, Priam begs Achilles to reconsider and connects with him through their shared grief; Achilles takes pity on him and returns Hector's body.

Pyrrhus – Pyrrhus is Achilles and Deidameia's son—though he's taken from Deidameia in infancy and raised by his grandmother, Thetis, away from humans. He arrives in Troy after Achilles is dead. Though only 12, he bears a striking resemblance to his father and shares his skill in battle, as Thetis told Achilles that Pyrrhus was fated to end the Trojan War. However, the resemblance ends there: unlike the prideful but loving Achilles, Pyrrhus is sadistic, cruel, and incapable of love. He refuses to allow Patroclus's grave to be marked, since Patroclus wasn't famous and is therefore unworthy of any association with Achilles. He slaughters the royal family in Troy in Achilles's name and attempts to assault Briseis before killing her. Eventually, Agamemnon's son kills him for assaulting his wife. Thetis told Achilles that a human upbringing softened him too much, but the novel implies that if he were raised by gods, he and Pyrrhus might be indistinguishable. Pyrrhus's inability to love separates him from his father, whose love for Patroclus ended up being his one redeeming quality.

Apollo – Apollo is the god of light and music; he favors the Trojans, especially Hector. Apollo plays a role in many of the novel's most significant events: after Agamemnon refuses to ransom a young priest's daughter, the girl's father prays to Apollo, who sets a plague upon the Greek army. The fallout from this incident leads to Achilles's break with the Greek army, which eventually leads to Patroclus's death. Apollo also plays a direct role in both Patroclus's and Achilles's deaths. When Patroclus is dressed as Achilles, he attempts to scale Troy's walls, and Apollo pushes him down twice. He eventually knocks off Patroclus's helmet so that everyone can see his true identity, which is what leads Hector to kill Patroclus. Later, Apollo encourages Paris to shoot and kill Achilles, telling him that—contrary to what the Trojans believe—Achilles isn't invincible.

Menelaus – Menelaus is a prince of Mycenae and Agamemnon's brother. Paris steals his wife, Helen, from his kingdom, an incident that instigates the Trojan War. He seems to genuinely care about Helen—he eventually fights Paris for her return—but their marriage was clearly flawed, as he boarded her up in a palace that was more like a "fortress." Menelaus is the softer version of his brother, diplomatic where Agamemnon is brash; he alone wants to start the war by sending an embassy to the palace, rather than with raids. Menelaus is also a skilled politician, constantly playing both sides in the conflict between Achilles and Agamemnon. It's

implied that Odysseus and Diomedes want Menelaus to take over the army and are maneuvering to make it happen. Menelaus may or may not have a part in this coup, which never comes to fruition.

Helen – Helen is a Spartan princess and known to be the most beautiful woman in Greece. Her abduction at the hands of Paris kicks off the Trojan War, as her husband, Menelaus, comes to rescue her from Troy. When the novel begins, Helen is still unmarried; at Odysseus's urging, her suitors (including a young Patroclus) vow to protect her chosen husband. In exchange, Helen will pick that husband herself, and she chooses Menelaus. Achilles and Patroclus later wonder whether Helen went with Paris willingly because she was in love with him. If this is true, it means she chose both her husband and her lover—something unheard of for women in the world of the novel. Achilles even thinks she might have known her actions would cause a war and wanted the fame it would bring her. Ultimately, however, they decide that it doesn't matter—Menelaus's brother, Agamemnon, would have attacked Troy regardless, and Helen only provided a convenient excuse.

Paris – Paris is one of the princes of Troy, Priam's son, and Hector's brother. He's best known for stealing Menelaus's wife, Helen, and instigating the Trojan War in the process. However, Patroclus eventually realizes that the Greeks would likely have attacked Troy even if Paris hadn't abducted Helen. It remains unclear whether Helen went with Paris willingly. Priam eventually claims that she doesn't want to return to Greece, but Achilles and Patroclus both think it wouldn't matter either way—the war was inevitable. Paris is a favorite of the goddess Aphrodite and known for his beauty and vanity. He later challenges the Greek army to a single-combat fight, in which the winner takes Helen; he fights Menelaus, but the gods apparently interfere, and Paris slips away. Eventually, Apollo encourages Paris to shoot Achilles. Paris had thought Achilles invulnerable, but his arrow hits Achilles in the back and kills him.

Priam – Priam is the Trojan king and father to Hector and Paris—the latter of whom stole Menelaus's wife, Helen, and instigated the Trojan War. Priam tells the Greek army that the Trojans will defend Helen, who apparently doesn't want to leave Troy; the Greeks would likely have attacked regardless, as the Trojan kingdom was wealthy. Priam is rumored to have at least 50 sons and 50 daughters, and he's known to be kind and beloved by the gods. After Achilles kills Hector and takes his body, Priam begs him to return Hector's corpse to the palace—if he doesn't, Hector's soul will never be at rest. Priam knows that Achilles could kill him, but he connects with him via their shared grief: he empathizes with Achilles's pain over losing Patroclus, whom Hector killed. Achilles takes pity on Priam and agrees to return Hector's corpse—one of his greatest acts of kindness. Patroclus later shares this anecdote with Thetis from beyond the grave, which helps convince her to set Patroclus's soul to rest so he and Achilles can be together in the underworld.

Phoinix – Phoinix is Peleus's most trusted advisor who helps raise Achilles; he later accompanies Achilles and Patroclus to Troy. When Thetis takes Achilles to Scyros, Phoinix is the one to tell Patroclus that he's gone—he's a kind and gentle man, and he seems to understand that Achilles and Patroclus love each other romantically. He disapproves of Achilles's pride in Troy and his refusal to defer to Agamemnon, and he later helps Patroclus and Briseis teach the Trojan women Achilles "claims" as war spoils. Though Phoinix wants Achilles to return and help the Greek army after Achilles's quarrel with Agamemnon, he doesn't try to convince him directly. Instead, he tells Patroclus and Achilles a story about the hero Meleager and his wife, Cleopatra, who begged her husband to fight in battle to save his people. Though Meleager did this, his people hated him for how slow he was to help. This story is meant to convince Patroclus to beg Achilles to fight, which he eventually does.

Diomedes – Diomedes is the king of Argos and one of the generals in the Trojan War. He is also a close friend of Odysseus, and the two have a rough banter which establishes them as equals. Diomedes was one of Helen's suitors, and he later goes with Odysseus to find Achilles on Scyros, where the two trick Achilles out of hiding by feigning an attack. Diomedes then threatens to tell everyone that Achilles was dressed as a woman unless Achilles agrees to fight in Troy, while Odysseus smooths things over and tries to convince Achilles more diplomatically. Both Odysseus and Diomedes are both intelligent and both favored by the goddess Athena, though their personalities are very different: Diomedes is loud and crass, while Odysseus is careful. Patroclus and Achilles both dislike and distrust Diomedes, whose cruel humor disturbs them; this distrust is cemented when Diomedes assists Agamemnon in sacrificing Iphigenia. Diomedes uses skillful manipulation to help quell the Greek army's attempted mutinies, and Patroclus later guesses that he and Odysseus wanted Agamemnon to fail as a commander so they could take over.

King Menoitius – King Menoitius is Patroclus's father and husband to Patroclus's mother. He's a cruel man, often disparaging his son—he resents Patroclus for his physical weakness and alleged stupidity, and Patroclus's mother for her intellectual disability. Menoitius clearly wishes he had a stronger son: he's demonstrably jealous of Peleus when a young Achilles wins a race Patroclus couldn't even compete in, and he tells Patroclus that Achilles is what a son ought to be. He later brings a nine-year-old Patroclus to Sparta to woo Helen; Menoitius's kingdom is wealthy, and he brags openly of their riches. However, the other kings, including Tyndareus, subtly mock him, demonstrating that Menoitius's braggadocio hasn't made him many friends. When Patroclus kills Clysonymus,

Menoitius exiles his son in lieu of executing him, largely because exile is cheaper—in ancient Greece, where the book is set, death would have been preferable. Patroclus later speculates that he was angry not because of the murder, but because Patroclus confessed so easily, apparently proving his stupidity. King Menoitius's cruelty sharply contrasts with his son's kindness—and it explains Patroclus's early jealousy of Achilles, whose father always loved him.

Ajax – The large and powerful Ajax is the king of Salamis and Greece's second-best fighter after his cousin, Achilles; he's also one of the Trojan War's generals. Though he's skilled in battle, he isn't fated for greatness the way Achilles is. He is, for instance, incapable of killing Hector—their fight ends in a draw—whereas Achilles does eventually kill Hector. Ajax later goes with Odysseus to broker peace with Achilles on Agamemnon's behalf. Patroclus notes that it must have cost him a lot to do so, since he's army's best fighter as long as Achilles sits the war out. Eventually, Hector wounds Ajax in battle, which helps spur Patroclus to, finally, beg Achilles to fight—and then to don Achilles's armor. When Achilles dies, Ajax is the only soldier who cries over his body, but Patroclus dryly notes that they could be happy tears—Ajax thinks that Achilles's death means he'll get a promotion.

Automedon – Automedon is Achilles's extremely young charioteer; Peleus places Automedon at Achilles service for the Trojan War. Patroclus notes that Automedon's skills grow during the war, and he remains extremely loyal to Achilles, serving as his second during battle and often bringing Achilles messages from the other generals, or gossip related to him. He accompanies Patroclus into battle while Patroclus pretends to be Achilles. Achilles forced Patroclus to swear that he wouldn't really fight, but Patroclus disobeys him—this which makes Automedon nervous, but he reluctantly helps. He eventually witnesses Patroclus's death from afar.

Patroclus's Mother – Patroclus's mother is King Menoitius's wife; she's implied to be intellectually disabled. Menoitius married her when she was only 14 due to her large dowry. But after Patroclus is born, she has little influence over his upbringing and sometimes doesn't even recognize him. Menoitius dislikes both Patroclus and his mother for their weakness; when he tries to marry a nine-year-old Patroclus off to the beautiful Helen, he's really trying to live vicariously through his son. Patroclus's mother enjoys the ocean and music—her dowry included a **lyre**, which Menoitius later sends to Phthia along with Patroclus, and which later belongs to Achilles.

King Lycomedes – King Lycomedes is the ruler of Scyros and the father of Deidameia. He's old and ill, so Deidameia essentially runs their kingdom, which leaves it (and Deidameia) vulnerable. Because of Lycomedes's inattention, Thetis is able to trick Deidameia into marrying and having sex with a disguised Achilles, which eventually leads to Deidameia's pregnancy and exile. Later, Odysseus convinces Achilles to join the Trojan War effort, in part by pointing to King Lycomedes's example—his kingdom will soon be seized, and he'll be forgotten, which is what could happen to Achilles if he doesn't fight. Lycomedes has very little power, despite his royal status; he's beholden to Thetis's threats and whims. Despite this, he's a kind man who fosters many young women on his island.

Iphigenia – Iphigenia is Agamemnon's priestess daughter; Agamemnon summons her to Aulis, telling her mother that she'll marry Achilles there. However, he sacrifices her upon arrival. The goddess Artemis demanded this sacrifice before she allowed the Greek army to sail to Troy—specifically, she demanded the army kill a virgin priestess. This incident causes Achilles to distrust Agamemnon.

Clysonymus – Clysonymus is the young boy Patroclus accidentally murders after he attempts to steal Patroclus's **dice**. The son of a nobleman, Clysonymus taunts Patroclus over his cowardice, believing that Patroclus is simple and weak—these taunts infuriate Patroclus, who pushes Clysonymus onto a bed of rocks and kills him. It remains unclear whether Patroclus knew, subconsciously, that Clysonymus's fall would be fatal, though he was immediately horrified by his actions. The murder causes Patroclus's father to exile him to Phthia. In Phthia, Patroclus is plagued with nightmares featuring Clysonymus, and believes the young boy is haunting him from beyond the grave.

Meleager – Meleager was a famous hero, the greatest and proudest of his age, who was married to Cleopatra. After his people (or, in some versions of the story, the king) insulted him, he refused to fight in the army any longer and instead sought comfort from Cleopatra. His people begged him to save them, but he continued to refuse; eventually, Cleopatra asked him to fight for her, and he did so. It was too late, however, and his people despised him forever. Peleus is the first to tell this story to Achilles and Patroclus, though he doesn't get to the end; later, Phoinix picks up the same thread, attempting to convince Patroclus to beg Achilles to fight. Eventually, Patroclus tries, worried that the Greeks will always hate Achilles if he doesn't.

Heracles – Heracles was a hero of days past who was taught by Chiron. He eventually went mad, failing to recognize his own wife and children and killing them. This was the gods' punishment, and though Achilles thinks it was worse for Heracles's wife, Chiron argues that it's a worse fate to be left on Earth when someone you love is dead. This is a lesson Achilles later learns firsthand, when Hector kills Patroclus and Achilles is left alive.

Artemis – Artemis is Apollo's twin sister and the goddess of the hunt, the moon, and virginity. Before the Trojan War begins, she's angry about the upcoming slaughter and maroons the Greek army on Aulis by halting the wind. She then demands that Agamemnon sacrifice a virgin priestess—preferably his

daughter, Iphigenia. He does so, and Artemis returns the wind. This incident causes Achilles to distrust and dislike Agamemnon.

Zeus – Zeus is the king of the gods, father to many heroes, and assumed grandfather of Helen. Odysseus tells the story of Zeus's son, Tantalus, who killed his own child to taunt Zeus; Zeus later punished him. Eventually, Zeus becomes directly involved in the Trojan War at Thetis's behest: she makes him promise that the Greeks will keep losing until Achilles rejoins the fight. Patroclus eventually kills Zeus's son, Sarpedon, while pretending to be Achilles.

Tyndareus – Tyndareus is the king of Sparta and Helen's father. When Helen is ready to marry, he summons a group of suitors to woo her—but he ends up taking Odysseus's advice to allow Helen to choose her own husband and to force her other suitors to vow that they'll defend the selected man. Odysseus eventually marries Tyndareus's other daughter, Penelope, and Tyndareus finds him amusing. However, he doesn't trust Odysseus's charm completely and forces him to swear the oath as well.

Calchas – Calchas is the Greek army's chief priest. Though he conveys information from the gods, he's deferential to Agamemnon and afraid of his wrath. When prodded by Achilles, he's the one to break the news about Artemis's anger and Apollo's plague, both of which demand large sacrifices from Agamemnon—the death of his daughter and the loss of his pride, respectively.

Machaon – Machaon is the Greek army's physician, who works in the medical tent with his brother. He recognizes Patroclus as a student of Chiron's and allows him to help treat patients, eventually deferring to Patroclus's expertise in wounds. When Machaon is shot by an arrow, he asks Patroclus to speak to Achilles and convince him to rejoin the fight.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Cleopatra – Cleopatra was the hero Meleager's wife. After he refused to fight for his people any longer, Cleopatra convinced him to fight for her. Phoinix subtly draws a parallel between Cleopatra and Patroclus, hoping Patroclus will convince Achilles to fight again after Achilles's quarrel with Agamemnon.

Athena – Athena is the goddess of wisdom and favors both Odysseus and Diomedes; she doesn't interfere in the Trojan War directly, but she does protect Odysseus from Thetis when he's trying to convey the gods' prophecies about Achilles.

Nestor – Nestor is the king of Pylos and rumored to be the oldest man alive. He's one of the generals in the Trojan War and the former companion of the hero Heracles. Patroclus eventually saves the life of one of Nestor's sons while working in the army's medical tent.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

HONOR, PRIDE, AND LEGACY

Achilles is an ancient Greek warrior who's prophesized to die during the Trojan War; he is, as a result, obsessed with what he'll leave behind. His lover, Patroclus, notes that after Achilles dies, "his honor is all that will remain"—in Greek society, honor refers to social status, military rank, fame, and general reputation. Achilles's honor is the novel's central focus: the Fates have prophesized that the war will make him famous, so he believes that he's entitled to honor, often confusing it with pride and violence. Furthermore, the Greeks, including Achilles, believe that warfare is honorable, and that this honor will define their legacies. But by demonstrating the dishonorable tactics that Achilles and the rest of the Greek army use to gain and maintain honor, the novel suggests that there is no real honor in war, and that honor alone can't define someone's legacy. In other words, the type of "honor" that the Greek warriors in the novel pursue is inherently dishonorable.

From the novel's start, the Greeks believe that honor is key to a worthwhile life, and that this honor involves certain forms of acceptable violence. As a child, Patroclus accidentally kills another boy, who tried to steal his **dice**. The fallout proves that Patroclus violated the unspoken rules of Greek honor: he's exiled from his kingdom with his name and title stripped. He notes that for the Greeks, "death was preferable" to this loss of reputation and status. Ironically, however, Patroclus had by this point vowed to go to war if anything happened to the Spartan princess Helen. The takeaway is clear: violence in war is permissible, but violence outside of set parameters is dishonorable. Later, Achilles chooses his honor over life itself. The Fates say that he'll either fight in the Trojan War, attain fame, and die, or live with no glory or fame. Achilles therefore decides to go to Troy—if he doesn't fight, he'll be left with nothing, since the Greeks prize honor above all else.

However, despite the Greeks' emphasis on committing violence honorably, the army's treatment of innocent bystanders in the Trojan War begins to imply that violence and war are perhaps *never* honorable. The Trojan War begins because the Trojan prince Paris stole Helen away from her husband, Menelaus; the Greeks are supposedly in Troy to retrieve her. But when they arrive, they decide to raid local villages instead of immediately sending an embassy to the palace. This means that Achilles and the other soldiers murder villagers who, Patroclus notes, had

"nothing at all to do with Paris or Helen." The Greeks believe that these sanctioned raids are honorable, but they're entirely unrelated to Menelaus's honor, or to Helen's. Furthermore, even as the Greeks defend Helen's honor, they sully that of other women. When they raid villages, they take women captive and allow high-status soldiers to select from the women and rape them. Again, the Greeks see this as an honorable process, with rules and regulations, even though it's unrelated to their larger goals and brutalizes innocent women. If there's honor in harming innocent people, then maybe the concept of honor is inherently flawed.

Meanwhile, Achilles's individual quest for honor also leads him to act dishonorably. Because Achilles believes he's entitled to honor—the Fates, after all, promised him fame and glory—he lets his pride dictate his actions. After the Greek commander, Agamemnon, insults him, he refuses to fight without an apology. This prideful decision ends up costing thousands of lives and sullying Achilles's reputation: the Greeks believe that he's acting dishonorably, even though he's trying to maintain his honor. In fact, Achilles believes his honor is worth any cost. After his quarrel with Achilles, Agamemnon steals Briseis, a Trojan captive whom he believes is Achilles's "bed-slave." Achilles knows that Agamemnon will assault Briseis, but he actually wants him to do so—according to the unspoken rules of honor, Achilles would then have the right to kill Agamemnon. Patroclus puts a stop to this plan, and Achilles accuses Patroclus of trading Briseis for Achilles's honor, not understanding that Patroclus actually prevented him from doing something dishonorable. Achilles is caught up in the Greeks' definition of honor, which allows innocent bystanders to be harmed. Later, Achilles's attempt to maintain his honor leads to Patroclus's death. Patroclus dresses in Achilles's armor to fool the Greeks into thinking that Achilles has decided to fight with them, when really, he's too proud. Patroclus is killed in battle, showing how Achilles's "honor" comes at a steep price, as it indirectly leads to someone else's death.

Notably, the book suggests that characters like Achilles won't be remembered for their "honor" as the Greeks understand it—instead, their legacies will be defined by their morals (or lack thereof). After Achilles and Patroclus die in battle, Odysseus (another Greek soldier) speaks to Achilles's son, Pyrrhus, about burying the two men together. Pyrrhus refuses to do so because Patroclus wasn't famous, but Odysseus argues that unexpected people attain fame and jokes that he might be more famous than Pyrrhus someday. And indeed, Odysseus's character (famous for his role in Homer's *Odyssey*) is far better known to modern readers than Pyrrhus. The Greek understanding of "honor" is therefore flawed: even those who believe they've attained honor might be forgotten, meaning that the horrors they inflicted could have been pointless. After Odysseus fails to convince Pyrrhus, he says that he hopes others will remember that he tried—and Patroclus, from some otherworldly dimension, says that he does remember. Kindness is therefore Odysseus's legacy, rather than anything that happened in war.

At the end of the novel, Achilles's gravestone is marked with his greatest acts of violence, and Patroclus—now a restless spirit—is frustrated that this is how he'll be remembered. When Achilles's mother, Thetis, comes to mourn, Patroclus shares his memories of Achilles with her. None of them are violent—instead, Patroclus remembers Achilles's acts of love and mercy. Given that Patroclus knew Achilles intimately, it's implied that his memories of Achilles, not the official memorial, comprise the legacy that readers should remember. Achilles's legacy is therefore defined by his morals, not his "honor." Achilles misunderstood honor, but Patroclus redefines it: honor is found in small kindnesses, not in war.

FATE, BELIEF, AND CONTROL

In *The Song of Achilles*, the Greek gods, along with the Fates, predict and control events on Earth; humans can ask for guidance but can never overpower their will. The gods are particularly interested in the Greek warrior Achilles, half-god himself: the Fates predict some great destiny for him, which will eventually lead to his death in the Trojan War. Achilles, his lover Patroclus, and his mother Thetis all know Achilles's fate, but they all believe that they can shape it according to their own desires: Thetis (a sea nymph) wants to make Achilles immortal, and Patroclus wants to keep him alive for as long as possible. In the end, however, their belief that Achilles's fate can be controlled is exactly what creates the conditions for his death. By presenting a character's uncontrollable destiny, and by demonstrating that others still hope to control it, the novel suggests that people are incapable of truly submitting to fate—and this inability to accept their destiny is, ironically, what makes that destiny come to pass. Fate is, in this way, a punishment for disbelief.

At first, it seems like Patroclus and Thetis understand and accept Achilles's fate—but they nevertheless begin to interfere in minor ways. There are three initial prophecies regarding Achilles, which come from the Fates: first, he will be the Greek army's best warrior. Second, he will gain fame if he fights in the Trojan War. Third, he will die in Troy. Achilles doesn't *have* to go to Troy, but if he stays home, his legacy will be forgotten. Patroclus and Achilles both believe that Achilles has two choices: either he'll be heroic in death, or he'll live in obscurity. But Thetis is skeptical—as a minor goddess herself, she knows how wily the Fates can be and worries that no one ever specified how famous Achilles will become, or when he'll die. However, all three think that Achilles is making a choice between glory and obscurity. By interpreting the prophecies, they assume that they understand them. Though Patroclus isn't part of the prophecy, he accompanies Achilles to Troy. This is a small intervention in fate—Patroclus admits that if he's able to

stop Achilles's death, he will. Achilles made a choice, and Patroclus accepted it, but this acceptance is fragile; inserting himself in Achilles's destiny may have ripple effects. Thetis, too, begins to subtly mold Achilles's fate as soon as Achilles enters Troy. While Patroclus wants to keep Achilles alive, Thetis wants him to be exceptionally famous—if he is, the gods may make him immortal. This wouldn't invalidate the prophecies, so Thetis's interferences are minor: she makes Achilles appear godlike and watches him on the battlefield. But even these minor interferences suggest that, while Thetis might have accepted fate, she'll still work to shape it.

After the war begins, Thetis, Achilles, and Patroclus's belief that they understand Achilles's fate leads them to think that they have more control than they do. Thetis tells Patroclus that Achilles's prophesied death contains a caveat: he'll die after Hector (a Trojan prince who's Troy's best fighter). Patroclus assumes that, because Hector is so powerful, Achilles will be the one to kill him. He therefore thinks that if Achilles avoids killing Hector, Achilles will stay alive—so, in a more direct act of interference, Patroclus warns him not to kill Hector. Both men know that Achilles is fated to die, but they believe that they can control *when* that death happens. Later, Thetis tells Achilles about another prophecy: the Fates say that the "best of the Myrmidons" (Achilles's kinsmen) will die soon, but that Achilles will be alive when it happens. Achilles and Patroclus don't think much of the prophecy, believing that they already know Achilles's fate. This belief emerges from overconfidence: this prophecy is likely significant, but they don't think they need to understand it. Achilles, meanwhile, thinks that the Fates promised him heroism, so with destiny on his side, he stops worrying about how others perceive him. After the Greek commander, Agamemnon, insults Achilles, Achilles refuses to fight until Agamemnon apologizes, which leads to the deaths of thousands of Greek warriors. The prophecy promised that Achilles would be famous, but Patroclus realizes that everyone could remember Achilles for being prideful. Achilles's belief that he's guaranteed to be a hero—that is, his subjective interpretation of his fate—causes him to make reckless choices that may make him famous for the wrong reasons.

Ultimately, Patroclus's belief that Achilles's fate can be somehow circumvented or altered is what causes that very fate. Hoping to save Achilles's reputation, Patroclus decides to dress up in Achilles's armor and enter battle, believing that this deception will secure Achilles's heroism but dodge his death. Patroclus notes that his idea seemed to come "straight from a god's mouth" but ignores his intuition, choosing to intervene in fate by pretending that Achilles is more heroic than he is. He believes he's found a loophole that will thwart the gods' predetermination of how Achilles will be remembered. But when Patroclus's helmet falls off, everyone realizes that Achilles never came to fight, and Hector kills Patroclus. Patroclus came face-to-face with a god's power and ignored it, believing that he could control Achilles's destiny—but his death proves that such control was never possible. In fact, Patroclus himself was fated to die: it's implied that *he* was the "best of the Myrmidons." In other words, even his idea to circumvent fate was, ironically, a working of fate. Because Hector killed Patroclus, Achilles kills Hector, sealing his fate—and sure enough, Hector's brother Paris soon kills Achilles in retaliation. Achilles and Patroclus believed that Achilles would live if he could avoid killing Hector—but in reality, Achilles should have killed Hector immediately, as this would have spared Patroclus. The two men knew Achilles's fate but never accepted it, thinking that they could outsmart it, and their punishment was a more painful end than either anticipated. This tragic ending suggests that, within the world of the novel, no human can change the will of the Fates or the gods—and trying to do so only ensures a crueler destiny.

GENDER, POWER, AND AGENCY

The Song of Achilles revolves around the actions of men, as the titular character, Greek warrior Achilles, is thrust into the Trojan War alongside his best friend and lover, Patroclus. Women are minor characters by comparison, as they're largely powerless and beholden to the strict gender roles of ancient Greece (a society in which women were generally expected to be submissive to men). However, they also play crucial roles in the novel—in fact, certain women appear to take agency over their lives and bodies. But while it would be easy to accept this agency at face value, it's usually temporary, and it always benefits others. By presenting female characters who defy the norms of ancient Greece, and by implying that even *these* women have no genuine agency of their own, the novel suggests that female empowerment in ancient Greece is an illusion. Worse, it's a tool, given and taken by men and gods alike.

The foundation of Greek society in the novel is female powerlessness—women set the story's events in motion, but they can only do so passively. For instance, Achilles is a product of sexual assault: his mother, Thetis, is a sea nymph, and the gods force her to mate with a mortal king, Peleus. Her assault is a reward for Peleus's piety: the Fates prophesize that Achilles will outshine his father, ensuring the family's continued fame. Achilles goes on to become the best warrior in Greece and is a prominent fighter in the Trojan War, in part because he's half-god. In this way, Achilles's heroism (and indeed his very existence) is predicated on his mother's powerlessness as a woman. Similarly, Patroclus's mother is a passive figure—it's implied that she's intellectually disabled. Her husband, King Menoitius, resents both her and Patroclus, believing that both are weak. Patroclus's unhappiness eventually leads him to kill a young boy by accident, which causes his father to exile him to Achilles's kingdom. The passivity of Patroclus's mother thus, indirectly, propels the story forward: her powerlessness is

central to Patroclus's early frustration, which leads him to Achilles. Even the Trojan War begins as a tale of female powerlessness: the Trojan prince, Paris, allegedly steals Helen away from her husband, Menelaus. Menelaus assembles an army to retrieve her from Troy, which paints Helen as a damsel in distress. Again, women like Helen are central to the novel's plot, but only in a passive way.

Although female powerlessness underlies the novel, certain women defy that powerlessness—but what little agency they possess actually makes them *more* vulnerable. Because Achilles is prophesized to die in the war, Thetis sends him to hide on Scyros, an ailing king's island. Achilles poses as a female companion to the princess Deidameia, who runs Scyros—she is, in practice, the real king. Deidameia, who alone knows Achilles's true identity, believes she has power over him; he can't do much as a "woman." But Thetis soon convinces Deidameia to secretly marry Achilles and have his child, admitting that she saw Deidameia as a "tool." Deidameia's clueless father must exile his daughter while she gives birth, since she can't claim Achilles as her husband publicly. In the end, her assumed agency left her with none. Later, before the Greek army sails to Troy, they're stuck on a strip of land with no wind. They need to sacrifice something—or someone—before the goddess Artemis allows them to leave. The Greek commander, Agamemnon, summons his daughter Iphigenia, telling his wife that he intends to marry their daughter to Achilles. Iphigenia is a priestess, meaning that she can commune with the gods—she has power that other women, and even her own father, do not. But Agamemnon ends up sacrificing Iphigenia against her will; her blood appeases Artemis because she's a priestess. In other words, her power is what dooms her. Later, in Troy, Achilles and Patroclus take responsibility for Briseis, a Trojan woman that the Greeks captured during early raids. Rather than living as a slave, Briseis eventually helps Patroclus run the Greek camp—a position that gives her more power than other Greek women and certainly more than other Trojan slaves. But Briseis's prominent position only makes her a target for Agamemnon, who steals her away—having more agency than most women makes her *more* vulnerable in the end.

Ultimately, the question of female agency is irrelevant: men control the novel's events and outcomes, and they use "powerful" women to do so. Although Paris's kidnapping of Helen is what spurs the Trojan War, Achilles and Patroclus speculate that Helen may actually have gone to Troy with Paris voluntarily. In other words, she may have had an unprecedented amount of agency for a woman of her time. Achilles even believes that Helen knew her actions would start a war and craved the fame it would bring her. However, Patroclus doesn't think it matters either way: the Greeks would have attacked the wealthy Troy regardless, and Helen only provided a convenient excuse. Helen may have had agency, but that agency only galvanized the men around her. Similarly, Thetis believes that she has control over Achilles's fate: the Fates prophesize that Achilles will die in Troy, but Thetis hopes she can make him immortal beforehand by heightening his fame. As a minor goddess, she can't change him herself, but hopes she can influence the other gods to do so. This causes her to interfere in battle, protecting Achilles and shifting his appearance. But these interferences only shield Achilles until his death, when Apollo encourages Paris to finish him off. Thus, Thetis's agency only leads to a conclusion that was already foretold by the Fates. In this way, female agency only *appears* to impact the novel's events—in the end, any power that women have is only a convenient tool that allows men and gods to pull hidden strings.

LOVE, VIOLENCE, AND REDEMPTION

The Song of Achilles is a love story, following the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus from childhood to adulthood. While their bond is an example of romantic love, various forms of platonic love also become important as the story progresses. But *The Song of Achilles* is also a war story, tracking the experiences of the Greek army fighting in the Trojan War. As a result, love and war intermix—in fact, the novel at first seems to imply that love causes and justifies violence, and that violence is more powerful than love. However, characters' fates eventually depend on their ability or inability to love, and those who are capable of love are much better off. In this way, the book suggests that real love is a redemptive force; while it sometimes justifies violence, it also provides an alternative.

On the surface, it seems that love sanctions violence—or, at the very least, that it isn't strong enough to overcome violence. Notably, the Trojan War itself is founded on a love story: the Trojan prince Paris runs away with Helen, Menelaus's wife. Menelaus and his brother, Agamemnon, then assemble an army to retrieve her. At the start of the novel, Helen's suitors—including Patroclus—all take a blood oath to defend her and her husband, and Patroclus notes that the scene feels like a fictional story. Later, Patroclus understands that the Greeks would have invaded Troy regardless of Helen; the abduction merely provided a convenient reason to do so, and the oath ensured an army. In this way, love justified an inevitable war: the reason why taking the oath felt like fiction to Patroclus is because, in a way, it actually was. Then, after Menelaus announces that he'll sail to Troy, the gods give Achilles a choice: either he can participate in the war, become famous, and die in Troy, or he can stay in Greece and live in obscurity. In other words, he can choose between a short, violent life or a long life with Patroclus. Achilles knows that he's Greece's best fighter (someone eventually refers to him as a human "weapon"). Patroclus tells him that they would remain together if he stayed—but he knows that for Achilles, "it was

not enough," and Achilles decides to fight in the Trojan War. This choice implies that perhaps love isn't a strong enough force to overcome violence and war.

However, characters who are unable to love wind up doomed in one way or another. Before the Greek army sails to Troy, Agamemnon sacrifices his daughter, the priestess Iphigenia, against her will to appease the goddess Artemis. Achilles is horrified by the ritual, which leads him to distrust Agamemnon to the point that he eventually refuses to fight for Agamemnon, dooming thousands of Greeks. Achilles's decision ruins his own reputation, but also Agamemnon's: Agamemnon prizes control, but he's left without any. His willingness to sacrifice his daughter rather than spare her out of love leads to his own humiliation as well as his army's plight. Achilles's son, Pyrrhus, is similarly unable to love or act on love: he was taken from his mother, Deidameia, as a child and raised by Thetis, Achilles's goddess mother. Achilles's final conversation with his mother sets up an explicit contrast between father and son: both of them are strong and divinely predestined to be warriors, but Thetis wishes that she hadn't allowed Achilles to be raised by humans, because it softened him. But the emotional hardness and cruelty that Thetis prizes in Pyrrhus proves fatal: Agamemnon's son eventually kills him because he stole his wife and assaulted her. Thus, Pyrrhus's inability to show others love or mercy ensures his early death.

In contrast, other characters' capacities for love redeem them. Achilles's ability to love proves to be his only redeemable quality after endless violence. When Patroclus dies, Achilles goes on a rampage, killing Patroclus's murderer, Hector; he takes Hector's body, planning to keep it away from Hector's family (if he does so, Hector's soul will never find peace). Hector's father, Priam, begs him to reconsider, connecting with him via their shared grief—and Achilles decides to return Hector's body, a rare act of mercy. His ability to love sets him apart from a character like Pyrrhus, who wouldn't understand Priam's love for Hector. Achilles dies soon after, meaning that his kindness was one of his final acts—it's what readers are meant to remember him by. Patroclus's ability to love, meanwhile, indirectly saves the Greek army. When Achilles refuses to fight, Patroclus wears Achilles's armor into battle, planning to save his lover's reputation and galvanize the army at the same time. He does so in part because he loves Achilles and wants him to be remembered kindly; he also cares about his kinsmen and doesn't want anyone else to die. Patroclus's plan leads to his own death, but it works—his love, both romantic and fraternal, briefly spares the army.

Eventually, the love between Achilles and Patroclus saves their souls. Both men are dead at the end of the novel, ashes intermingled. But because Pyrrhus ensures that their grave only references Achilles, Achilles's soul rests in the underworld, while Patroclus's is adrift. Thetis eventually visits their burial ground, and Patroclus's spirit begins telling her about Achilles's good deeds. Thetis always hated Patroclus, believing him unworthy of her son—but as with Achilles and Priam, their shared grief connects them. Thetis ends up marking Patroclus's grave herself, proving both that she truly loved Achilles, and that the love between Patroclus and Achilles (exemplified by the anecdote of Achilles's kindness to Priam) was strong enough to move her. Patroclus and Achilles are spared a lonely afterlife; their love saved each other and redeemed Thetis, who observed it. The novel ends with the implication that Achilles and Patroclus find each other after death. Their story, then, is fundamentally a love story, though violence underlies it—love brings them peace, which violence stole away. It is, in the end, a redemptive force.

SELFHOOD AND RESPONSIBILITY

The Song of Achilles is narrated by Patroclus, but the story centers around the hero Achilles, who has been destined since birth to be the best fighter in Greece and who later discovers that he's fated to die in the Trojan War. Achilles's skill as a soldier is an innate part of him, but he's also loving and kind toward Patroclus and initially dislikes violence. Patroclus constantly attempts to distinguish between the Achilles who hurts people and the Achilles who loves him; he believes the latter Achilles is the real one. Other people think that Achilles is an innate killer, while Patroclus believes he's innately good. But ultimately, the novel suggests that people aren't born with an innate selfhood. Believing that someone is born to be a certain way—killer or lover—only absolves them of responsibility for their actions.

Because Patroclus loves Achilles, he and Achilles's mentor, Chiron, believe that Achilles is innately good. As a child, Patroclus is attracted to Achilles's innocence, as Achilles is deeply honest and hates deceit. Though Achilles is destined to fight someday, he spends most of his time playing the **lyre**, which Patroclus associates with childhood innocence. This is his most lasting impression of Achilles, and it's one that will persist even after Achilles steps into a warrior role. Patroclus later insists that the "real" Achilles is childlike and innocent, and that everyone around Achilles manipulates him to act badly. When Patroclus first sees Achilles fight as a child, he's frightened by Achilles's innate skill. Achilles wasn't trained by anyone, yet he's already a talented warrior. Patroclus's instinct is to divert Achilles's skill by asking Achilles to fight him. This impulse suggests that he's uncomfortable with the way violence is part of Achilles, and he wants Achilles's skill to be external rather than internal. If violence is just what Achilles *does* rather than what he *is*, that means Achilles is still an innocent and good person. Achilles's mentor, Chiron, later adopts this same impulse when he sends Achilles a **spear** before he goes to war. The spear is a way to hurt people, but it's molded specifically to Achilles's hand. This means that it's an extension of Achilles's body, so it gives Achilles a way to kill

people without becoming monstrous: if the spear is only an extension of him, then his fighting skill is just one part of who he is, not all of who he is. The spear also resembles a lyre, which suggests that Achilles will remain innocent in some way even after he begins to hurt others. Chiron and Patroclus both believe that Achilles can separate his identity as a killer from his "true" self, because that true self is innately good.

Other people believe that Achilles was born to be a killer. Before the Trojan War begins, Achilles's fellow soldier, Odysseus, tells Patroclus that Achilles is ultimately just a "weapon." Odysseus believes that Achilles needs to toughen up and leave his innocence behind, because the gods created him to hurt people. This suggests that no matter how kind or good Achilles seems, he's never going to be anything more than a murderer. Similarly, Achilles's goddess mother, Thetis, thinks that Achilles's humanity makes him weak. At the end of the novel, she tells Achilles that she shouldn't have allowed him to grow up alongside humans. The implication is that if she had raised Achilles herself, he would have fulfilled his destiny as a killer without any regrets or moral quandaries. In other words, Achilles was always supposed to be a cold-blooded killer.

However, both of these beliefs—that Achilles is innately good, and that Achilles is innately murderous—only absolve him of personal responsibility. After all, if Achilles is innately good, then his kills aren't part of who he is, and instead they're something that he does. This actually makes his choices worse: if Achilles is good enough to know that what he's doing is wrong, then the fact that he uses his skill to hurt people is morally reprehensible. Still, his innate goodness would absolve him of responsibility: if "true" self has nothing to do with what he does, then he never has to face consequences for his actions or reckon with his choices. He can rest assured that he's a good person and that his capacity for violence is separate from who he really is. But if Achilles is innately murderous, he also can't be held responsible for anything he does. If he murders people, that murder is excusable because he has no other choice and is only using the gifts the gods gave him.

Ultimately, Achilles's destiny depends on the fact that he's both a lover and a fighter, which means that he's not innately one thing. Achilles was always fated to die after the Trojan prince Hector, and Patroclus believes that Achilles will be the one to kill Hector. This ends up being true, but the only reason Achilles kills Hector is because Hector killed Patroclus. If Achilles didn't grow up with and care about Patroclus—in other words, if he was just a cold-blooded murderer—he probably wouldn't have killed Hector, and if he wasn't a skilled murderer, he wouldn't have been able to. As his destiny predicted, Achilles dies shortly after he kills Hector. His fate relied on both elements of his identity, so contrary to the belief of people like Patroclus and Odysseus, Achilles's identity was never fixed. That means that Achilles was responsible for his choices and for his selfhood—that selfhood wasn't chosen for him.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE LYRE

The lyre represents innocence, which Achilles and Patroclus must eventually cast aside. When Patroclus is exiled from his kingdom to Phthia, his father sends a lyre as payment, which the young prince Achilles takes. This particular lyre belonged to Patroclus's mother and was part of her dowry; she was intellectually disabled and would often listen to visiting bards play the instrument, not understanding the sounds but appreciating their beauty instinctually. When Achilles, a skilled musician, first encounters the lyre, he's similarly innocent. But Patroclus isn't: he's already killed a young boy, which is what led to his exile. The lyre's change of ownership makes sense, then: Achilles's innocence and carefree nature is what allows him to take pleasure in playing the instrument. Patroclus describes Achilles's use of the lyre as "pure," which might be the only pure thing about him, as he's eventually destined to be Greece's best warrior. But he's still childlike when he plays the lyre, and that bloody future seems a long way off.

When Achilles leaves to train with Chiron, Patroclus secretly follows him—but he hesitates before doing so, solely because running away would mean leaving the lyre. His decision to go anyway suggests that he's willing to abandon the instrument—and the comfort of childlike innocence that it represents—if it means staying with Achilles. Achilles, however, took the lyre when he left, and he jokes that he now knows how to make Patroclus follow him anywhere: all he has to do is hold onto the lyre. But when Achilles leaves for Scyros, he leaves the lyre in Phthia, and he later says that he wishes they had it. Before Achilles and Patroclus leave for Troy, Achilles receives an ash **spear** that Chiron fashioned for him. Patroclus notes that it resembles a lyre, though the two objects are, of course, vastly different. The resemblance suggests that Achilles's innocence has transformed into something much darker—he will, after all, use the spear to kill enemy soldiers in the Trojan War. Furthermore, it confirms that Patroclus never followed him for his innocence. Patroclus understands that Achilles will change, and he accepts it—and this acceptance is, perhaps, the clearest loss of innocence for them both.

ACHILLES'S SPEAR

Achille's handmade ash spear represents his inhumanity, which will always be part of him due to his inevitable, violent destiny. But it also symbolizes the part of him that remains childlike and innocent. When Achilles decides

to fight in the Trojan War, his mentor, Chiron, sends him the spear. The weapon is of course, intended to kill enemy soldiers. But Patroclus notes that Chiron made the spear with love, and indeed, the spear—designed specifically for Achilles's hands and therefore an extension of his body—allows him to adopt and shed a murderous persona without fully embodying it. Patroclus also notices that the spear resembles a **lyre**'s strut, which is important because Achilles's lyre is an ongoing symbol of innocence. So, the resemblance suggests that although Achilles has largely foregone his innocence in becoming a warrior, his former childhood innocence is still with him even as he commits inhumane actions on the battlefield.

Achilles's contradictions, manifested by the spear, confuse others in the novel. At one point, Odysseus tells Patroclus that Achilles should embrace his destiny as a human weapon, because although "you can use a spear as a walking stick [...] that will not change its nature." In other words, Achilles is inherently violent, no matter how honorable he pretends to be. But because Achilles's spear is distinct from him, Odysseus is both correct and incorrect: Achilles is capable of great violence, but he's able to compartmentalize that inhumanity. He's not a weapon, because his weapon of choice is only an extension of him. Patroclus believes that Chiron guessed Achilles's destiny early on and was bitter about its unavoidability. Thus, it's likely that the spear was both a gift and a way out, since it allowed Achilles to subvert the gods' worst intentions by remaining—at least partially—himself.

THE DICE

Patroclus's dice symbolize the ancient Greeks' flawed understanding of honor. As a young child, Patroclus accidentally kills a young boy, Clysonymus, when Clysonymus tries to steal the dice. Patroclus doesn't know where the dice came from, because neither his father King Menoitius nor his mother ever gave them to him; they have no sentimental value and are essentially meaningless. But Clysonymus demands them, and although Patroclus refuses, he steps backwards, which causes Clysonymus to call him a coward. Patroclus, intending to prove he isn't, pushes Clysonymus against a bed of rocks, which kills him. The dice are lost when Patroclus runs away from the body.

Patroclus's defense of the dice is a symbolic defense of his honor, which Clysonymus called into question. At the same time, Clysonymus is defending his own honor, because letting the famously weak Patroclus win a fight would be dishonorable. Ironically, Patroclus loses his honor (and, more literally, the dice themselves) by defending it: his father exiles him and strips him of his royal title after learning of the murder. Though Patroclus narrates the incident by suggesting that he didn't know the fall would kill Clysonymus, he also admits that his kingdom was a "land of rocks"—in other words, he may have subconsciously intended to kill the boy, therefore acting dishonorably in defense of his honor. If that's the case, honor is arguably as meaningless as the dice, meaning that it isn't worth defending.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Ecco edition of *The Song of Achilles* published in 2012.

Chapter 3 Quotes

I was so small; I was rumored to be simple. If he backed down now, it would be a dishonor. [...] Without meaning to, I stepped back.

He smirked then. "Coward."

"I am no coward." My voice rose, and my skin went hot.

"Your father thinks you are." His words were deliberate, as if he were savoring them. "I heard him tell my father so."

"He did not." But I knew he had.

The boy stepped closer. He lifted a fist. "Are you calling me a liar?" I knew that he would hit me now. He was just waiting for an excuse. I could imagine the way my father would have said it. *Coward*. I planted my hands on his chest and shoved, as hard as I could. Our land was one of grass and wheat. Tumbles should not hurt.

I am making excuses. It was also a land of rocks.

Related Characters: Clysonymus, Patroclus (speaker), Helen, King Menoitius

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 17

Explanation and Analysis

This passage takes place sometime after Patroclus returns from Sparta to woo Helen. He's playing in a field with dice, though he can't remember where he received them. A nobleman's son, Clysonymus, demands he hand over the dice, and Patroclus refuses—he's still a prince, even if his father, King Menoitius, won't interfere in the quarrel.

The passage establishes the values of ancient Greek society (where the book is set): honor is prized above anything else, and an insult to someone's honor is the gravest insult of all. Both Patroclus and Clysonymus are defending their honor: Patroclus is trying to prove he isn't a "coward," and Clysonymus has backed himself into a corner, unable to

leave Patroclus alone without dishonoring himself, since Patroclus is "simple" and therefore weak. Mercy is obviously not involved in honor—picking on someone smaller and more vulnerable than you is both allowed and expected. And yet the fight for honor still has bizarre rules. Clysonymus can't hit Patroclus without an "excuse," which implies that violence is okay in some circumstances and not okay in others.

But the passage also demonstrates that Patroclus and Clysonymus are still innocent, parroting the ideals of their parents and picking the wrong battles. Clysonymus taunts Patroclus using King Menoitius's insult—he might not have seen cowardice as shameful if his father hadn't influenced him to see it that way. His "deliberate" phrasing further suggests that he's mimicking someone else's convictions. Meanwhile, Patroclus reacts to the insult not because it's coming from Clysonymus, but because he can imagine it coming from his father. This might be why he defends his dice blindly, even though they have no real significance to him. Honor is something the two boys have been taught to prize, but they haven't internalized what it really means, or when it's worth defending.

Ironically, this misguided idea of honor leads to a dishonorable act: Patroclus kills Clysonymus. His narration suggests that Patroclus may have subconsciously known that his push would be fatal. But all he could think of at the time was Clysonymus's insult, "coward," and he pushed as hard as he could. This outcome shows how defending honor can lead to dishonor, no matter the "excuse" someone gives later.

❝ My father had spent his life scrabbling to keep his kingdom, and would not risk losing it over such a son as me, when heirs and the wombs that bore them were so easy to come by. So he agreed: I would be exiled, and fostered in another man's kingdom. In exchange for my weight in gold, they would rear me to manhood. I would have no parents, no family name, no inheritance. In our day, death was preferable. But my father was a practical man. My weight in gold was less than the expense of the lavish funeral my death would have demanded.

Related Characters: Patroclus (speaker), Patroclus's Mother, Clysonymus, King Menoitius

Related Themes:

Page Number: 18

Explanation and Analysis

This passage follows Patroclus's murder of Clysonymus, which he immediately confessed to. Clysonymus's parents demand either exile or execution for Patroclus, and King Menoitius agrees. This passage again demonstrates that the Greeks value honor and reputation over anything else, even family. Menoitius doesn't care about Patroclus because he's his *son*, but rather because he's his *heir*. Menoitius's legacy and reputation are more important than his family, who can be "easily" bought and sold. This is particularly true because Patroclus brings him no additional honor—he's small and weak, a shameful son.

After Menoitius's sentence, Patroclus notes that exile is worse than death. This may surprise readers, since Patroclus's father is a cruel man, and his mother sometimes doesn't even recognize him—living without parents may not seem like such a bad thing. Losing a named association with a disliked king seems like a bonus, and he's only a child, so he can't be thinking much about inheritance yet. But honor doesn't seem to follow logic or have much to do with someone's happiness. Patroclus might be better off in exile, but reputation is still more important. Since he's so young, it's safe to assume that this value has been drilled into him since birth; he wouldn't understand what he's losing otherwise.

Though Patroclus believes his father is exiling him to save money, it's also possible that Menoitius just thinks it's a fitting punishment: in order for Menoitius to keep his honor and status, Patroclus has to lose his. In the novel's ancient Greek society, honor is almost always the product of violence, and this forcible ejection seems like a kind of violence, too. Death is apparently dignified, marked with "lavish" remembrance, whereas exile is quick and disgraceful.

❝ Its king, Peleus, was one of those men whom the gods love: not divine himself, but clever, brave, handsome, and excelling all his peers in piety. As a reward, our divinities offered him a sea-nymph for a wife. It was considered their highest honor. [...] Divine blood purified our muddy race, bred heroes from dust and clay. And this goddess brought a greater promise still: the Fates had foretold that her son would far surpass his father. Peleus' line would be assured. But, like all the gods' gifts, there was an edge to it; the goddess herself was unwilling.

Everyone, even I, had heard the story of Thetis' ravishment. The gods had led Peleus to the secret place where she liked to sit upon the beach. They had warned him not to waste time with overtures—she would never consent to marriage with a mortal.

Related Characters: Patroclus (speaker), Achilles, Thetis, Peleus

Related Themes:

Page Number: 19

Explanation and Analysis

This passage, which takes place right before Patroclus arrives in Phthia, describes Achilles's birth, which is the product of Peleus raping Thetis. This assault was sanctioned by the gods, and it demonstrates the subordinate position of women in the novel. Though Thetis is a goddess herself, she's only a sea-nymph, and her will doesn't matter much—in fact, she's valuable only for her "divine blood." Peleus is mortal, but he's still the dominant figure, "sir[ing]" a son through violent means.

Peleus, interestingly, is never depicted as villainous. In fact, he's "pious" (or faithful), deferential to the gods, "brave." The ancient Greek society of the novel, indirectly ruled by the gods, apparently values these traits over any kind of moral compass. This partially explains why "honor" in the novel is always gained through violence and war. In this case, Thetis herself is a tangible "honor" to be won, and Peleus has no choice but to gain that honor violently, according to the gods' wishes (he's not even supposed to *try* to reason with Thetis). Even worse, he's essentially cleared of any wrongdoing, since the gods are telling him exactly what to do. Both the Greek definition of "honor" and the gods' interference allow Thetis's assault to become a "story" in which Peleus is definitively the hero.

At the end of the novel, Thetis reveals that this story—the one "everyone [...] had heard"—isn't even accurate. Apparently, the gods knew the prophecy about Thetis's son and wanted to diminish his power, afraid he'd be dangerous with too much divine blood. Peleus may have believed that Thetis was his "reward," but the gods had ulterior motives. Thetis's agency was therefore twice-removed: even if she'd managed to escape from Peleus, she likely would've been assaulted by someone else later. The gods were essentially trying to maintain the patriarchal status quo, ensuring that even if Thetis's son "surpass[ed] his father," that wouldn't affect any of the male gods.

Chapter 4 Quotes

It was my mother's lyre, the one my father had sent as part of my price.

Achilles plucked a string. The note rose warm and resonant, sweetly pure. My mother had always pulled her chair close to the bards when they came, so close my father would scowl and the servants would whisper. I remembered, suddenly, the dark gleam of her eyes in the firelight as she watched the bard's hands. The look on her face was like thirst.

[...]

His fingers touched the strings, and all my thoughts were displaced. The sound was pure and sweet as water, bright as lemons. It was like no music I had ever heard before. It had warmth as a fire does, a texture and weight like polished ivory. It buoyed and soothed at once.

Related Characters: Patroclus (speaker), King Menoitius, Patroclus's Mother, Achilles

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 33-34

Explanation and Analysis

This quotation takes place after Patroclus has arrived in Phthia. He asked Achilles to lie to his father and claim they'd been playing together, but Achilles hates to lie, so Patroclus goes with him to his lyre lesson to make the lie true. The symbol of the lyre emerges in this passage, which comes to represent the boys' innocence. At this point in the novel, Patroclus is no longer innocent: he's killed a boy. But Achilles is so innocent that he can't bear to lie, something other boys freely do. The transfer of the lyre's ownership therefore makes sense. Part of the "price" Patroclus paid for his exile was a definitive loss of innocence, so the "pure" sounds of the lyre no longer belong to him.

It would be easy to buy into the comparison Patroclus makes between his mother and Achilles: both are innocent, attracted to the "warm," "pure" sounds of the lyre. Patroclus's mother is implied to be intellectually disabled, and Patroclus describe her is childlike. In this way, she's innocent in her passivity. But that innocence isn't totally "pure." She's "thirst[y]" for something she barely understands, to a degree that makes those around her uncomfortable. Achilles, too, can never be totally innocent: he's destined to be the greatest fighter in Greece, and though he hasn't killed anyone yet, it's only a matter of time before he does. The lyre attracts both Patroclus's mother

and Achilles because of their innocence, but Patroclus's memory and Achilles's future imply that this innocence is impermanent, a temporary state of being.

The fact that this scene marks the beginning of Patroclus's love for Achilles is significant: he's at least partly attracted to Achilles because he views Achilles as innocent. Achilles is able to "buoy" and "soothe" Patroclus and to make him feel "warm" even through his crushing guilt. These early impressions of Achilles don't gel with the person he becomes in the Trojan War: a killer and a stubborn leader. But Patroclus's love for Achilles comes first, and he later uses that love to justify Achilles's acts of violence. It's possible that he believes this innocent, "pure" version of Achilles is the real one—but again, his memory of his mother demonstrates that Patroclus subconsciously knows that innocence is only temporary. If his mother was "thirst[y]," she must have wanted something more than what she had.

Chapter 5 Quotes

❝ His movements were so precise I could almost see the men he fought, ten, twenty of them, advancing on all sides. He leapt, scything his spear, even as his other hand snatched the sword from its sheath. He swung out with them both, moving like liquid, like a fish through the waves.

He stopped, suddenly. I could hear his breaths, only a little louder than usual, in the still afternoon air.

"Who trained you?" I asked. I did not know what else to say.

"My father, a little."

A little. I felt almost frightened. "No one else?"

"No."

I stepped forward. "Fight me."

He made a sound almost like a laugh. "No. Of course not."

"Fight me." I felt in a trance. He had been trained, a little, by his father. The rest was—what? Divine? This was more of the gods than I had ever seen in my life.

Related Characters: Achilles, Patroclus (speaker), King Menoitius, Thetis, Peleus

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 45-46

Explanation and Analysis

This passage depicts the first time Patroclus ever sees Achilles fight. Achilles goes to drill practice from time to time, but his mother forbids him to let anyone watch. The gods have prophesized that Achilles will be Greece's best fighter, and she doesn't want anyone to find out about this. Letting Patroclus see him practice, then, is a demonstration of Achilles's trust. Interestingly, Achilles is fighting air here, basically dancing alone with a spear. The most noteworthy thing about his violence is that it's not violent at all; his movements are so natural that Patroclus literally compares them to nature, "liquid" or "a fish through the waves." Achilles doesn't jab or stab, but rather "leap[s]" and "swings" in broad, graceful movements. He's not hurting anyone or even intending to.

Strangely, Patroclus is the one to add violence to the equation. He cares deeply about Achilles—by this point in the novel, he might even love him—but he can't fully understand him here. He adds an invisible army to the image in front of him, "twenty men," and bizarrely asks Achilles to fight him. All of this seems like an attempt to understand Achilles: Patroclus is "frightened" by the clear display of power in front of him (which apparently came from nowhere), and the only way he'd understand that power is if Achilles was literally hurting someone. The ancient Greeks of the novel understand violence, which is tied up with the concept of honor, but they don't necessarily understand "divini[ty]." Part of Patroclus's fear is also jealousy-based, since his father once told him that Achilles was everything a son should be. Achilles seems to be proving him right, and Patroclus feels self-destructive as a result.

But Patroclus's request that Achilles fight him—and, readers can assume, hurt him—might also be a subconscious attempt to make Achilles's clear capacity for violence external. In other words, Achilles's power seems to be innate, so innate that it's a natural part of him, and he's as comfortable with violence as a fish would be comfortable swimming. Though his practice isn't hurting anyone, his power is obviously meant to. If Achilles were to hurt Patroclus in this scene, that would divert the violence from him—right now, it's simmering below the surface. Later in the novel, Patroclus will attempt to separate Achilles the soldier from Achilles the lover, always insistent that the man he loves is not a human weapon. That impulse seems to begin here, because Achilles's innate capability for violence disturbs Patroclus, who cares about him. He wants Achilles's deeds to be distinct from who Achilles is as a person.

Chapter 6 Quotes

❝ Her desire was ambitious. It was a difficult thing, to make even a half-god immortal. True, it had happened before, to Heracles and Orpheus and Orion. They sat in the sky now, presiding as constellations, feasting with the gods on ambrosia. But these men had been the sons of Zeus, their sinews strong with the purest ichor that flowed. Thetis was a lesser of the lesser gods, a sea-nymph only. In our stories these divinities had to work by wheedling and flattery, by favors won from stronger gods. They could not do much themselves. Except live, forever.

Related Characters: Patroclus (speaker), Peleus, Achilles, Zeus, Thetis

Related Themes:

Page Number: 54-55

Explanation and Analysis

This passage follows Patroclus's first conversation with Thetis. During this conversation, she tells him that Achilles will be a god someday without leaving room for him to question that assertion. Readers only learn in this passage that she can't be certain of Achilles's future, and that if he's going to become a god, it'll be the result of a major effort.

Patroclus is immediately frightened of Thetis, and her role in the novel predisposes readers to dislike her, too: she's cruel to Patroclus and constantly tries to separate him from Achilles, believing that their relationship dishonors her son. But in this passage, she reads as a pitiful figure with no real power of her own. She relies on "favors" from other gods, and it's safe to assume these favors aren't easily won. Achilles's birth was, after all, the result of Thetis's assault at the hands of Peleus, which the gods planned. It's not even clear whether a female goddess's son has ever become a god in the world of the novel. Any "favors" likely come from male gods like Zeus, who seem to hold all the cards.

Because Thetis has no real power, her main "ambition" is equally sad: she's trying to make her son a god, so her power depends on him. If Achilles decides that he doesn't want to be a god, she'd have no purpose. Thetis might frighten Patroclus, and he might view her as an enemy, but she's barely more powerful than he is. Neither one of them has any real control over Achilles's future, though Thetis believes she does—or at least tells others she believes it. Besides, Patroclus can hardly blame her for wanting Achilles to stay alive: living "forever" is a curse if one is forced to watch one's children die young.

Chapter 9 Quotes

❝ "Men will hear of your skill, and they will wish for you to fight their wars." He paused. "What will you answer?"

"I do not know," Achilles said.

"That is an answer for now. It will not be good enough later," Chiron said.

[...]

"What about me?" I asked.

Chiron's dark eyes moved to rest on mine. "You will never gain fame from your fighting. Is this surprising to you?"

His tone was matter-of-fact, and somehow that eased the sting of it.

"No," I said truthfully.

"Yet it is not beyond you to be a competent soldier. Do you wish to learn this?"

I thought of the boy's dulled eyes, how quickly his blood had soaked the ground. I thought of Achilles, the greatest warrior of his generation. I thought of Thetis who would take him from me, if she could.

"No," I said.

Related Characters: Patroclus, Achilles, Chiron (speaker), Clysonymus, Thetis

Related Themes:

Page Number: 90-91

Explanation and Analysis

This passage takes place while Patroclus and Achilles are on Mount Pelion to train with their mentor, Chiron. This is the first time Chiron has tried to train them in soldiery, but he soon realizes that Achilles has nothing to learn. Achilles is prophesized to be the best fighter in Greece, and that prophecy is clearly true. Now, all that remains to be seen is how he'll use his skill.

At this point in the novel, Patroclus and Achilles don't know that Achilles is fated to die in the Trojan War. However, Patroclus later theorizes that Chiron might have known Achilles's destiny, at least to some extent. His question for Achilles is therefore confusing: he's basically asking whether Achilles will agree to fight in a war, but if Achilles is fated to die in Troy, there's no real choice to make. Both Chiron and Patroclus like to believe that Achilles has control over his actions and isn't beholden to a bloody destiny. This is somewhat logical, because Achilles could, technically, choose not to fight. But if everything is predetermined, then that's not really true. It's likelier that Chiron is forcing

Achilles to think about what killing actually means—even if he's destined to become a warrior, that won't absolve him of guilt.

Interestingly, Patroclus of all people knows exactly what Achilles is choosing if he goes to war: Patroclus has killed a boy (Clysonymus) and would never want to repeat that murder. But he doesn't fully make the connection between that murder and Achilles's destiny. Instead, he immediately thinks about Thetis, an external enemy, as though trying to divert attention from Achilles. This is something Patroclus will do throughout the novel, as he's unable to ever reconcile Achilles the "warrior" with the innocent Achilles he loves. He understands what it means to kill someone but almost always absolves Achilles of the same guilt.

Chapter 10 Quotes

His eyes opened. "Name one hero who was happy."

I considered. Heracles went mad and killed his family; Theseus lost his bride and father; Jason's children and new wife were murdered by his old; Bellerophon killed the Chimera but was crippled by the fall from Pegasus' back.

"You can't." He was sitting up now, leaning forward.

"I can't."

"I know. They never let you be famous and happy." He lifted an eyebrow. "I'll tell you a secret."

"Tell me." I loved it when he was like this.

"I'm going to be the first." He took my palm and held it to his. "Swear it."

"Why me?"

"Because you're the reason. Swear it."

"I swear it," I said, lost in the high color of his cheeks, the flame in his eyes.

"I swear it," he echoed.

We sat like that a moment, hands touching. He grinned. "I feel like I could eat the world raw."

Related Characters: Patroclus, Achilles (speaker), Hector, Heracles

Related Themes:

Page Number: 104-105

Explanation and Analysis

This passage takes place while Patroclus and Achilles are training on Mount Pelion and after they've had sex for the first time. Achilles knows he's destined to be Greece's greatest fighter—a hero—but believes his destiny will be happier than men who were similarly skilled. This will be possible because he and Patroclus love each other.

What Patroclus doesn't say—and what readers can infer—is that the men Patroclus immediately thinks of as "heroes" are actually soldiers. In other words, they've killed many people and are likely famous because of their actions on the battlefield, since this is how honor is won in ancient Greece (where the novel is set). Achilles is going to be a soldier, too—his destiny makes that inevitable, although they don't yet know *how* it'll happen. At no point does it occur to Achilles that maybe there's a reason famous soldiers, more skilled at killing than other people, are never happy—and that maybe their skill is the very thing that prevents them from being happy. Achilles seems to believe he can avoid the repercussions of his fate while still enjoying the fame that fate promises. Later, he'll realize that no such bargain is possible.

Achilles's logic in this passage is basically that love will overcome unhappiness, which violence would probably cause otherwise. But Patroclus, again, doesn't think through the examples that pop into his head. Heracles had a family, Theseus a bride, Jason a wife. Presumably, these men loved the people they were close to or at least cared about them, and that love didn't prevent them from being unhappy. If anything, love was probably the thing that *caused* their unhappiness. If they didn't love the people that died, they wouldn't be unhappy about their deaths.

Finally, this passage introduces a phrase that will recur. Achilles's claim that he wants to "eat the world raw" is a declaration of independence from a predetermined, unhappy future. But later, the phrase takes on a different meaning: after Hector kills Patroclus and Achilles is about to avenge him, Achilles says that he'll eat Hector "raw." His early belief that he could avoid unhappiness is thus verbally linked to his later unhappiness. And sure enough, Patroclus's death causes Achilles's unhappiness *because* he loves Patroclus deeply. Even now, this declaration seems strangely violent: Achilles's desire to "eat the world" paints him as an animalistic predator, which he both is and isn't.

Chapter 13 Quotes

She slapped me. Her hand was small but carried surprising force. It turned my head to the side roughly. The skin stung, and my lip throbbed sharply where she had caught it with a ring. I had not been struck like this since I was a child. Boys were not usually slapped, but a father might do it co show contempt. Mine had. […]

She bared her teeth at me, as if daring me to strike her in return. When she saw I would not, her face twisted with triumph. "Coward. As craven as you are ugly. And half-moron besides, I hear. I do not understand it! It makes no sense chat he should- " She stopped abruptly, and the corner of her mouth tugged down, as if caught by a fisherman's hook. […] I could hear the sound of her breaths, drawn slowly, so I would not guess she was crying. knew the trick. I had done it myself.

Related Characters: Patroclus, Deidameia (speaker), Clysonymus, King Menoitius, Achilles

Related Themes:

Page Number: 144

Explanation and Analysis

This passage takes place while Patroclus is on Scyros with Achilles. Deidameia is secretly married to Achilles and pregnant with his child, and she's about to go into exile to have the baby. Aware of Achilles's romantic relationship with Patroclus, she's called Patroclus to her chambers.

In this passage, Deidameia threatens Patroclus's honor in exactly the same way that Clysonymus did: she calls him a coward and (unknowingly) reminds Patroclus of his father's earlier cruelty. Because "boys [are] not usually slapped" and presumably are never slapped by a woman, she's claiming some power over Patroclus and reminding him that even as a young prince, he never had any. But unlike with Clysonymus, Patroclus doesn't hurt her, and her threat to his honor seems to mean very little to him. Moreover, his constant reminders of her vulnerability—her "small" hand, her tears—demonstrate that he doesn't agree with the rules of honor established earlier in the novel. Clysonymus was expected to pick on Patroclus because Patroclus was weak and vulnerable—but Patroclus refuses to do the same thing here, which implies that those expectations are morally wrong.

Although Deidameia appears to be in control of the situation, she's really powerless. She's about to be forced away from her palace, and she can't even get her husband to pay attention to her. Patroclus relates to her powerlessness by reminding readers of his own: his father used to hit him, and he used to hide his tears. But Patroclus also subconsciously suggests that Deidameia's powerlessness is a product of external forces. She can't even control her facial expression: her mouth is dragged down "as if caught by a fisherman's hook." Patroclus might feel powerless throughout the novel, but as a woman, Deidameia has far less control over her circumstances, and outsiders dictate those circumstances—she's only prey to other people, a fish on a hook. For example, Thetis tricked her into marrying Achilles but now won't allow her to claim him publicly, forcing her into a life of shame.

Patroclus's belief in his own powerlessness is a convenient one, as it absolves him of any guilt. But eventually, he'll change his mind, and the novel's climax is his attempt to take control of his circumstances. Deidameia, on the other hand, will never be afforded that opportunity.

Chapter 15 Quotes

"That if you do not come to Troy, your godhead will wither in you, unused. Your strength will diminish. At best, you will be like Lycomedes here, moldering on a forgotten island with only daughters to succeed him. Scyros will be conquered soon by a nearby state; you know this as well as I. They will not kill him; why should they? He can live out his years in some corner eating the bread they soften for him, senile and alone. When he dies, people will say, who?"

The words filled the room, thinning the air until we could not breathe. Such a life was a horror.

But Odysseus' voice was relentless. "He is known now only because of how his story touches yours. If you go to Troy, your fame will be so great that a man will be written into eternal legend just for having passed a cup to you. You will be—"

Related Characters: Patroclus, Odysseus (speaker), Deidameia, King Lycomedes, Achilles

Related Themes:

Page Number: 165

Explanation and Analysis

This quotation is part of a conversation between Odysseus and Achilles on Scyros, witnessed by Patroclus. Odysseus is trying to convince Achilles to fight in the Trojan War and claims that the gods have prophesized two possible futures for Achilles. Either he'll fight in Troy and becomes famous, or he'll live in obscurity.

Although Odysseus paints Lycomedes's future as a horrific one—and indeed, Patroclus and Achilles view it that way—it

really doesn't seem so bad. Lycomedes is old, sick, and tired. He allows Deidameia to rule Scyros, so he clearly doesn't care much about his kingdom and doesn't even bother to pretend he has control over it. Because the island is "forgotten," no one bothers him—and if Odysseus predicts that Scyros will be taken soon, Lycomedes likely knows that as well and is allowing it to happen. He won't live on after death, but his daughters will presumably remember him. In a world where honor is won in violent battle, living to a ripe old age without any fame seems like a gift, even if it means being "alone." Odysseus frames Lycomedes as weak—needing his bread "softene[d]"—but really, that's just a product of old age, something more famous men will probably never experience.

Meanwhile, Odysseus unintentionally demonstrates the illogic of valuing fame and honor above all else. If Achilles fights in the war, Lycomedes will become famous for exactly the same reason his future without fame will be horrific: he'll have to accept food and drink from someone else. In the first hypothetical, it's softened bread, and in the second, it's a cup. The only difference between those two scenarios is that Achilles chooses—or doesn't choose—to fight in a war, rather than anything Lycomedes does or doesn't do. Honor arguably seems cheap in this regard, and it may make readers wonder why Achilles values it so much. Clearly, it doesn't always accurately reflect a person or their potential, so maybe it means nothing at all.

❝ "I do not think I could bear it," he said, at last. His eyes were closed, as if against horrors. I knew he spoke not of his death, but of the nightmare Odysseus had spun, the loss of his brilliance, the withering of his grace. I had seen the joy he took in his own skill, the roaring vitality that was always just beneath the surface. Who was he if not miraculous and radiant? Who was he if not destined for fame?

"I would not care," I said. The words scrabbled from my mouth. "Whatever you became. It would not matter to me. We would be together."

"I know," he said quietly, but did not look at me.

He knew, but it was not enough.

Related Characters: Patroclus, Achilles (speaker), King Lycomedes, Odysseus

Related Themes:

Page Number: 167

Explanation and Analysis

This passage takes place after Odysseus and Achilles's conversation. Achilles has just learned that if he goes to fight in the Trojan War, he'll be famous, but he'll also die in Troy. If he doesn't go, he'll live in obscurity. Patroclus narrates the passage, but it remains unclear whether or not he agrees with Achilles's bleak assessment of his potential future. This ambiguity is exemplified by his two rhetorical questions, which have no clear source. On the one hand, it seems like Patroclus is trying to imagine what Achilles thinks about "his own" brilliance and talent for fighting, so the rhetorical questions are Achilles's, or Patroclus's best guess about what Achilles is thinking. On the other hand, those questions could just as easily be Patroclus's. If Achilles's "vitality" is always part of him, "beneath the surface," then Patroclus also doesn't know what Achilles would be without it. Currently, Achilles's capacity for violence is an innate part of him.

In a way, this passage defies logic, because readers might assume that Achilles is choosing between something easy (living a long life, albeit an ordinary one) and something difficult (fighting in a war and dying there). But actually, fighting and dying is the easier choice, because living a long life would force Achilles to figure out what he is besides "miraculous" or "destined for fame" and honor. Achilles would be uniquely vulnerable in that case—more vulnerable than he is when he's marked for death.

Achilles's refusal of vulnerability is also a refusal of a long life with Patroclus. If he chose not to fight, there would be no prophecy to rely on, only love. This passage seems to suggest that love isn't strong enough to overcome not only Achilles's violent destiny but the certainty that destiny provides. Trusting in love is vulnerable; trusting in a prophetic death isn't. It's a pretty bleak notion, one that the novel will later complicate: after Patroclus dies in battle, Achilles seems to realize that he chose wrong.

My hand closed over his. "You must not kill Hector," I said. He looked up, his beautiful face framed by the gold of his hair.

"My mother told you the rest of the prophecy."

"She did."

"And you think that no one but me can kill Hector."

"Yes," I said.

"And you think to steal time from the Fates?"

"Yes."

"Ah." A sly smile spread across his face; he had always loved defiance. "Well, why should I kill him? He's done nothing to me."

For the first time then, I felt a kind of hope.

Related Characters: Achilles, Patroclus (speaker), Clysonymus, Hector, Thetis

Related Themes:

Page Number: 171

Explanation and Analysis

This passage is a conversation between Achilles and Patroclus. Patroclus has just learned that Achilles is prophesized to die *after* the Trojan prince, Hector. Because Hector is a skilled fighter, second only to Achilles, Patroclus assumes that Achilles will be the one to kill Hector. That means that all Achilles has to do to stay alive is to never kill Hector.

This is an obvious display of overconfidence: first, Patroclus believes he understands the "prophecy" enough to find a loophole in it. Second, he believes the Fates would leave a loophole at all. And third, he believes that finding that loophole wouldn't be part of their inevitable fate. That suggests that he doesn't believe in the concept of fate, which by definition means that everything that happens was always supposed to happen. There's no such thing as "stealing time from the Fates" or "defying" the Fates, because if one does gain extra time, that only means one was always fated to do so. If Patroclus thinks he can subvert Achilles's fate, he clearly doesn't put much stock in fate itself—which, in ancient Greece (where the novel is set), feels like a big mistake.

Meanwhile, Achilles's response—that Hector hasn't done anything to harm him—reads as similarly arrogant, and the fact that it's basically a joke makes it seem like he's laughing at fate. Of course, Hector *will* eventually do something to Achilles: he'll kill Patroclus, which will then spur Achilles to kill him. It's possible that this was fated to happen from the moment the Fates gave the prophecy. It's also possible that the Fates were angry at Achilles's overconfidence and chose to make his statement an ironic one, adding Patroclus's death to Achilles's fate later on. Either way, Achilles was never in control and was wrong to assume that he was.

Achilles's comment also reminds readers of the nature of war. Achilles is going to kill many people who have done "nothing to [him]"—he won't need an excuse in battle, because all fighting is honorable and because he's destined to kill. This contrasts sharply with earlier displays of honor in the novel, including when Clysonymus bullies Patroclus. In that scene, Clysonymus was waiting for Patroclus to insult him in order to hit him. This demonstrates the inconsistent nature of honor in the ancient Greece of the novel: violence is allowed in certain circumstances but not in others.

Chapter 16 Quotes

Finally, last of all: a long spear, ash sapling peeled of bark and polished until it glowed like gray flame. From Chiron, Peleus said, handing it to his son. We bent over it, our fingers trailing its surface as if to catch the centaur's lingering presence. Such a fine gift would have taken weeks of Chiron's deft shaping; he must have begun it almost the day that we left. Did he know, or only guess at Achilles' destiny? As he lay alone in his rose-colored cave, had some glimmer of prophecy come to him? Perhaps he simply assumed: a bitterness of habit, of boy after boy trained for music and medicine, and unleashed for murder.

Yet this beautiful spear had been fashioned not in bitterness, but love. Its shape would fit no one's hand but Achilles', and its heft could suit no one's strength but his. And though the point was keen and deadly, the wood itself slipped under our fingers like the slender oiled strut of a lyre.

Related Characters: Patroclus (speaker), Chiron, Achilles

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 189

Explanation and Analysis

This passage takes place as Achilles and Patroclus are preparing to leave for Troy. Achilles receives gifts that he'll take into battle, including Chiron's spear. This spear represents Achilles's inhumanity and capacity for violence—it's his first real weapon, one he'll kill with. But the fact that Chiron made the spear complicates things: Chiron,

who favors healing and the arts, doesn't want Achilles to be a "murder[er]." If he does know Achilles's destiny to become Greece's best warrior, he's probably "bitter" about it.

Taking that into account, the spear actually provides Achilles with a way out of his own inhuman fate. It's essentially an extension of Achilles's body, built specifically for his "hand" and "strength"—and because it's an extension of Achilles, it's not actually part of him. If that's the case, then Achilles's deeds can be separate from him, too. This explains why the spear resembles a lyre, which symbolizes Achilles's lingering innocence throughout the novel. The spear allows Achilles to maintain some of that innocence, or at least some of his humanity—if he throws a spear away from him to kill someone, he isn't internalizing that murder. It makes sense, then, that Chiron made this spear with "love," because the spear is a way for Achilles to maintain some semblance of humanity.

Of course, the logic isn't flawless. Achilles is a killer, no matter how he kills or what he uses to do it. Trying to divert blame away from him may be a pointless endeavor, but it's one Patroclus will adopt as the novel goes on, excusing Achilles's violence because of his love for Achilles. This spear, in part, gives him a reason to do so.

Chapter 18 Quotes

He leaned forward in his chair. "May I give you some advice? If you are truly his friend, you will help him leave this soft heart behind. He's going to Troy to kill men, not rescue them." His dark eyes held me like swift-running current. "He is a weapon, a killer. Do not forget it. You can use a spear as a walking stick, but that will not change its nature."

The words drove breath from me, left me stuttering. "He is not—"

"But he is. The best the gods have ever made. And it is time he knew it, and you did too. If you hear nothing else I say, hear that. I do not say it in malice."

Related Characters: Patroclus, Odysseus (speaker), Iphigenia, Agamemnon, Achilles

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 207

Explanation and Analysis

This passage—a conversation between Odysseus and Patroclus—takes place after Agamemnon sacrifices his own daughter, Iphigenia. This incident horrifies Achilles, who has never seen someone die before. Patroclus blames Odysseus for allowing it to happen, but Odysseus thinks that Achilles needs to toughen up if he's going to fulfill his inevitable, bloody destiny.

In many ways, Odysseus is right: Achilles is destined to be a fighter, and that destiny involves murder. He's going to kill a lot of people, some as innocent as Iphigenia was. Patroclus wants to rescue Achilles from his fate, but Achilles certainly won't "rescue" anyone. Odysseus claims that his tough love is a kindness, and it is to some extent—Patroclus knows what Achilles is capable of, but he hasn't yet come to terms with it.

But at the same time, Achilles isn't quite a "weapon," because he's more than capable of human feeling. He and Patroclus love each other, and he doesn't want innocents like Iphigenia to be harmed. He might become a killer, but he's still a person. Odysseus thinks the gods intended to "make" Achilles emotionless, but it doesn't seem likely; Achilles ends up dying not because he's a killer, but because he loves Patroclus and avenges his death, dooming himself. In other words, his destiny was always to love and to fight, two seemingly incompatible things.

Odysseus's mention of a "spear" recalls the symbol of Achilles's spear, which represents his inhumanity. Because the spear is an extension of Achilles's body, this inhumanity is just one part of him and not all of him. But Odysseus doesn't seem to view it that way and instead thinks Achilles *is* the spear. In other words, Patroclus doesn't think Achilles's abilities define him, while Odysseus thinks they do. Of course, it's possible that both men are right—Achilles's capacity for violence may define him, but not entirely.

Chapter 20 Quotes

I listened to every word, imagining it was a story only. As if it were dark figures on an urn he spoke of instead of men [...] I learned to sleep through the day so that I would not be tired when he returned; he always needed to talk then, to tell me down to the last detail about the faces and the wounds and the movements of men. And I wanted to be able to listen, to digest the bloody images, to paint them flat and unremarkable onto the vase of posterity. To release him from it and make him Achilles again.

Related Characters: Patroclus (speaker), Deidameia, Menelaus, Achilles

Related Themes:

Page Number: 223-224

Explanation and Analysis

This passage takes place after the Greek army begins to raid Trojan villages. When Achilles returns from these raids, he always seeks Patroclus out and tells him every detail, a habit that began when they were kids. Patroclus's choice to imagine real events as a "story" or a dream is an ingrained habit; he did the same thing after he swore the oath to defend Menelaus and after he had sex with Deidameia. This impulse is both a way to cope and an in-joke: Patroclus is, obviously, a character in a story. This strange self-awareness suggests that Patroclus understands how little control he has over his life—his only real option is to shape Achilles's legacy so that it's a story people want to hear later, the kind that will be painted on "urns."

But this self-awareness also leads him to separate Achilles's "bloody" deeds from Achilles as a person. Patroclus seems to think that the stories people will tell about Achilles later on won't have anything to do with who Achilles really was—the "vase of posterity" will present Achilles the soldier, but Patroclus will have known Achilles the man. But this passage takes readers out of the novel briefly, forcing them to remember that they're reading a fictional story. Ironically, this ends up proving Patroclus wrong. Achilles appears in the novel exactly as Patroclus knew him, murder and all, so Patroclus can't successfully separate Achilles's deeds from Achilles as a person. This is both a good thing and a bad thing: Achilles comes across as more human than he would on the "vase," but this also means he has more responsibility for the lives he takes.

It's never clear whether Achilles shares this detailed information about "wounds" and "movements" with Patroclus because he feels guilty or because he just wants to relive the kills. It's probably a bit of both, which further proves that there aren't two Achilles but rather one very conflicted Achilles. Again, this is both a good thing and a bad thing: on the one hand, Achilles knows what he's doing is wrong, and on the other, that only makes his bad choices worse.

Chapter 21 Quotes

❝ It turned out that she did know a little Greek. A few words that her father had picked up and taught her when he heard the army was coming. *Mercy* was one. *Yes* and *please* and *what do you want?* A father, teaching his daughter how to be a slave.

During the days, the camp was nearly empty but for us. We would sit on the beach and halt through sentences with each other. I grew to understand her expressions first, the thoughtful quiet of her eyes, the flickering smiles she would hide behind her hand. We could not talk of much, in those early days, but I did not mind. There was a peace in sitting beside her, the waves rolling companionably over our feet. Almost, it reminded me of my mother, but Briseis' eyes were bright with observation as hers had never been.

Related Characters: Patroclus (speaker), Agamemnon, Achilles, Patroclus's Mother, Briseis

Related Themes:

Page Number: 230

Explanation and Analysis

This passage takes place after Patroclus has befriended Briseis, a Trojan captive that Achilles claimed as a war spoil in order to protect her from being raped by other Greek soldiers. The powerlessness of women in the novel is on full display here: the Greek army's invasion of Troy means that captive women can only hope to please their captors. Briseis's father taught her Greek not because it would help her escape but because it would help her survive slavery.

Interestingly, Patroclus compares Briseis with his mother here. This scene recalls an earlier memory in which he and his mother skipped stones by the ocean; he felt similarly "peace[ful]" then. However, he suggests that Briseis is very different from his mother, whom Miller implies is intellectually disabled. Though they can't communicate, Briseis is "thoughtful" and "observa[nt]," qualities that set her apart.

However, Patroclus's depiction of Briseis's inevitable slavery suggests that she and his mother aren't all that different, at least in terms of their possible futures. They're both powerless as women, and Briseis's intelligence only makes her aware of her own powerlessness. It's possible that Patroclus believes he's freed Briseis, at least in a limited capacity, but her position in the Phthian camp will only make her more vulnerable later on. Agamemnon will eventually steal her away, believing she's important to Achilles. Briseis's inability to communicate allows Patroclus to build a false narrative about her unique position, one that will eventually crumble.

Chapter 22 Quotes

"She must have been willing, though. Menelaus' palace is like a fortress. If she had struggled or cried out, someone would have heard. She knew he must come after her, for his honor if nothing else. And that Agamemnon would seize this opportunity and invoke the oath."

"So you think she did it on purpose? To cause the war?" This shocked me.

"Maybe. She used to be known as the most beautiful woman in our kingdoms. Now they say she's the most beautiful woman in the world." He put on his best singer's falsetto. "A thousand ships have sailed for her."

[...]

"Maybe she really fell in love with Paris."

"Maybe she was bored. After ten years shut up in Sparta, I'd want to leave too."

"Maybe Aphrodite made her."

"Maybe they'll bring her back with them."

We considered this.

"I think Agamemnon would attack anyway."

"I think so too. They never even mention her anymore."

"Except in speeches to the men."

Related Characters: Patroclus, Achilles (speaker), Priam, Agamemnon, Menelaus, Paris, Helen

Related Themes:

Page Number: 234-235

Explanation and Analysis

This passage is a conversation between Achilles and Patroclus. The Greek army has gone to negotiate with the Trojan king, Priam, for Helen's release, but Achilles and Patroclus know that the war is inevitable no matter what happens. They speculate about whether Helen went with Paris willingly. Everyone believes she was abducted, but that seems unlikely.

Essentially, Patroclus and Achilles are wondering how much agency Helen really had. If she did go with Paris willingly, that's pretty significant—it means that she chose Menelaus as her husband, then Paris as her lover. Maybe she was unhappy living with Menelaus, apparently caged up in a "fortress," and saw a way out by taking control of her circumstances. It's possible that she loved Paris, and it's also possible she wanted fame for herself. In the latter hypothetical, Helen is a kind of mastermind, engineering a war for her own benefit. Achilles is right that if Helen *did* run away with Paris of her own free will, she probably knew that Menelaus would follow—the Greek "honor" code is strict, and stealing someone's wife is a personal insult. Or maybe Helen had no agency at all, and the goddess Aphrodite forced her to run away.

But crucially, Helen's agency or lack thereof doesn't actually matter, because it won't impact the events to come. Patroclus notes that regardless of whether or not Helen returns with the army, there will be a war. Agamemnon was always planning to strike the wealthy Troy, and Helen is a figurehead. Regardless of her intentions, she's no longer a central part of the conflict and is just a topic for speeches. Her agency is an illusion, since it only benefits men like Agamemnon.

Chapter 26 Quotes

"Her safety for my honor. Are you happy with your trade?"

"There is no honor in betraying your friends."

"It is strange," he says, "that you would speak against betrayal."

There is more pain in those words, almost, than I can bear. I force myself to think of Briseis. "It was the only way."

"You chose her," he says. "Over me."

"Over your pride."

[...]

"My life is my reputation," he says. His breath sounds ragged. "It is all I have. I will not live much longer. Memory is all I can hope for." He swallows, thickly. "You know this. And would you let Agamemnon destroy it? Would you help him take it from me?"

"I would not," I say. "But I would have the memory be worthy of the man. I would have you be yourself, not some tyrant remembered for his cruelty."

Related Characters: Patroclus, Achilles (speaker), Agamemnon, Briseis

Related Themes:

Page Number: 295-296

Explanation and Analysis

This passage is a conversation between Achilles and Patroclus, which occurs after Patroclus betrays Achilles to Agamemnon. Achilles was planning to allow Agamemnon to sexually assault Briseis, which would give Achilles an excuse to kill him—a violation of Briseis would be an insult to Achilles's honor, since she's technically Achilles's war spoil (though he only took her in order to protect her). However,

Patroclus told Agamemnon about the plan in order to spare Briseis.

In this passage, the contradictions of Greek "honor" are obvious: Achilles is trying to maintain his honor, but in order to do that, he'd have to allow someone else to act dishonorably. Patroclus argues that this means Achilles himself would be acting dishonorably. Even worse, Achilles may not be acting purely based on logic. He's jealous of Briseis, who loves Patroclus and wants to have children with him. Whether or not Achilles admits it (and he hints at it by suggesting that Patroclus "chose" Briseis), he's subconsciously punishing her, which isn't particularly honorable.

Even the rules Achilles is trying to follow don't make any sense. Achilles needs to wait for Agamemnon to assault Briseis before killing him, but arguably, he should kill Agamemnon before he can hurt her. Morally, this would perhaps be more honorable, but Greek honor in the novel clearly has very little to do with morals or helping innocent individuals. In fact, Patroclus argues that Achilles confuses "pride" with honor. Real honor is something else entirely.

Clearly, Achilles is deeply concerned with his legacy, or how others remember him. This is fair enough, since he's going to die young and has traded a long life for fame and glory. Patroclus cares about that legacy, too, maybe even more than Achilles does, but he's trying to deliberately shape it. Achilles is focused on the fame he achieves in the present: if he kills Agamemnon, no one will be left to boss him around. Patroclus is focused on how people in the future will judge Achilles. He wants people's memories of Achilles to resemble the way *he* views Achilles—in other words, he wants Achilles's capacity for love to outweigh his violent deeds. This is a definitely a rejection of honor as the Greeks understand it. However, Patroclus doesn't always see Achilles clearly: even if Achilles is capable of love, he's also capable of cruelty and violence.

Chapter 28 Quotes

❝ It is strange how well she fits there. How easily I touch my lips to her hair, soft and smelling of lavender. She sighs a little, nestles closer. Almost, I can imagine that this is my life, held in the sweet circle of her arms. I would marry her, and we would have a child.

Perhaps if I had never known Achilles.

[…]

She draws down the blanket, releasing me into the air. She cups my face in her hands. "Be careful tomorrow," she says. "Best of men. Best of the Myrmidons."

Related Characters: Briseis, Patroclus (speaker), Thetis, Agamemnon, Achilles

Related Themes:

Page Number: 314

Explanation and Analysis

This passage takes place in Briseis's tent. She's still being held prisoner by Agamemnon, and Patroclus comes to warn her that the Greek camp will likely fall. This ends up being the last time they speak to each other.

The passage posits a kind of alternate universe. Patroclus obviously loves Briseis, even if it's not exactly how she wants him to. He can "almost" picture a future with her, complete with children. He's comfortable with her, and their relationship would be "easy"—it's a vision of an ordinary life. But this life could only happen if Patroclus "had never known Achilles," and it's unclear whether that was ever possible. Achilles was always fated to die in Troy, and the reason he dies is because he avenges Patroclus's murder. If Achilles had never loved Patroclus, his destiny would be totally different. Patroclus imagines that his own fate isn't predetermined, but this probably isn't true.

Indeed, Briseis's declaration—that Patroclus is the "best of the Myrmidons"—immediately reminds readers that fate plays a major role in Patroclus's life, whether he wants it to or not. Earlier, Thetis told Achilles and Patroclus that the "best of the Myrmidons" (Achilles's kinsmen) was prophesized to die soon, but that it wasn't Achilles. Briseis's offhanded comment foreshadows that, unexpectedly, this prophecy refers to Patroclus and his kindness rather than another soldier's skill in battle. A future with Briseis was never possible because Patroclus's life and death were preordained.

Chapter 30 Quotes

The thought of Troy's fall pierces me with vicious pleasure. They deserve to lose their city. It is their fault, all of it. We have lost ten years, and so many men, and Achilles will die, because of them. No more.

[...]

I will crack their uncrackable city, and capture Helen, the precious gold yolk within. I imagine dragging her out under my arm, dumping her before Menelaus. Done. No more men will have to die for her vanity.

[...]

I am delirious, fevered with my dream of Helen captive in my arms. The stones are like dark waters that flow ceaselessly over something I have dropped, that I want back. I forget about the god, why I have fallen, why my feet stick in the same crevices I have already climbed. Perhaps this is all I do, I think, demented—climb walls and fall from them.

Related Characters: Patroclus (speaker), Hector, Paris, Agamemnon, Apollo, Helen, Achilles

Related Themes:

Page Number: 332-333

Explanation and Analysis

This passage takes place while Patroclus is dressed up as Achilles to galvanize the Greek army. Though he promised Achilles he wouldn't actually fight, he grows cocky and begins scaling Troy's walls. Apollo drops him down, but Patroclus keeps trying to climb.

Patroclus skillfully diverts blame in this passage. It's obviously not the Trojans' "fault" that the war has gone on so long—the Greeks are invaders in Troy, and they came to Troy primarily to steal the country's wealth. Earlier in the novel, Patroclus and Achilles decided that Agamemnon would've invaded Troy regardless of whether or not Helen returned to Paris. Patroclus's mention of Helen's "vanity" is therefore bizarre, since Helen doesn't have any real agency and the Greeks are at fault for any and all deaths. Admittedly, Patroclus seems to know this subconsciously: he imagines Helen as "gold yolk" and pictures "dragging" and "dumping her." In this fantasy, she's an object, not the mastermind behind a decade-long conflict. This image is a much more accurate depiction of Helen's position: she's as powerless as Patroclus feels, regardless of whether or not she chose to come to Troy.

Even more importantly, Achilles is not going to die "because of" the Trojans. Patroclus should blame fate for Achilles's prophesized death, or he should blame Achilles himself—Achilles's quest for honor led him to this point. And it's Achilles's quest for honor that put Patroclus in this particular situation; Patroclus is wearing Achilles's armor to save Achilles's reputation. Meanwhile, men are dying on the battlefield because Achilles refuses to fight. Patroclus loves Achilles, so he excuses his worst behavior, trying to blame an external enemy.

Even though Patroclus has just encountered Apollo, he immediately "forget[s] about the god" and keeps climbing. He seems to know that the climb is pointless and feels that he's always climbing and climbing and making no progress. This is likely a metaphor for what fate looks like in ancient Greece: there's no point in attempting to shift fate, because doing so means ending up in the same place one started. Interestingly, Patroclus's decision to ignore Apollo and keep climbing makes Apollo angry and causes him to undo Patroclus's helmet, revealing Patroclus's identity, which then prompts Hector to kill him. Patroclus's attempt to ignore fate *causes* his fate, and he seems to sense this even as it's happening.

Chapter 31 Quotes

He lifts his ashen spear.

No, I beg him. It is his own death he holds, his own blood that he will spill.

[...]

Hector's eyes are wide, but he will run no longer. He says, "Grant me this. Give my body to my family, when you have killed me."

Achilles makes a sound like choking. "There are no bargains between lions and men. I will kill you and eat you raw."

Related Characters: Patroclus, Achilles, Hector (speaker), Chiron

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 344

Explanation and Analysis

This passage takes place after Hector murders Patroclus and a distraught Achilles goes on a rampage to avenge him. Patroclus's spirit watches the murder from afar. Notably, Achilles kills Hector using the spear Chiron gave him, which was supposed to be a way to separate Achilles's violent

deeds from Achilles as a person. This passage proves that the spear was partially successful: although Achilles kills Hector, it's a murder he commits because he loves Patroclus, which proves that he never fully became a human weapon. At the same time, that makes this his most horrific murder. When Patroclus tells Achilles that he'll spill "his own blood" by killing Hector, he obviously means to remind Achilles that he's prophesized to die after Hector. But Patroclus, who once murdered a young boy, knows how horrible it is to kill out of anger. His words have a double meaning: killing Hector will kill Achilles in more ways than one.

Achilles obviously wants to believe that he *is* a human weapon, or even worse, an animal; he compares himself to a lion here. But his mention of "eat[ing] [Hector] raw" recalls his earlier declaration to Patroclus, when he was happy enough to "eat the world raw." At that time, he believed that his love for Patroclus would save him from an unhappy fate. Now, it's obvious that his love for Patroclus actually led to that unhappy fate. Chiron's "ashen spear" reminds readers that Achilles is still human, but this humanity just leads him to an inhuman act of violence, supposedly justified by love. Meanwhile, Achilles has left any semblance of honor behind—Hector asks Achilles to act honorably by returning his body, but Achilles refuses, likely just to spite Hector.

❝ Her skin is whiter than I have ever seen it. "Do not be a fool. It is only my power that—"

"What does it matter?" He cuts her off, snarling. "He is dead. Can your power bring him back?"

"No," she says. "Nothing can."

He stands. "Do you think I cannot see your rejoicing? I know how you hated him. You have always hated him! If you had not gone to Zeus, he would be alive!"

"He is a mortal," she says. "And mortals die."

"I am a mortal!" he screams. "What good is godhead, if it cannot do this? What good are you?"

"I know you are mortal," she says. She places each cold word as a tile in a mosaic. "I know it better than anyone. I left you too long on Pelion. It has ruined you."

Related Characters: Achilles, Thetis (speaker), Pyrrhus, Chiron, Odysseus, Hector, Apollo, Zeus, Patroclus

Related Themes:

Page Number: 346-347

Explanation and Analysis

This passage takes place after Patroclus dies and Achilles kills Hector. Thetis tells Achilles to stop dragging Hector's body around because it's making Apollo angry. Once again, this passage demonstrates how little power Thetis actually has. She claims that "nothing can" bring back the dead, but earlier in the novel, Odysseus told Achilles and Patroclus the legend of Tantalus: Tantalus killed his son, but Zeus brought that son back. Clearly, powerful gods like Zeus can do pretty much anything, but Thetis doesn't admit that here. Instead, she claims that "her power" has done something for Achilles—protected him, probably. In reality, her power is pretty much nonexistent.

As Patroclus has done throughout the novel, Achilles blames Thetis for his problems. He conveniently doesn't mention that he's the one who refused to fight for the Greek army, which is the only reason Thetis went to Zeus for help. And though Thetis has dedicated her time to making Achilles a god, something Achilles also wanted, he ignores this and claims that she isn't "good" for anything. He was obsessed with his honor throughout the novel, but now pretends that keeping Patroclus "alive" was his first priority, which is obviously not the case. In many ways, Achilles chose his honor over Patroclus and is paying the price for it now, but he can't take responsibility for his bad choices.

But Thetis arguably isn't right, either. She claims that allowing Achilles to train with Chiron "ruined" him, presumably because Achilles learned empathy and humanity. But Achilles's human emotions are his only redeeming quality. As readers will later discover, Achilles's son Pyrrhus (who was raised by Thetis), is cold and cruel, incapable of love. Achilles's love for Patroclus is the only thing that separates him from Pyrrhus, even after his cruel deeds.

Chapter 32 Quotes

❝ "I am sorry for your loss," Priam says. "And sorry that it was my son who took him from you. Yet I beg you to have mercy. In grief, men must help each other, though they are enemies."

[...]

Priam's voice is gentle. "It is right to seek peace for the dead. You and I both know there is no peace for those who live after."

"No," Achilles whispers.

Nothing moves in the tent; time does not seem to pass. Then Achilles stands. "It is close to dawn, and I do not want you to be in danger as you travel home. I will have my servants prepare your son's body."

Related Characters: Achilles, Priam (speaker), Thetis, Chiron, Heracles, Hector, Patroclus

Related Themes:

Page Number: 349-350

Explanation and Analysis

This passage takes place after Achilles has killed Hector. He's been dragging Hector's body around the Greek camp, even though Hector had asked him to return his body to the Trojan palace (this is the only way Hector's soul would be at rest). Hector's father, Priam, eventually comes to beg Achilles to return the body.

This passage recalls an earlier conversation between Chiron, Patroclus, and Achilles. Chiron shared the story of Heracles, who was punished by the gods and forced to murder his wife and children. Achilles believed that this punished the wife more than Heracles, but Chiron argued that it's worse to be left alive when someone else is gone. This is the same thing Priam suggests, but Achilles can fully understand it now.

The fact that Achilles understands Priam's "grief" is the reason he changes his mind and decides to give Priam the body back. This is a decision that will have enormous ramifications: Patroclus later tells Thetis about it, which in part convinces her to send Patroclus's soul to the underworld, allowing Patroclus and Achilles to be together. Achilles's capacity to love—and to understand someone else's love—ends up being his one redeeming quality. Someone like his son, Pyrrhus, wouldn't understand Priam's words, particularly his comment about "enemies." Priam essentially suggests that in grief, people need to put things like honor and even nationhood aside. Achilles might have disagreed with this notion earlier, given his obsession with honor, but his ability to love enables him to grasp Priam's point.

Chapter 33 Quotes

"Is it right that my father's fame should be diminished? Tainted by a commoner?"

"Patroclus was no commoner. He was born a prince and exiled. He served bravely in our army, and many men admired him. He killed Sarpedon, second only to Hector."

"In my father's armor. With my father's fame. He has none of his own."

Odysseus inclines his head. "True. But fame is a strange thing. Some men gain glory after they die, while others fade. What is admired in one generation is abhorred in another." He spread his broad hands. "We cannot say who will survive the holocaust of memory. Who knows?" He smiles. "Perhaps one day even I will be famous. Perhaps more famous than you."

[...]

Odysseus looks at the young man's implacable face. "I have done my best," he says. "Let it be remembered I tried."

I remember.

Related Characters: Pyrrhus, Odysseus (speaker), Achilles, Patroclus

Related Themes:

Page Number: 363-364

Explanation and Analysis

This passage is part of a conversation between Pyrrhus and Odysseus. Patroclus has been haunting Odysseus in his sleep, asking Odysseus to convince Pyrrhus to mark his grave. Without that marking, Patroclus can't join Achilles in the underworld.

Interestingly, Odysseus uses two different arguments here. First, he tries to reason with Pyrrhus using Pyrrhus's own logic, claiming that Patroclus had honor and glory of his own: he was a prince, he was a soldier, and he killed a famous warrior. When this doesn't sway Pyrrhus—who believes that dependence on someone else is dishonorable, or less valuable—Odysseus switches gears. He begins to suggest that the current conception of honor and fame is wrong; future generations might despise people for things the current generation values. This seems to be an attack on Pyrrhus himself, who acts cruelly but believes his deeds are honorable.

The novel winkingly suggests that Odysseus is correct: unexpected individuals *will* survive the "holocaust of memory." Odysseus's sly comment that he might be "more famous" than Pyrrhus is probably a metafictional reference

to his own, real-world fame: Odysseus is a character known for his role in Homer's *Odyssey* and is certainly better-known than Pyrrhus among modern readers. Pyrrhus, meanwhile, is a villain in *The Song of Achilles*—his deeds aren't painted in a heroic light.

It's not clear whether Odysseus knows that he'll be famous someday. It's possible that the gods prophesized this, but it's also possible he's just throwing darts at the wall, hoping some argument will stick. But because he's right, readers can infer that he's also right about honor in general. The Greeks believe honor is gained through extreme violence, but Pyrrhus's violence won't even be remembered. He'll have committed horrors for nothing.

Because Patroclus "remember[s]" Odysseus's one selfless act—and because this is the final time Odysseus appears in the novel—his enduring legacy becomes this attempted kindness on Patroclus's behalf, not anything he did in battle. Patroclus seems to suggest that this is real honor, since Odysseus comes across in a much better light than Pyrrhus, and his kindness is memorialized.

❝ Others stand at the base to look at the scenes of his life carved on the stone. They are a little hastily done, but clear enough. Achilles killing Memnon, killing Hector, killing Penthesilea. Nothing but death. This is how Pyrrhus' tomb might look. Is this how he will be remembered?

[...]

You said that Chiron ruined him. You are a goddess, and cold, and know nothing. You are the one who ruined him. Look at how he will be remembered now. Killing Hector, killing Troilus. For things he did cruelly in his grief.

Her face is like stone itself. It does not move. The days rise and fall.

Perhaps such things pass for virtue among the gods. But how is there glory in taking a life? We die so easily. Would you make him another Pyrrhus? Let the stories of him be something more.

"What more?" she says.

For once I am not afraid. What else can she do to me?

Returning Hector's body to Priam, I say. *That should be remembered.*

Related Characters: Thetis, Patroclus (speaker), Priam, Hector, Pyrrhus, Achilles

Related Themes:

Page Number: 365-366

Explanation and Analysis

This passage takes place at the end of the novel. Achilles and Patroclus are both dead and buried together, but the grave only bears Achilles's name, so Patroclus's soul can't join him in the underworld. Patroclus is frustrated by Achilles's gravestone, which marks his most heroic acts, all of which happen to be his most violent and "cruel." Patroclus is concerned about Achilles's legacy, and when Thetis comes to mourn at Achilles's grave, he tells her so.

In this passage, Patroclus establishes an explicit connection between Pyrrhus and Achilles. Their actual actions are almost identical, since both were responsible for many murders. That means that people will remember them similarly. They would both be considered "honorable" to an outsider, since the Greeks consider warfare to be "glorious."

But Patroclus suggests that real honor is more difficult than violence. The difference between Pyrrhus and Achilles is invisible: Achilles was capable of love and kindness and Pyrrhus was not. Even Achilles's worst acts happened because he was able to love and therefore able to grieve. Killing someone is "easy," but real honor is harder; Patroclus's example of Achilles's kindness to Priam illustrates this more intangible virtue. Achilles's decision to return Hector's body was a selfless one and happened because he could relate to Priam's love for his son. In other words, Achilles's capacity for love was his one redeeming quality, the thing that kept him from being the cold warrior that Pyrrhus is. While Achilles's ability to love doesn't excuse his worst deeds, it does mean he was more than those deeds.

Essentially, this passage juxtaposes two memorials of Achilles: one that conforms to the Greek definition of honor and a verbal memorial that presents Patroclus's very different definition. This second memorial ends up being the thing that saves Patroclus's soul, as Thetis eventually decides to mark Patroclus's grave herself so that he and Achilles can be together in the afterlife. And because the novel ends with that second memorial, Achilles's real-world legacy encompasses both his violence and capacity for love, since he was defined by both.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CHAPTER 1

Patroclus's father was a king from a long line of kings. He married Patroclus's mother when she was fourteen, due to her large dowry. But during the wedding he found out she was "simple": she smiled when her veil was removed, something a bride never does. Patroclus, like his mother, is immediately disappointing at birth: he's small, weak, and has no talents. He *is* unusually healthy, which only makes his father suspicious, worried that his son is somehow inhuman.

The novel immediately and efficiently makes clear that women in this society have very little power or agency. First, Patroclus's father marries Patroclus's mother not for love but for money: he marries her for her dowry (a sum of money given by her father to her husband). Second, the fact that she smiles at her wedding, indicating that she is happy to get married, is taken as incontrovertible evidence that she is simple-minded. This suggests that "normal" women are aware that marriage makes them powerless. The novel also quickly establishes the gender expectations for men in this society—they should be strong and physically talented—and through Patroclus's father's disdain for Patroclus shows how the society treats men who don't meet that expectation. Patroclus's father can't recognize the physical strength Patroclus does *have—being healthy—and protects himself from the embarrassment of being the father of such a boy by suspiciously wondering if in fact he isn't Patroclus's father.*

When Patroclus is five, his father hosts an athletic tournament, welcoming men of all ages from across Greece. Patroclus isn't allowed to compete—he simply holds the prize wreath—but he notices the runners. The youngest boys run first, and among them is a childlike blond prince who wins the race easily, heels "flashing" as he moves. Patroclus's father takes the garland from Patroclus and crowns the boy, whose father, Peleus, proudly claims him. Peleus's kingdom is small, but he supposedly has a goddess wife and is known to be kind. Patroclus's father jealously tells Patroclus that the boy is what a son ought to be.

This passage illustrates the kind of boy Patroclus's father would like Patroclus to be. The young boy who wins the tournament is athletic and strong, and having those traits is directly tied to that boy being seen as worthy and therefore being accepted and loved by his father and society. The description of the blond prince's "flashing" heels is a moment of foreshadowing, as that blond prince will grow up to be Achilles, whose heels end up being very significant. Meanwhile, that Peleus is kind and has a goddess for a wife suggests that there is perhaps another way to be a man in this society that offers better results than those practiced by Patroclus's father.

As an adult, Patroclus remembers little else about his childhood. One thing he does remember is skipping stones one time while his mother watched; she seemed to enjoy the ripples, or to just appreciate the sea. Patroclus watched light hit her temple, marking a scar where her own father struck her. This is the sole memory Patroclus has of his mother, and it seems too good to be true; his father wouldn't have let his simple son and simple wife be alone.

The scar on Patroclus's mother's head makes clear that her father abused her. Whether he hit her because she was simple, or whether the blow is what made her simple, is almost beside the point. Either way, it again highlights the powerlessness of women, and the ways they are at the mercy of men. It also demonstrates that violence, in this society, underlies relationships that should be loving. Meanwhile, that Patroclus barely gets to spend time with his mother further details his father's power, and, perhaps, the ways that boys in this society are separated from the influence of women.

CHAPTER 2

One day, Patroclus's father summons him to tell him that King Tyndareus's daughter will soon marry. Tyndareus is the king of Sparta, and his daughter is known to be the most beautiful woman in Greece, supposedly the product of Zeus raping her mother. While Patroclus's father wants Patroclus to present himself as a suitor for the daughter, Patroclus is only nine and he's uncomfortable with the idea. When Patroclus and his father arrive at Tyndareus's citadel, many people are already there, and no one welcomes Patroclus ceremoniously, as his father expects. A soldier takes pity on Patroclus, who is visibly bored, and hands him a pair of **dice** to play with.

Women are not only subordinate to men in this society, but also to gods, who can apparently sexually assault them. In Greek mythology, Zeus is the ruler of the gods and is essentially all-powerful; this girl's mother wouldn't have stood a chance against him. In addition, the sexual assault seems to be okay with everyone else, as the story is clearly widely-known. Once again it is made obvious that marriages are not based on love at all if a nine-year-old can be sent to woo a young woman. And once again, Patroclus's father proves that he's only concerned about how others perceive him. The soldier's small kindness to Patroclus is the first glimpse of goodwill in the novel, and as a result, the dice seem like significant objects.

During their visit, Patroclus's father dresses him in royal garb and orders him not to disgrace the family; they head into Tyndareus's great hall, gifts in hand. Inside, hundreds of kings introduce themselves one by one to Tyndareus, showing off their riches and bragging about their heroics. A king named Menelaus presents himself, alongside his hulking brother, Agamemnon. Patroclus wishes he were older, though he thinks Peleus's young son would make a fine impression. Mind wandering, he suddenly notices Tyndareus's three daughters sitting quietly by his side, all veiled.

It's not clear what Patroclus could do that would disgrace his family—again, his father's comment seems to have more to do with his own pride and anger than with anything Patroclus has done. However, this passage does provide some idea of why Patroclus's father values appearances so much. Based on what the kings show about themselves, it's evident that Greek society cares about heroism, strength, and wealth. Traits like kindness and intelligence are never mentioned as being admirable. That Patroclus wishes he was like these other men shows that he has internalized these values. It's also notable that while this whole affair is about marrying one of the daughters, the women are pushed off to the side and veiled. Tyndareus controls the women, and access to their beauty, as a way of asserting control over the men. Women in this society are like a kind of currency, to be used but given no agency of their own.

Patroclus kneels as his father presents him. Tyndareus wonders why such a young boy is there, but Patroclus's father says he's "man enough for both of them." Patroclus notices that Tyndareus and the other kings are mocking them. Oblivious, his father presses on, saying that Tyndareus's daughter, Helen, would essentially be queen of his kingdom, since Patroclus's mother isn't fit to rule. An onlooker with a scar on his calf interjects, claiming to be an observer to proceedings, rather than a participant. He asks to hear from Patroclus directly, so Patroclus quietly introduces himself as the son of Menoitius. He's ashamed: he knows what these men think of him and his father.

That the other kings mock Patroclus's father suggests that while his father understands the masculine traits that are valued, he himself lacks them—he seems to be trying too hard, In contrast, Patroclus demonstrates that he's very intuitive. And while his father can't recognize that strength, there is a hint that the man with the scar on his calf may recognize that Patroclus has some wits about him. That Tyndareus's daughter's name is only revealed now once again implies how this whole courtship ceremony isn't about her, *but rather about the honor and pride that she, as the most beautiful woman in the world, will bring to the man who wins her.*

Other men present themselves, including the giant-like Ajax. The man with the scar on his calf goes last; Tyndareus identifies him as Odysseus, and he asks what Odysseus thinks of the proceedings as an onlooker. Odysseus wonders how Tyndareus will prevent the men from killing each other over the eligible princess, Helen, or declaring war if they can't marry her. Apparently, he and Tyndareus have already discussed this in private, which angers the men. However, he offers a solution, for which he'll be given an unnamed prize: Helen should choose her suitor, and before she does, everyone should vow to defend that man if someone tries to steal her.

The man with the scar on his calf is revealed to be the wise and wily Odysseus, so his ability to recognize Patroclus's intelligence now comes as no surprise. Meanwhile, the predicament described by Odysseus again illustrates the toxic relationship between gender, power, honor, and violence in this society. Helen, because of her beauty, is seen by the men as a prize that will give her "winner" honor, but those who lose can only regain their honor (which they would lose by not winning her) by proving themselves in combat. Odysseus, however, figures out a way to use these social dynamics to cement bonds between the kings, rather than create war (though he also has his own secret agenda, which will be revealed). Helen, meanwhile, is just an object to all these men.

Tyndareus and Helen agree, and the men sacrifice a white goat to seal the oath. Then, Tyndareus orders Odysseus to be the first to vow to protect Helen's suitor. This annoys Odysseus, and Patroclus assumes this is because Odysseus had hoped he wouldn't have to take the vow at all. While Odysseus reminds Helen that he isn't really a suitor, he completes the ritual. All the men follow, including Patroclus. Helen selects a joyful Menelaus, and Odysseus reveals what the prize for his suggestion was: he's now engaged to Helen's sister. Patroclus and his father leave, never discussing the trip again. The oath feels like fiction to Patroclus, or like a dream.

Odysseus's plan suddenly gives Helen agency, and she selects her husband. However, this granted agency is ironic, since it was all a part of a scheme by Odysseus to marry her sister. Odysseys offered Helen agency solely to ensure he has the right to marry Helen's sister, no matter what the sister might think. Odysseus is clearly wily, always manipulating others while seeking to avoid any entanglements that might catch him (though in this case he fails to escape the vow). That Patroclus thinks of the vow as being a "fiction" allows Madeline Miller to create a moment of dramatic irony—the whole novel is based on Greek mythology of the Trojan War that most readers will already know—so the reader knows that in fact this vow will get invoked and affect the entire Greek world. The whole novel, then, is suffused with a sense of fate: these characters don't know it, but the path of their future is set.

CHAPTER 3

One day, Patroclus stands in a field holding a pair of **dice**—he can't remember who gave them to him, because it certainly wasn't his father or mother. He's just escaped the palace trainer, whom his father hired after the tournament to train Patroclus. A boy named Clysonymus walks over. He's the son of a nobleman and he demands that Patroclus hand him the dice. Patroclus refuses and shoves Clysonymus, which only ensures that there will be a fight; Clysonymus can't walk away now, as Patroclus is famously weak and it would be dishonorable to let him win.

The dice are likely the same dice Tyndareus's soldier gave Patroclus. At the time, they were a gesture of kindness, but now they've taken on an entirely new meaning. That Patroclus can't remember who gave him the dice can be taken as indicating that Patroclus—who has been working with a trainer tasked with turning him into the man his father wants him to be—has forgotten that former lesson of kindness. That lost memory of kindness is connected to honor and manhood—the dice are now meaningless to him, but he's willing to fight to prove his manhood. Clysonymus is also defending his honor here, but in an entirely different way: Patroclus is known as being weak, so Clysonymus has to beat him in order to maintain his own honor. This implies that, in this society, honor perversely compels the strong to show their strength by dominating the weak.

Clysonymus calls Patroclus a coward, claiming that Patroclus's father said the same thing. Patroclus imagines how his father would say that word—*coward*—and he shoves Clysonymus again. Their land is full of grass, so Patroclus tells himself that the shove is harmless—but he also knows that there are rocks all around. Sure enough, Clysonymus hits a rock and dies. Patroclus has never seen someone die and he runs away, shell-shocked and sick.

Clysonymus's use of Patroclus's father's insult shows that these warped definitions of honor and "manliness" are ingrained in Greek boys from a young age. Patroclus seems lost in this toxicity: on the one hand, he knows that in fighting Clysonymus in this spot he might really hurt him because of the rocks; on the other hand he is appalled when he actually does harm and kill Clysonymus. In fighting for his honor, he does something that seems dishonorable, which seems to indict the Greek conception of honor more generally.

Later, Clysonymus's family demands exile or death for Patroclus—they're nobles, so Patroclus's father has to give in. He agrees to exile his son, a cheaper solution than killing him and then paying for a funeral—though stripping Patroclus of his title and inheritance is a fate worse than death. Now an orphan, Patroclus leaves his kingdom for Phthia.

Patroclus's father continues to somehow always act in the cruelest way possible: his son is facing tragedy, and all he cares about is what saves him the most money while still finding a way to conform to the dictates of honor. Meanwhile, that same honor is seen by the Greeks as more important than life itself: death is seen as being better than losing status and reputation. Note also that all of these events are the result of a fight over dice, which are traditionally linked to chance and fate, subtly implying that this exile was destined to happen to Patroclus.

Phthia is a small country; its king, Peleus, was always a favorite with the gods due to his devout faith. As a reward, they gave him a sea-nymph as a wife, who provided him with a half-god son. Even better, the Fates prophesized that the sea-nymph's son would outshine his father, so Peleus's family line was secure. However, the sea-nymph, Thetis, was unwilling to marry Peleus, and Peleus had to seize her so she couldn't shape-shift; as soon as he deflowered her, she was bound to him. The gods forced her to remain with Peleus for a year, and she had just one child. Now, she only visits Phthia to see the boy, who is otherwise raised by Peleus and Peleus's advisor, Phoinix. A normal wife would have been happy with Peleus, Patroclus knows, but Thetis despises Peleus for his mortality.

The novel reintroduces to Peleus, who was earlier lauded for his kindness. It says a lot about this society that Peleus would be considered kind given the story of his marriage to Thetis. The gods essentially sanctioned a sexual assault, and Peleus went along with it in order to better his own prospects and secure a powerful son. Even though Thetis is a goddess able to shape-shift, she's still powerless in this situation. Her virginity is apparently a significant part of her, because once she's no longer a virgin, she has to stay with Peleus. The prophecy about Peleus's son, who won the race earlier in the novel, establishes the relationship between Peleus and his son as essentially the exact opposite of the relationship between Patroclus and his father: Peleus's son can literally never disappoint him and will always bring Peleus honor and status.

Patroclus arrives in Phthia with no belongings of his own, only gifts for the royal family—including his mother's **lyre**, which was once part of her dowry. When Patroclus arrives, Peleus is gone, so his son greets Patroclus instead. This is the same blonde boy who won the race. He lounges on a bench and plays with a lyre, his features strikingly beautiful. When he demands that Patroclus introduce himself, Patroclus is reluctant—the name "Patroclus" means "honor of the father," but the boy doesn't make the cheap joke that Patroclus expects. He introduces himself as Achilles and appears bored with the conversation; Patroclus leaves, silently dismissed.

In many ways, Patroclus seems to be in the same position his mother was in when she married Menoitius, powerless, traded and treated like a commodity—he even has the dowry to prove it. At the same time, the situations are also quite different: Patroclus might be powerless now, but he got into this situation because he asserted his power, something his mother could never do. The fact that Achilles makes no effort to mock Patroclus's relationship with his father the same way Clysonymus did marks Achilles as unique. Achilles may be dismissive and lazy, but he isn't cruel and doesn't seem interested in the sort of petty scuffling for honor that is so evident in other characters.

It turns out that Patroclus isn't Peleus's only foster son; the kingdom is full of them, the result of Peleus's charity. There's even a barracks-like room where they all live. The other boys try to talk to Patroclus, even offering to play **dice** with him, but Patroclus sharply refuses. He notices Achilles from across the hall at dinner, surrounded by adoring boys who laugh at his every word. Patroclus remembers his father's admiration of Achilles and how he believed that Achilles was what a son is supposed to be.

Peleus's generosity in taking in so many foster sons does mark a strong contrast to Patroclus's father, who was always focused on making or saving money. This is a different view of fatherhood and honorable behavior. Patroclus's refusal to play dice is obviously tied to Clysonymus's death, and can be read as a refusal also to play with the fate and honor that are now symbolically connected to the dice. Patroclus's apparent jealousy of Achilles here stems from how everyone else admires Achilles—the other boys, Patroclus's father. But it is notable that Achilles himself hasn't acted badly at all, or even whether Achilles cares about such things.

That night, Patroclus is plagued by nightmares about Clysonymus's dead body, but he wakes up before Clysonymus can speak, which is good because the voices of the dead are known to make the living insane. The Greeks also believe that the dead can cause physical harm, so Patroclus lives in mortal fear. The next day, the boys begin training together in combat. Patroclus realizes that, in this way, Peleus's charity happens to ensure him an unusually loyal army. Luckily, Patroclus is easily ignored on Phthia—it's just like home. The nightmares recur, each more gruesome than the last.

It's possible that Patroclus's many nightmares are the work of the gods, and it's possible that Clysonymus's ghost is truly dangerous and out to harm him. It's also possible—and maybe more likely—that Patroclus just feels guilty about the murder and the dreams are a manifestation of that guilt. This guilt, despite the action that caused it, shows that Patroclus remains unconvinced about whether the honor offers reason enough to kill another. This passage also demonstrates that even if Peleus is a kind ruler, he has an ulterior motive for that kindness: the boys he takes in become an army that will never betray him. It's a perverse logic, even cruel, and again suggests that Peleus might not be as kind as everyone thinks—or that Greek society doesn't think of "kindness" the same way a modern reader would.

CHAPTER 4

Patroclus continues to watch Achilles during meals in the dining hall. Once, Patroclus sneers at Achilles inside his head, then he and Achilles make eye contact, which startles Patroclus. Patroclus is deeply jealous of Achilles, who is unmarked by any scars, his feet without calluses. When Patroclus watches Achilles, it's the only time he feels anything at all. One day, Achilles and his admirers sit at Patroclus's table, which is normally empty. Achilles begins to juggle figs; while juggling is considered to be a low-class act, Achilles makes it beautiful.

Patroclus is jealous of Achilles because Achilles has everything Patroclus wants, including a loving father. Achilles's lack of scars suggests that no one has ever hurt him, physically or emotionally. (It also references Achilles' mythological back-story in which Thetis protected his entire body other than his heel by dipping him as an infant in the River Styx.) Achilles himself, though, doesn't seem to care about status and reputation—he willingly performs low-class tricks and sits with the friendless Patroclus. Achilles seems to be so powerful and beloved that he can't conceive of anyone taking his honor, and so he never needs to fight for it.

The next day, Patroclus meets Peleus. Peleus says that while Patroclus is in Phthia because he killed a boy, he hopes that Patroclus still ends up a good man. Sometime later, when the other boys learn why Patroclus is in Phthia (perhaps from a gossipy servant, Patroclus thinks), they give him a wide berth. They're afraid and fascinated, certain that the gods will punish Patroclus. Patroclus avoids them in response.

Again the novel highlights the way this society undervalues women: Peleus, who raped Thetis, lectures Patroclus, who accidentally killed another boy, about being a good person. Yet Peleus's comment also suggests that Patroclus might have some power over his own life, that he can become who he wants to be despite his past. That viewpoint stands in stark contrast to what the bother boys think: they avoid Patroclus because they think he has no control over his fate, and that the gods will punish him for his past.

One day, Achilles finds Patroclus hiding in a storeroom and asks him what his excuse will be for missing training—he's clearly not sick, which is what Achilles assumed at first. Angry at this interference, Patroclus says that Achilles should claim they've been spending time together, which would excuse him, given Achilles's royal status. But unlike other boys his age, the Achilles states that he hates lying. Patroclus is surprised Achilles admits to this: he has learned that honesty is weak, something children grow out of. Patroclus petulantly suggests that they go to Achilles lesson together to make his lie the truth. To Patroclus's shock, Achilles agrees.

Achilles's motivations for helping Patroclus are a mystery—at this point, Patroclus still dislikes Achilles, so readers aren't privy to Achilles's good qualities. The fact that honesty is considered weak or childish in Greece is another indication that this society has conflated strength with honor. Achilles, then, seems more genuinely honorable and good than other people, since he hates to lie. That said, Achilles is willing to bend the truth in a way that helps others. Achilles seems to possess an inner code that motivates him to help Patroclus here.

Patroclus accompanies Achilles to his lyre lesson. While Patroclus doesn't know how to play (because his father hated music), he picks up one of the room's many lyres anyway. Achilles begins to play his **lyre**; it's the same one that Patroclus gave to the royal family when he came to Phthia. This lyre belonged to Patroclus's mother, and when Achilles plays it, it makes a "pure" sound. Patroclus's mother enjoyed watching visiting bards play. Patroclus wants to tell Achilles who the lyre belonged to, but he knows it wouldn't do any good and he refuses Achilles's offer to let him hold it. The lyre instructor arrives, and Patroclus listens to Achilles play and sing, refusing to play himself. The sounds of the lyre and Achilles's voice soothe Patroclus and bring him unexpected joy.

In this passage, Patroclus's mother's lyre takes on new significance: it's not just a part of her dowry, but represents both her innocence and Achilles's. The lyre makes a "pure" sound, and Patroclus—who is far from innocent, since he murdered someone—can't play it. Meanwhile, Patroclus's mother liked the lyre's music innately—a signal of her "natural" innocence that the novel seems to suggest was a product of her mental "simplicity." Because Achilles takes ownership of the lyre, Patroclus compares Achilles to his mother here, which suggests that Achilles shares some of her "simplicity," though he doesn't have the same limitations that she did. Part of Patroclus's father's vain efforts to seem masculine included a hatred of music. Achilles skill makes clear that masculinity can involve an appreciation of beauty too. That Patroclus can appreciate Achille's music-making suggests he has the capacity to see the value in Achilles way of being a boy/man in the world.

CHAPTER 5

Immediately after the lesson, Achilles brings Patroclus to see Peleus. He asks for his father's forgiveness: he took Patroclus from his drills. Achilles wants Patroclus to be his sworn companion, a position of high esteem. Peleus observes Patroclus; for years, he's wanted Achilles to take a companion, and no one sufficed. But Achilles says that he finds Patroclus surprising. Though Peleus notes that Patroclus will not help Achilles's reputation, Achilles doesn't care. Peleus agrees to Achilles request. Patroclus is shell-shocked; he doesn't understand why Achilles chose him, small as he is, cursed as he is.

Achilles statement here is technically true, though it continues to bend the truth. Achilles's honesty seems to be at least somewhat malleable, much like Greek honor is malleable depending on the circumstance. Achilles's reason for wanting Patroclus as his companion—that Patroclus surprises him—is interesting, and may refer to Patroclus's open hostility toward him—all the other boys worship Achilles, but Patroclus doesn't, or at least doesn't act like it. Achilles, it's clear, values different things than the other Greek men do, including his own reputation. The fact that Achilles chooses Patroclus is proof of this, because as Patroclus notes, he's small and dishonored. These are two things that might prevent others from befriending him, and certainly prevented his father from caring about him.

Achilles and Patroclus part ways after leaving Peleus's chamber. Achilles is about to practice fighting, which he never allows anyone to see. After hesitating a moment, he tells Patroclus that his mother, Thetis, has forbidden anyone to see him fight. Achilles says that he's destined to be the best warrior of his generation, a prophecy that was given before he was born. He adds that some people know about it, although most don't, and that's why he trains alone.

Achilles's revelation that he's destined to be a great fighter is all the more shocking given his gentle lyre-playing and scrupulous honesty. It now makes sense that Achilles is unconcerned with how others perceive him and with Patroclus's impact on his reputation—his fated greatness gives him cover to be himself and focus on what he cares about without having to posture. It's also worth noting that Achilles destined greatness is directly connected to his capacity for committing violence. However, this fits with what has been made clear about the Greeks, and the value they place on physical prowess and war skills.

At dinner that night, Achilles and his friends again join Patroclus's table, and Achilles tells Patroclus that he'll sleep in Achilles's room tonight. The other boys are surprised by his choice of companion, as surprised as Peleus and Patroclus were. In Achilles's room, the two sit awkwardly. Eventually, Achilles asks Patroclus to help him juggle. He calls out to Patroclus, who tosses him more balls. Patroclus would normally hate being ordered around like this, but commands from Achilles don't sound like commands. Patroclus then lies down on his designated pallet and watches Achilles sleep; he thinks that Achilles looks beautiful, but cold and harsh. Patroclus wishes that Achilles would wake and appear alive again.

A man like Patroclus's father would never choose someone small and cursed like Patroclus as a companion, because he always feels he must prove his manhood. But Achilles seems to hold his honor innately, and so shares no such worries. Presumably, this is also part of the reason that Achilles's commands don't bother Patroclus. Achilles isn't trying to bully Patroclus the way Patroclus's father or Clysonymus did. Instead, he gains people's respect without dominance, which seems unusual for the Greeks. Yet the fact that Achilles's beauty turns cold and harsh in sleep hints that Achilles has is not just a beautiful, kind boy—as his divine mother and fate to be the greatest ever warrior suggests. Patroclus prefers the kindhearted boy.

Over time, Patroclus grows used to their new arrangements and stops expecting to be thrown back to the barracks at any moment. He still has nightmares about Clysonymus, but when he wakes up, Achilles is there. Even asleep, Achilles's vividness makes frightening things seem far away. Patroclus learns that Achilles isn't quite as perfect as he seems; he's mischievous and likes to test himself at skills like jumping and catching.

In this passage, Achilles is the antidote to Patroclus's guilt and fixation on death. It's interesting that Patroclus associates Achilles with "vivid" life and goodness, given that Achilles's destiny is violent. As he gets to know Achilles, Patroclus discovers just how human Achilles is, even though perhaps it should be the opposite now that Patroclus knows about the prophecy. Achilles always seems to occupy both worlds—the human world in which he can be himself, and the fated world in which he will become what the gods have decreed.

Eventually, Patroclus tells Achilles little bits about his life back home, including that the **lyre** used to belong to his mother. Achilles says that he's glad that Patroclus's father sent the lyre to Phthia with him. Patroclus grows comfortable with Achilles, who always says exactly what he means and is confused by those who don't. Some people might think this makes him "simple," but Patroclus knows there's intelligence in it.

Again the lyre is connected with "simplicity," and suggests a kind of similar innocence between Achilles and Patroclus's mother. Notably, this is an innocence that Patroclus lost after committing murder—he no longer possesses the lyre, or his mother. But his friendship with Achilles puts him in touch with that innocence, that simplicity. But while Patroclus seemed to accept that his mother really was only "simple," Patroclus thinks that Achilles's honesty is an honorable part of him, not a sign of stupidity.

One afternoon, Achilles nervously invites Patroclus to watch him train. Patroclus tries to grab a spear, but Achilles tells him he doesn't fight with others. Achilles supposes that this means that he has no way of knowing whether he really is the best fighter in Greece, as the prophecy claims. As Patroclus watches, he notices that Achilles's real skill is speed; his spear flashes in his hand, and his feet move too quickly for human eyes. Patroclus can almost picture an army around him, though Achilles fights only air. His movements are precise, but fluid, like a fish in water.

Achilles goddess mother has told him not to let others see him fight—an order Achilles is breaking now. Patroclus demonstrated how much he trusted Achilles when he told him about the lyre; Achilles is demonstrating his trust in Patroclus by letting him watch now. In a way, they're both confessing—indirectly—to either violent acts (in Patroclus's case) or their capacity for violence (in Achilles's), but these confessions are also proof that they care about one another. Notably, Achilles's fighting isn't actually violent here. He's not training with anyone. It's Patroclus who introduces hypothetical violence to the situation by imagining an army around Achilles. Achilles fighting skill seems to be innate, so natural that he's as comfortable fighting as a fish would be swimming. But Patroclus can't simply appreciate the beauty of Achilles movements; he can only imagine them in the context of war.

When Achilles stops, Patroclus asks who trained him. Achilles replies that Peleus did "a little," but most of his skill is innate. Feeling frightened, Patroclus asks Achilles to fight him, but Achilles laughs and refuses. To Patroclus, Achilles's fighting is the closest thing to divinity he's ever seen; his friend makes violence look beautiful and puts all other fighters to shame. Patroclus continues to demand a fight, taunting Achilles and saying he should be afraid. He wants Achilles to look at him, but Achilles turns away.

This passage suggests that Patroclus's fear of Achilles's innate skill is, at its heart, a fear of where that skill comes from. Achilles is a product of the gods, and while he is his own person, his "divinity" was given to him. Patroclus sees Achilles as human and innately good—a god-given capacity for violence complicates that idea. The fact that Achilles's violence is actually "beautiful" only further makes clear its divine aspect. Patroclus's desire to fight Achilles, then, seems like an effort to take Achille's divine fighting skills and bring them to a human level of actual fighting—to push out the divine and make Achilles merely human. It's also possible that Patroclus is just jealous of his beautiful, perfect friend who excels at what the Greeks most value. Or, perhaps, it's both. Note also how this scene parallels Patroclus's interaction with Clysonymus's, but this time Patroclus takes on the bully role and implies that Achilles is a coward. But Achilles, secure in himself, feels no need to fight back.

Patroclus tackles Achilles, who easily pins him to the ground and won't let go. Patroclus has never seen someone fight like that—there's no one else like Achilles. Achilles wonders what Patroclus is doing, and Patroclus realizes that he's right: it doesn't matter. There *is* no one like Achilles, something he used to be jealous of. Now, he's no longer angry. Achilles senses this shift and smiles, an expression Patroclus compares to the sun.

Patroclus acts on his jealousy and his desire to knock Achilles down to a human level by literally tackling him. But in doing so he comes fully face-to-face with Achilles's unbelievable skill and utter uniqueness, and he at last lets his fear and his jealousy go. In this moment, Patroclus realizes that Achilles is such a singular person—in both his fighting skill and his "simplicity" and code of honor—that to compare himself with Achilles or deny Achilles specialness simply doesn't make sense. Patroclus's comparison of Achilles to the sun cements this idea that Patroclus has accepted Achilles as the center of his world; it also implies that despite Achilles battle skills that Patroclus still considers Achilles to be innately good and life-giving.

CHAPTER 6

After Patroclus witnesses Achilles' training, Achilles and Patroclus grow even closer. Contrary to what the other boys assume, Achilles's days are pretty open; he doesn't train constantly. He mostly plays the **lyre** and does occasional drills. The two talk, play, and swim, and Patroclus realizes that he feels different now than he did when he arrived in Phthia, less tired and afraid. In his own kingdom, he was only ever briefly content when he was alone, but now he feels giddy. Patroclus teaches Achilles to skip stones and often watches him play the lyre. He no longer minds that he loses races or other games—it's enough just to watch Achilles.

Achilles continues to display his uniqueness through his combination of conflicting traits; the ability to make beautiful music, and the ability to deal violence (also beautifully). Patroclus is happy now because he's accepted Achilles's contradictions, which makes the two of them closer than ever before. Still, it's not clear whether Patroclus truly understands Achilles's capacity for violence, because he keeps trying to slot Achilles into his mother's position and subconsciously compare the two. The fact that he teaches Achilles to "skip stones" proves this, as does his continued fascination with Achilles's lyre-playing. Both are activities Patroclus associates with his mother, who is actually innocent and incapable of hurting others, unlike Achilles.

Patroclus eventually tells Achilles how he murdered Clysonymus. Achilles wonders why Patroclus didn't say he killed in self-defense—something that never even occurred to Patroclus—or why he didn't lie and say he found the body. With this, Patroclus realizes that he lost his kingdom not because of the murder, but because of his stupidity; his father must have been so angry when he confessed. Achilles, however, comments that he also wouldn't have lied, although he doesn't know what he would've done. He adds that no one has ever attempted to take something of his—he assumes he'd be angry if they did.

Apparently, Patroclus's inner honor code is a lot like Achilles's: he didn't even consider lying about murdering Clysonymus. And of course, his father's honor code isn't honorable at all—he uses honor to get what he wants, and lies as necessary to use the generally recognized honor code to get what he wants. That Patroclus initially sees his failure to manipulate the situation as a sign of stupidity suggests that the entire Greek honor code is corrupt—if it's dumb not to exploit it, then everyone must exploit it. Achilles's comment that no one has ever taken something of his again points to his "golden boy" life up to this point, and is a moment of foreshadowing for events later in the novel. That those events are also a part of well-known Greek myth increases the dramatic irony of the moment, as many readers will know what is coming, even as Achilles doesn't.

Achilles often visits his mother, Thetis, by visiting the seashore. There, she speaks to him about his growing reputation and asks him to return underwater with her, something Peleus has forbidden since no mortal who does so remains unchanged. One day, Thetis asks to meet Patroclus alone. He arrives on the beach and she appears, inhumanly tall, abnormally pale. Patroclus instantly disgusts her; she says Achilles will be a god one day and asks if Patroclus understands what that means. Patroclus says he does, noting to himself that her mouth looks torn open, like her blood was sacrificed. She dismissively tells Patroclus he'll be dead soon, then she turns and swims away.

Both Patroclus and Peleus want to ignore or deny Achilles's less human side; and Peleus's command that Achilles never go underwater seems an effort to deny Achilles the ability to engage with his divine half. Thetis, in contrast, cares little for Achilles human half, and wants to protect and bring forth his divine nature. Patroclus and Thetis seem to disgust each other—Patroclus sees Thetis as inhuman and therefore monstrous, while Thetis sees Patroclus as mortal and therefore meaningless and temporary. In a way, they are two sides of the "coin" that is Achilles—Patroclus tied to Achilles human half, Thetis to his divine half. Yet even as Patroclus is frightened of Thetis, his observations of her hint at her past trauma—her bloody mouth and "sacrificed" blood seem to hint at the sexual assault she endured from Peleus. Even though he views Thetis as powerful and frightening, he subconsciously acknowledges her former powerlessness.

Patroclus sits in an olive grove and thinks about what Thetis said. She doesn't want him to be Achilles's companion, but she also sees him as not even worth murdering. Her desire to make Achilles a god isn't unprecedented; it's happened to some of Zeus's sons. But Thetis is a minor goddess—she can't transform Achilles herself, so she'll need to rely on favors from the other gods if she wants to make it happen. In fact, she can't really do *anything* herself—only live eternally.

Patroclus's insights here are penetrating. He recognizes that Thetis is, relatively speaking, not that powerful—that she can't actually make happen the things she wants to make happen. Despite being a goddess she can, like most of the other woman in the novel, simply endure and try to affect the world through either indirect means or just by waiting. Seen this way, her dismissive attitude toward the mortal Patroclus seems like Thetis flaunting the one power that she has: immortality. Thetis's desire to make Achilles a god also implies a desire to protect him: she loves him, and doesn't want him to die.

Achilles finds Patroclus sitting there. He assumes Thetis told Patroclus that he'd die soon, and he apologizes for it. Patroclus tells Achilles that his mother wants to make him a god; Achilles already knows, and he seems boyishly embarrassed by the notion. Patroclus asks if he *wants* to be a god. Achilles isn't sure—he doesn't even know what that would mean, or what the process would be like. He also knows that Thetis has no real plan; she's banking on Achilles amassing a huge amount of fame, enough that the gods take him voluntarily.

Achilles seems to intuitively understand Thetis's powerlessness, though, the same way Patroclus did—this makes sense, because all women in the novel are pretty powerless, even goddesses like Thetis. Meanwhile, Achilles himself makes clear that he hasn't given much thought to any of this—he's still a boy focused on his life, not thinking about his future beyond the simple fate he already knows about himself.

But Achilles hasn't answered Patroclus. When prodded, he says he doesn't want to be a god yet. Patroclus is relieved—he won't have to lose him, at least not now. However, Achilles *does* want to be a hero if a war comes. Thetis believes he can be, assuming the prophecy is true. Achilles asks Patroclus if he'd want to be a god, which Patroclus finds funny—it's not likely to happen. The two then run off in search of figs, their melancholy conversation forgotten.

Achilles feelings about becoming a god are unformed. Yet Achilles is already thinking about his human legacy, with his desire to become a hero. In contrast, Patroclus clearly doesn't *want Achilles to be a god, because the human Achilles is his friend whom he doesn't want to lose. Patroclus himself, meanwhile, doesn't have to worry about his own cosmic legacy in the way that Achilles does—becoming a god isn't any part of his fate, whatever that might be. And, finally, the two boys are still boys—able to easily forget things like this and go find figs to eat. That won't always be the case.*

CHAPTER 7

Patroclus and Achilles turn thirteen, and their bodies begin to change. In the barracks, the foster boys start having sex with serving girls, something common and accepted. Because Peleus doesn't have a live-in wife, most of the women around the palace are war slaves rather than nobly-born ladies' maids. They often become pregnant, which is good, as it produces more slaves. Sometimes the sex is nonconsensual; sometimes the men say it's consensual, but that's only their belief. Achilles and Patroclus don't have sex with anyone, though Peleus sometimes offers serving girls to Achilles (and seduces them himself). Patroclus, for his part, is too shy, and he's somewhat repulsed by the courting rituals; he watches the dull looks on the girls' faces as boys paw at them, and he doesn't want that for himself.

This is a pretty bleak look at what life is like for women in Phthia. Ironically, Peleus's sexual assault of Thetis's just leads to more sexual assault—her absence from the palace means that female war slaves are part of daily life (the novel implies that ladies' maids wouldn't be treated the same way). Even the "consensual" sex is deeply problematic, since the women can't leave the palace and have no power to resist the demands of the men around them. The women don't even have control over what happens to their children, who will be enslaved as soon as they're born. It's important to remember that Peleus is known for his kindness, so this behavior isn't considered wrong at all—as Patroclus notes, it's a normal part of life in Phthia. Achilles and Patroclus's decision to abstain from sex could suggest a lot of things. Maybe they aren't interested in women, or maybe Achilles is uninterested in the displays of power that "seducing" the war slaves involves. Patroclus definitely is uncomfortable with those power dynamics—once again, he proves he's quite intuitive, as he can sense that the serving girls aren't into what's happening.

One night, Peleus is telling Achilles and Patroclus a story about the hero Meleager, the best and proudest fighter of his era. Patroclus is barely paying attention since he's remembering a serving girl's earlier comments about Achilles—she thought he looked at her. Peleus continues: one day, the king insulted Meleager, who then refused to fight for king's army. Instead, he returned home to his wife. Patroclus fixates on Achilles's fingers around his ankle as Peleus's story unfolds. But Peleus soon notices that his son and Patroclus are distracted. He dismisses them, telling Achilles he should find the serving girl. Achilles refuses and says he's too tired.

Peleus's story feels important, particularly because Achilles is destined to be the best fighter of his *era—and, in fact, the story once again offers foreshadowing about future events, which many readers will already know from Greek myth. This dramatic irony again acts to give readers a sense that Achilles's fate is tightening its grip on him. But Patroclus, again, distances himself from that part of Achilles. Instead, he fixates on more mundane things, worried that a serving girl is interested in Achilles and focused on Achilles's touch. It's now obvious that Patroclus might see Achilles as more than a friend and that Achilles might feel the same way, since he's uninterested in anyone else.*

When the two return to their room, Patroclus asks Achilles whether he likes the serving girl. Achilles tackles Patroclus, saying he's tired of discussing her. Patroclus notices everywhere their bodies touch. Achilles then jumps away. That night, Patroclus dreams about a familiar body, but he can't name his feelings. He can't stop these dreams, which return every night.

Patroclus is clearly attracted to Achilles, and there are signs that Achilles feels similarly. Patroclus's dreams about Achilles are the second instance of recurring dreams in the novel. The first recurring were Patroclus's nightmares about Clysonymus's death. These two dreams are obviously different, but their juxtaposition suggests that Patroclus's love for Achilles isn't totally separate from violence—both the violence that Achilles is capable of dealing, and perhaps also the violence that Achilles as a likely future war hero may himself be forced to face.

One summer day, Patroclus and Achilles sit on the beach. Patroclus can smell him distinctly, and their feet touch. Achilles looks at Patroclus, and his gaze feels different somehow, more intense—it seems like he's waiting for something. Patroclus shifts toward him, not knowing what he's about to do. Unthinking, Patroclus kisses him. Shocked by his sudden rush of desire, he pulls back, noting Achilles's surprised expression. Patroclus wants to apologize, but Achilles runs away, too fast for Patroclus. Patroclus prays that Achilles won't hate him. As an adult, Patroclus will realize that he should never have involved the gods in something like that.

Achilles, as a peerless fighter, is meant to be physically intimidating as a fighter, but Patroclus flips that physical presence around, and it becomes part of his attraction to Achilles. It's maybe surprising that Patroclus is the one to kiss Achilles first, but it's also vaguely reminiscent of when he tackled Achilles after watching him fight, caught up in a rush of feeling. This interaction is the opposite of that one, because Patroclus is acting out of love, not jealousy or ill will. Achilles's speed in running away, meanwhile, once again emphasizes his divine aspect—the part of him that Patroclus can't touch. That speed, combined with Patroclus's realization in hindsight that he should never have involved the gods in his relationship with Achilles, again points to the ways that Patroclus and Achilles are at the mercy of fate and the Gods.

When Patroclus heads back to the palace, Thetis blocks his path to tell him she saw the kiss. She'll send Achilles away, she says, and Patroclus won't be able to follow. Patroclus knows that if she were any other mother, her wishes wouldn't matter, but she's a goddess, so they do—there's nothing he can do about it. Patroclus returns to the bedroom. Achilles seems almost hopeful, but Patroclus only notices how much he resembles his mother. Achilles says that he'll soon leave to go to Mt. Pelion in order to train with Chiron, who trained warriors like Heracles. Achilles may have told Patroclus he didn't want to be a god yet, but Patroclus knows Thetis has other plans. The next morning, Achilles leaves. When he glances back on his way out the door, Patroclus pretends to be asleep.

On Phthia, Thetis has a certain amount of power and can control Achilles's life. If she were a mortal wife, she wouldn't be able to do so, but since she's a goddess, she can. Yet the way she asserts her limited power here is kind of sad: she can only control small, petty things, and exerts that control by separating Patroclus and Achilles—she seems to be unwilling to allow Achilles to love anyone other than her. Meanwhile, when Patroclus sees Achilles resemblance to Thetis it reminds him that Achilles is half-god—which makes him feel distant from Achilles. And just as Patroclus pulls back here, Achilles truly starts to step into his destiny, going to train with a legendary creature that trained previous demi-god heroes. It's not clear whether Achilles really wants to go—the fact that he looks back at Patroclus implies that he's at least conflicted—but Patroclus can't bridge the gap between himself and Achilles divine self and destiny, and so he hides from it.

CHAPTER 8

That morning, the news of Achilles departure spreads quickly, and Patroclus can hear the gossip. He goes outside to avoid the other boys, but he smells the sea immediately, and he's determined to get away from the stench of "salty decay." He walks north—the palace lies on a pathway to the mountains, including Mount Pelion. Patroclus realizes suddenly that he can just leave to follow Achilles; he has no belongings, nothing to pack. His only regret would be leaving his mother's **lyre**, but there's no time to go get it, so he sprints away from the palace. He vows that if he sees Achilles again, he'll keep his thoughts to himself.

Patroclus is back where he started, isolated from everyone else on Phthia. His association of the smell of the ocean with decay seems to be derived from his anger at Thetis for sending Achilles away. Perhaps it also is connected to the fact that Thetis sent Achilles to go train to fight and kill. That Patroclus leaves the lyre behind when he decides to go after Achilles is symbolically significant. He's willing to leave behind childhood innocence for Achilles. That he assumes Achilles also left without the lyre signifies that he recognizes that Achilles, in going to train and fight, is also leaving innocence behind.

After two hours, Patroclus slows down, exhausted and unsure of how much longer the journey to Pelion will be. He realizes that he won't make it by nightfall, and he has no supplies for survival—he'll never catch up to Achilles. Suddenly, he hears someone around him, attempting stealth; he thinks it could be Peleus's soldiers, Thetis, or bandits. Suddenly someone strikes Patroclus from behind and he whirls: it's Achilles. He says that he hoped Patroclus would come. Patroclus feels deep relief and joy.

Patroclus obviously didn't think this journey through, as he finds himself stranded and vulnerable. That his "attacker" ends up being Achilles is ironic, since Achilles is more dangerous than Peleus's soldiers, bandits, and maybe even Thetis. But he's not dangerous to Patroclus, so Patroclus doesn't note the irony. That Achilles hoped Patroclus would follow indicates that when Achilles ran away from their kiss, it wasn't because he doesn't care about Patroclus.

Achilles's new mentor, Chiron, appears; he's half-human, half-horse, which startles Patroclus. Achilles apologizes to Chiron for his delay and says he was waiting for his companion. Chiron offers to carry Achilles and Patroclus to Pelion on his back, since Patroclus is weak and overtired—it's not something he usually offers, but the situation calls for it. There are rules: he doesn't like to be tugged, and the person in back needs to hold the person in front. Patroclus climbs behind Achilles and grabs onto his torso. As they move, Chiron points out features of the landscape.

Achilles once again plays a bit with the truth: he was *waiting for Patroclus, but he had no way of knowing whether or not Patroclus would follow, so it's not entirely the truth. Once again, Achilles's honor code is malleable. Chiron seems to have a code of his own, which is in part based on pride and being treated respectfully. That Chiron only agrees to let the boys ride him because Patroclus is weak doesn't bother Patroclus the way it might have at the start of the novel, which points to the distance he's placed between himself and his father's expectations.*

Chiron stops at a grove in the midst of woods, close to the mountain's peak. There's a cave there made of rose quartz. Inside, the ceiling is dyed to look like the night sky, and there are instruments, including lyres. There's one bed for Achilles—Chiron apparently doesn't need one. He cooks for Achilles and Patroclus, and Patroclus keeps watching Achilles, giddy at his escape from Phthia.

That Chiron's training ground contains beauty and lyres in addition to what will certainly be weapons suggests those things aren't as incompatible as Patroclus assumed when he left Phthia. It's a pretty domestic scene with Chiron cooking—overall, this doesn't seem to be the kind of place that breeds violent warriors like Heracles, although that's exactly what it is.

Patroclus asks Chiron what the tools on the wall are, and Chiron says they're for surgery, something Patroclus isn't familiar with. Surgery is, as Chiron describes it, a kind of healing in which someone cuts off parts of a body to save the rest. Chiron asks if Patroclus wants to learn medicine, and Patroclus says yes. Achilles fixates on the lyres and asks Chiron to help him play. Chiron, softening slightly, agrees.

Chiron's description of surgery is an interesting one. Basically, he's saying that surgery is a kind of necessary violence, one that heals rather than hurts. Again, Chiron's interest in medicine and his offer to teach Patroclus medicine and Achilles music seem at odds with what he's supposed to be doing. But Chiron is obviously not a bloodthirsty trainer, and Achilles will not be exclusively trained in violence. This complicates things again—the more human Achilles is allowed to be, the more difficult his destiny will become.

Later that night, Chiron sends Achilles and Patroclus to bathe in the river, teaching them about plants all the while. There's something about Chiron's authority that makes Patroclus feel boyish again, and it soothes any awkwardness between him and Achilles, even though both are naked. Chiron continues teaching them about the flora and fauna—they've never met anyone who had this much knowledge, and they're excited about it.

Like Achilles, Chiron seems to be someone who attains respect without dominance—both Achilles and Patroclus accept his authority and follow his commands without resenting them or seeing them as an insult to their honor. Chiron's authority here is based not on strength or dominance, but on knowledge. Achilles's and Patroclus's interest in the subject of plants again hints at the ways that they are different from other Greek men who all seem primarily focused on war and valor.

Back in the cave, Chiron tells Achilles that Thetis sent him a message: if Patroclus followed Achilles, Chiron should send him away. Chiron reveals that she did not, however, say why. Patroclus is relieved that their kiss remains secret. Chiron is upset about Achilles's deception, since Achilles acted like Patroclus was supposed to come with him all along. However, the message from Thetis came before the boys arrived, so he knew the whole time. Achilles insists that Thetis is wrong about Patroclus, and that Patroclus is, in fact, a fit companion. Chiron asks if Patroclus agrees that he's worthy. Patroclus doesn't know if he is, but he begs to stay anyway.

Chiron chides Achilles here for his willingness to deceive, even if he didn't outright lie. Meanwhile, this scene reveals more about why Thetis dislikes Patroclus: she thinks he's unworthy of Achilles. Thetis is devoted to the divine half of her son, and sees the mortal—and not even heroic—Patroclus as sullying Achilles divine aspect. The fact that Patroclus doesn't immediately claim to be worthy of Achilles is interesting—he's much less proud than he was at the beginning of the novel. His own honor and worth don't seem to matter to him as long as he can stay with Achilles.

Chiron agrees that Patroclus can stay, even though it will anger Thetis. When they arrived, he didn't know what decision he'd make, but now he sees that in some ways, Thetis's immortality prejudices her against Patroclus—although some of the faults she's observed do exist. Achilles goes to bed, but Patroclus stays behind to tell Chiron that, if it's too much trouble for him to stay, he'll leave. Chiron tells him not to give up something he's gained so easily.

Chiron here acknowledges that way that the divine hates and underestimates the mortal. It's never stated what faults Chiron sees in Patroclus that Thetis also sees. The fact that Patroclus offers to leave and essentially give up Achilles is significant; this is the same boy who was willing to fight for some stupid dice earlier in the novel. Here, Chiron seems to suggest that some things are worth fighting for, even if that fight isn't violent. Notably, though, Chiron's comment has nothing to do with honor and everything to do with Patroclus's love for Achilles.

CHAPTER 9

Chiron teaches Achilles and Patroclus a wide variety of skills, everything from poultice-mixing to spear-carving to cooking. One day, Chiron teaches them about surgical instruments and anatomy, noting that death would be quickest in the temple—he points to Achilles's temple as an example, unnerving Patroclus. Later, he tells them stories about heroes, including Heracles; in his madness, Heracles killed his wife and kids because he didn't recognize them. Achilles doesn't understand why the gods would do this—it was an unjust punishment because it was worse for Heracles's wife than for him. But Chiron argues that maybe it's worse to be left alone when someone is gone. Patroclus, listening, thinks that he would always recognize Achilles, even if he went mad.

Achilles came to Pelion to train to become a warrior, but Chiron seems to be teaching him everything but *that, and the things he teaches have more to do with healing than with hurting. Patroclus's discomfort at the reminder of how Achilles could die is both a sign of Patroclus's love for Achilles, but also a foreshadowing of Achilles' fate. The story about Heracles is important. It demonstrates how cruel the gods can be and how disposable humans are to them, especially women. Second, it once again demonstrates how little Patroclus and Achilles understand about life and death. Achilles naively assumes that dying is the worst thing that can happen to someone. Patroclus, meanwhile, thinks that his human love would allow him to break free of divine madness, but there is no reason to believe that he would have such control over his fate. Also, in putting himself in Heracles shoes, Patroclus is neglecting Achilles fate—that Achilles is the one most likely to be like Heracles.*

Chiron also shares a story of a hero he taught who spared the life of a snake. The snake supposedly told him secrets about herbs in exchange for his life—but really, Chiron was the one who taught the hero about herbs. Achilles wonders whether this bothers Chiron, since the snake is getting credit for Chiron's work, but Chiron, smiling, says it doesn't. Later, the two listen to Achilles playing the **lyre**. It's the same lyre that belonged to Patroclus's mother. On his first day on Pelion, Patroclus told Achilles he almost hadn't come to Pelion, not wanting to leave it behind. Achilles said that he now knows how to make Patroclus follow him anywhere.

Chiron doesn't care about honor the way other Greeks do. The fact that a snake is taking credit for the things he taught the hero doesn't faze him at all, and his demeanor suggests that Achilles is silly for thinking it would. That Achilles actually brought Patroclus's mother's lyre with him symbolically suggest he had no intention of leaving his innocence behind when he went to Pelion, and also perhaps that he wanted to bring something of Patroclus's with him should Patroclus himself not follow. Note that Patroclus was ready to lose the lyre to follow Achilles, but Achilles was not ready to do the same.

Time passes on Mount Pelion and winter arrives. One day, Patroclus notices a strange stillness in the woods. He calls for Chiron, but Thetis appears instead. She tells Patroclus that he shouldn't be there. As she walks toward him, threatening, the grass wilts beneath her. Chiron interrupts and sends Patroclus away. Annoyed, Thetis tells Chiron that he's spent too much time with humans. Patroclus notifies Achilles that Thetis is here and that she didn't hurt him—not mentioning that she clearly wanted to. With Chiron around, Patroclus doesn't fear for his life, but he does fear that Thetis will ruin their happiness. Chiron later tells Patroclus that Thetis will come back to visit Achilles. Patroclus is just relieved that she must not have told Chiron about the kiss, since he's not acting differently.

The grass wilting as Thetis passes against connects her with death—which is perhaps odd since her goal is to give Achilles immortality. Her monstrous image seems also to be connected to Patroclus's perception of her and the way she represents Achilles's violent and divine future—a future that leaves Patroclus behind. Thetis does seem to be prejudiced against humans, as she proves with her comment to Chiron, but humans have also given her zero reason to like them.. Meanwhile, Patroclus is making an assumption about Chiron's lack of knowledge—Chiron may know about it, but may not think about it in the way Patroclus assumes.

When spring arrives, Achilles asks Chiron to teach them to fight. Patroclus wonders why Achilles asked, whether it was boredom or somehow motivated by Thetis's recent visit. Chiron starts the training: he has the two perform drill. Afterwards, he tells Achilles that he has nothing to teach him; Achilles is already greater than any hero. He warns Achilles that men will want him to fight in their army, but Achilles responds that he doesn't know yet whether he will. Chiron then tells Patroclus that he has the potential to be a competent enough soldier, but Patroclus doesn't want to fight at all, thinking of Clysonymus, of Achilles's prophecy, and of Thetis, who will steal Achilles away. They never practice soldiery again.

In the end, Achilles is the one to ask Chiron to teach him what Chiron was supposed to be teaching him all along. Chiron, meanwhile, doesn't focus on Achilles's skill but rather on its implications, warning Achilles that other people will want to use him. Chiron seems more interested in Achilles as a person than in Achilles as the half-god hero with a destiny. Patroclus, for his part, wants to avoid violence entirely, in part because he seems to think that by avoiding fighting he can help Achilles escape his destiny.

Summer arrives and Achilles turns fourteen, receiving gifts from home. The messengers watch Achilles, Patroclus, and Chiron closely and Patroclus knows they'll gossip about them at the palace. Some of the gifts are useful, like a bow and lyre strings, but some are absurd, like gold cloaks and studded belts. Later, Achilles asks whether Patroclus misses the palace; Patroclus doesn't, and neither does Achilles. Two years pass in this peaceful contentment.

The messengers are reminders of Greek society outside Chiron's camp—a world that judges others. The mix of gifts seem to mirror the mix of attributes of Achilles: his skills at fighting, his royal status, and his innocence and beauty.

CHAPTER 10

One spring day when the boys are fifteen, Patroclus watches Achilles on the beach. There are no mirrors on Pelion, so Patroclus measures his own body through the changes in his friend's. He tells Achilles that he looks older and asks if he himself does, too. Using his hand, Achilles traces the parts of Patroclus's body that seem changed: wider collar, hair on his chest. Patroclus sharply stops him. Later, Achilles offhandedly tells Patroclus that he wouldn't be "displeased" with how he looks now.

The lack of mirrors connects with the way that Chiron's camp discourages self-importance. Meanwhile, Achilles and Patroclus continue to be sexually and romantically interested in one another, though neither seem willing to act on that interest at this time.

Patroclus knows that when Achilles is sixteen, his father will arrange a marriage for him, and Patroclus could also take a wife, if he wanted. He tries to imagine sex with women, something other boys have discussed, but he can't—when he thinks about it, his mind turns into a "slippery fish." Instead, he thinks of Achilles's neck, bent over a lyre, and his smell. Each time his thoughts turn in this direction, he remembers Thetis and the disastrous first kiss, but it's hard to control it; he often leaves the cave in the morning to masturbate, and he worries that Achilles knows.

While Patroclus is focused on how Achilles having an arranged marriage would affect his own relationship with Achilles, and about his own sexuality in connection with his own possible marriage, it is worth again noting the ways that the novel has made clear how much worse arranged marriages typically are for the women involved than the men. As for Patroclus's sexuality, it's not clear if he is completely uninterested in women, or just so fixated on Achilles that he's uninterested in anyone else, of any sex. Notably, Patroclus pictures Achilles with a lyre when he fantasizes about him, again hinting at his determination to focus only on Achilles innocence and not his potential for violence.

On Achilles's sixteenth birthday, Patroclus secretly picks figs for him. Achilles doesn't know that figs grow on Pelion. Patroclus also carves a small sculpture, featuring Achilles playing the **lyre**. The two then eagerly eat the figs, while Achilles opens his present from Peleus: a purple cloak, signifying his royal status, which pleases Achilles. Patroclus thinks the color suits him. Chiron gives him a hiking staff, but Achilles is particularly overjoyed by the small statue that Patroclus made.

Achilles and Patroclus often ate figs together in Phthia, so this is a call back to childhood.. The statue once again implies that above anything else, Patroclus sees (or wants to see) Achilles as a young, innocent boy playing the lyre. When Achilles last received a cloak from Peleus, he didn't care about it—now, he embraces the reminder of his royal status. This suggests that he may be slowly shedding that childlike innocence.

One night not long after, the three sit by the fire outside with Achilles playing the **lyre**. Asking if Chiron is tired, Achilles excuses himself and Patroclus, and they go to the cave alone. Achilles blurts out that Thetis can't see them on Pelion; he'd asked if she could, and though she seemed displeased by the question, she said no. Patroclus, newly hopeful and terrified, asks if Achilles liked her answer. Achilles says that he did. The two lie side-by-side and silent on the bed.

Achilles seems to have decided to finally act on his feelings for Patroclus. Achilles's blurting out that Thetis can't see them indicates his nervousness—he's in better control of his fighting than he is of this awkward seduction.

Thinking that Achilles is asleep, Patroclus turns to look at him, only to find that Achilles is already looking back—Patroclus never hears him when he moves, since he's capable of great stillness. The two kiss and Patroclus takes Achilles in his hand; Achilles strokes him in turn. Afterwards, they look at each other but don't speak.

As usual, this love scene is undercut with the reminder that Achilles is an innately incredible fighter—his stillness isn't normal or human. Achilles capacity as a warrior is always a part of his physical interactions with Patroclus, even if Patroclus himself doesn't recognize it.

Patroclus is terrified that Achilles regrets what they've done, but Achilles says, haltingly, that he didn't think they'd ever do that. Patroclus asks if he's sorry. Achilles isn't, and neither is Patroclus. Patroclus realizes, suddenly, that he'll never leave Achilles—it'll be exactly like this for as long as Achilles will let him stick around. He can't find the right words for that enormous truth, but Achilles seems to sense it anyway. He grabs Patroclus's hand, saying only his name. Patroclus notes that of the two of them, Achilles has always been more skilled with words.

Every marriage shown in the novel has been about power or ownership, in which a man seeks or wins a woman in order to get something, whether wealth or fame and glory. But this moment shows something else: a commitment based on love; a commitment in which Patroclus binds himself to whatever Achilles's fate turns out to be.

The next morning, Patroclus worries that Achilles will change his mind, but he doesn't. Now, Patroclus can openly stare at him, learning his body. The two are like "gods at the dawning of the world," he says, their joy blinding them to everything but each other. They sometimes worry that Chiron may have noticed a change and will be angry about it, but Achilles says that even if he *was* angry, it wouldn't stop them. Even if Chiron told Peleus—the worst-case scenario—Peleus couldn't do anything about it. Patroclus worries that, in that hypothetical, Thetis would kill him, but he doesn't say so. When Achilles asks if Patroclus would care if the adults were angry, Patroclus lies and says no. It doesn't matter anyway; he'd never let their disapproval keep him from Achilles.

Even though Patroclus has basically declared undying love for Achilles, he's still an insecure teenager, so of course he's worried Achilles will regret what they've done. At the same time, this new, revealed love makes Patroclus feel powerful, like a "god"—yet this moment is ironic and almost bleak, since they aren't *gods and* don't *control their fate. Achilles has never much cared what other people think. The less powerful or self-assured Patroclus always has cared, and so his refusal to be affected by how others think of him suggests the depth of his feelings for Achilles. It also suggests that he learned the lesson Chiron was trying to teach him: there are things besides honor worth fighting for.*

Achilles asks Patroclus to name a single hero who was happy. Patroclus, thinking of the mad Heracles, can't think of anyone. Achilles vows that because of Patroclus, he'll be the first, and he asks Patroclus to swear they'll make it happen together. Satisfied, Achilles says he "could eat the world raw."

Love has also made Achilles feel that he can control his own fate, and assure his own happiness. But he clearly wasn't listening to Heracles's story very carefully. The gods presumably forced Heracles to kill his wife and kids because Heracles loved them. Heracles's love for his family caused *his unhappiness. Achilles comment that he wants to eat the world raw is an interesting one, because it's a pretty violent way of expressing love.*

Suddenly, they hear a ragged trumpet sound; Achilles pulls a knife and waits. A voice calls for him from a distance. Patroclus realizes it must be a messenger from the palace, since no one else would know they're here. As man steps into the clearing, Achilles lowers his knife but holds it tightly. The messenger tells Achilles that there's urgent business in Phthia; messengers from Mycenae have arrived with news, and Peleus wants Achilles to be there. As the two return to the cave, they speculate about the news. Mycenae is Agamemnon's kingdom and has the greatest army in Greece.

Once again, Achilles quickly transitions from an innocent lover to a warrior. Meanwhile, for anyone familiar with the story of The Iliad, *this moment is one of fate or destiny intervening at just the moment when Achilles and Patroclus felt that they had taken control of their lives. Agamemnon was one of Helen's suitors, and his brother, Menelaus, was the man Helen chose as her husband. And, in* The Iliad, *Agamemnon was the leader of the Greek armies during the Trojan war—the war in which Achilles fate and destiny came to pass.*

Achilles tells Chiron that he's been summoned home but will return soon. Patroclus wonders whether Chiron will be lonely without them—he knows that Chiron dislikes other centaurs because he thinks they're "barbaric." Achilles and Patroclus pack their few possessions—including the statue that Patroclus made for Achilles—and Achilles embraces Chiron. Chiron warns him that he should consider his earlier question, whether or not he'll fight in someone else's army. Patroclus is disturbed by the implication. Chiron then tells Patroclus that he doesn't give up on things so easily anymore. Achilles assures him again that they'll be back soon, but Patroclus can't see Chiron's expression in the dark. They ride away, and though Patroclus tries to look back at Chiron's camp, he looks too late to be able to see anything.

Achilles's promise to return to Chiron indicates that he still thinks he is control of his own fate. That Patroclus looks to see Chiron's expression at Achilles statement—and can't see it—implies that Patroclus senses that Achilles may be wrong, and that Achilles will in fact end up being wrong. Chiron's comment to Achilles, however, does still offer a path to some measure control: Achilles may be destined to be a warrior, but he can choose who he fights for. Chiron's final comment to Patroclus hints that he might have known about the boys' relationship all along—after all, Achilles is what Patroclus became willing to fight for when he arrived on Pelion. The fact that Patroclus can't look back on Pelion again suggests that a chapter of the boys' lives is permanently closed.

CHAPTER 11

When Patroclus and Achilles arrive in Phthia, Peleus and Thetis are waiting for them. Still unnaturally pale, Thetis stands apart from Peleus and his guards who all lower their eyes, fearful of her. She welcomes Achilles home first—normally, this would be a father's role, but Thetis is a goddess, so Peleus can only look on, annoyed. Thetis accompanies the group back to the palace, frightening the servants as she moves silently across the floors.

As a goddess, Thetis asserts a certain degree of power and authority over mortals. In some ways, Thetis's power in conjunction with her notable inhuman uniqueness only serves to highlight how little power most women in this society ever hold. Thetis gets to greet her son first only *because she is a goddess. Peleus's annoyance indicates how much he dislikes his own power being disrupted by a woman, goddess or not.*

In the dining hall, there are only three place settings on the raised dais: they're for Achilles, Thetis, and Peleus. Achilles insists that another setting be added for Patroclus, annoying Thetis. Quietly, Achilles jokes to Patroclus that since Thetis already hates Patroclus, so it can't do any harm. Achilles comments also that he hasn't seen his parents in the same room since he was a child. Remembering Chiron's comment, Patroclus thinks that the reason Achille's parents are together now must be because of news of war. Achilles doesn't understand why that would mean anything to him—war is common in Mycenae.

Achilles is so self-assured that he continues to play with fate, and think little of pitting Thetis against Patroclus. That Thetis and Peleus haven't been in the same room for so long indicates again that their relationship was not consensual, and suggests that Thetis has come now only because she understands the importance of this moment relative to the primary person she does care about: Achilles. Achilles belief that any announcement of war has nothing to do with him again illustrates his sense that he can control his own fate.

Peleus finally announces the news to everyone in the hall: Menelaus's wife, Queen Helen, was abducted from Sparta, something previously thought to be impossible—Menelaus had built layered rock around her palace and specifically trained his soldiers to defend it. Apparently, the Trojan prince Paris stole Helen from her room while she was asleep. Menelaus's brother Agamemnon now asks for an army of Greeks to go to fight Troy—and states that Troy is wealthy and will be seized quickly. Patroclus thinks this is a good way to frame the announcement, since men have always killed for money and reputation.

Menelaus apparently treated Helen like property, "protecting" her by essentially locking her in a vault. Patroclus's thought that it was surprising that Helen could be abducted, along with the facts of how Menelaus treated her, foreshadows that perhaps she wasn't *simply abducted. The way that Agamemnon's call to war conflates punishing Troy for taking Helen with the promise of winning wealth and fame by crushing Troy further makes clear that women were just another kind of property, and at the way that Greek honor, wealth, and violence are so closely connected.*

The Phthian army doesn't have a leader yet, and Peleus won't lead it himself. Patroclus panics, noticing Peleus's gaze on Achilles and Thetis's "distant" eyes. He realizes that Thetis knew this war was imminent and wants Achilles to go to Troy. He also realizes the full weight of Chiron's warning—this war is what people think Achilles is born for, since they believe his talent is for murder alone. His bloody fate will be their triumph.

It's now clear why Achilles was brought back to Phthia: Peleus wants him to lead the Phthian army in the war. Patroclus's panic indicates his recognition that Achilles fate is already in motion, when just a little while earlier he and Achilles had thought that they might be able to control their fate. Patroclus also realizes that Achilles fate is determined not just by gods, but by the expectations and desires of other people, which will push Achilles to do what they want for their own benefit.

Peleus continues his announcement: Helen's suitors once vowed to defend her, and Agamemnon and Menelaus now command them to fulfill their duty. Peleus reads the list of names, and Patroclus recognizes many, remembering his own presence among them years ago. The names include Odysseus, Ajax, and Menoitiades, which is Patroclus's family name—one no one remembers, because Patroclus's father hasn't made much of himself. Achilles recognizes it, but he tells Patroclus not to say anything, since Patroclus hasn't kept his family name. Patroclus nods, but he remains panicked; he'd almost thought the oath was a dream.

The oath turns out to be a "fate" somewhat similar to Achilles's own god-given destiny. The men who swore the oath, thinking it would never come to pass, are now caught up in its snare, unable to escape. Achilles suggestion that Patroclus remain silent is another indication that, while Achilles won't lie, he doesn't mind bending the truth in other ways. His honesty is somewhat situational. In addition, it is another example of Achilles thinking that he can control events.

After dinner, Peleus asks to speak to Achilles alone. Patroclus joins them. Peleus says that he thinks Achilles could lead the army, since he's spent much longer on Pelion than any hero, including Peleus himself. Achilles thinks the war sounds baseless, but Peleus disagrees. Menelaus *is* upset about Helen, but the message came from Agamemnon. Agamemnon has watched Troy become wealthy and wants to strike now. Because of this, there is honor to gain. Achilles dismisses this idea, saying that other wars will come later.

While Helen's seeming abduction is part of the reason for this declaration of war, it is also a pretext for a war that Agamemnon wants to wage for power, glory, and wealth. "Love" is being used as a pretext for violence. Note how Peleus believes that because a war against Troy might lead to wealth it will lead to honor—rather than honor being connected to some ideal, for this Greek society it is a product of money. Achilles, for his part, seems to be waiting for an actually more noble war—which implies that he thinks that such an actually noble war could occur is possible. It's not clear that he's right.

Peleus notes that Patroclus has been summoned by oath, but Achilles argues that, in his exile, Patroclus is no longer bound. Quietly, Patroclus says that he doesn't want to go, and Peleus agrees not to say anything. However, he warns Achilles that kings sent on Agamemnon's behalf are coming to convince him and that he should listen to their pitch. Achilles agrees, though he doesn't think they'll succeed. Later, as Achilles and Patroclus lie in bed, Achilles says that if Patroclus has to go to Troy, he'll go with him.

Achilles continues to try to control his own life, and at the same to take Chiron's advice about choosing which war he'll be willing to fight. His love for Patroclus is behind his effort to convince his father not to reveal that Patroclus is subject to the oath. At the same time, Achilles love for Patroclus means that Achilles will go to war if Patroclus has to.

CHAPTER 12

When Patroclus wakes up the next morning, Achilles is gone. Patroclus goes to look for him, but he's nowhere to be found—not in the council chamber, not in the lyre practice room. Nervous, Patroclus eventually finds Peleus's advisor Phoinix, who's looking at clay tablets, each bearing the names of men who signed up for war. Phoinix is surprised that no one told Patroclus what happened, and he gently says that Thetis took Achilles away to some unknown location.

The lists of men who have signed up to fight in the war indicate that the wealth and "honor" that might be won are attractive to many. Apparently, money and honor are perfectly good reasons for most people to go to war, even though Achilles didn't think that they were. Meanwhile, Patroclus's hope to find Achilles in the lyre practice room seems like a hope to escape this time for a more innocent one. That Thetis spirited Achilles away again suggests her desire—among other things—to separate Achilles from Patroclus, and, perhaps, the human aspects of life that Patroclus represents.

Patroclus knows Achilles would never have gone willingly, and he imagines Thetis stealing him away in the night like a corpse. He knows why she did it: she wanted to separate the two of them at the earliest opportunity, now that they're away from Chiron's protection. She'll take Achilles to the caves and teach him to hate humans. Patroclus imagines Achilles fighting in Troy, wearing cold black armor, spear in hand—eventually, he won't recognize Patroclus.

Once again, Patroclus associates Thetis with death and imagines her carrying away Achilles's dead body. Earlier in the novel, Patroclus noted that Achilles appeared to be stone when he was sleeping. Patroclus is making the same comparison here, except now he's worried that Achilles will be permanently cold and inhuman. He seems to think that Thetis is targeting Patroclus specifically by stealing Achilles away and that this was her plan all along. If that were the case, then Achilles's transition to an unfeeling warrior would be entirely Thetis's fault and would have nothing to do with Achilles. In many ways, this is a more convenient narrative than if Achilles were to go to war, kill people of his own volition, and still love Patroclus. It is easier for Patroclus to blame the gods than to imagine Achilles as both beautiful, kind, and a killer..

Patroclus, grief-stricken, remembers Chiron's parting comment to him, that he no longer gives up on things. He goes to Peleus, clasping Peleus's knees and chin in supplication: this intimate position will force Peleus to treat Patroclus fairly by the gods' laws. Peleus is normally a benevolent king, so supplicants are rare in Phthia. Patroclus demands to know where Achilles is, and after some prodding, Peleus tells him that he's on an island called Scyros. Patroclus releases Peleus, knowing that the king told him this information only because he's pious and Patroclus was a supplicant. Peleus appears both angry and weary; he looks out at the sea and dismisses Patroclus.

This is the first time Patroclus is actively fighting for Achilles, which Chiron implied he might have to do. The concept of supplication is an interesting one, because it takes a position of weakness and turns it into a position of strength. This is backwards logic for the Greeks, who generally hate weakness—but in this case, weakness can give you essentially unlimited power over a king, provided the king in question believes in the gods..

Patroclus arrives in Scyros, a dilapidated island with a modest palace. Its guards, lounging around and playing with **dice**, reluctantly bring him to see the princess, Deidameia. Deidameia is pretty and arrogant, and she tells Patroclus that Scyros's king, Lycomedes, is old and ill. Because of this, if Patroclus wants a favor, he should ask her instead. Patroclus, choosing a fake name—Chironides, meaning son of Chiron—asks after the whereabouts of a young man from Phthia. Her tone colder, Deidameia says that she'll think about telling him, and in the meantime, her women will dance for him; apparently, Scyros is known for its foster daughters. Her coldness and intelligence unsettle Patroclus. He thinks about Scyros's vulnerability: it's a poor island, and if everyone knew a woman ruled, it would soon be seized.

The mention of dice connects Patroclus's fight for Achilles now with his earlier fight with Clysonymus. But this connection actually highlights the differences between these two fights: Patroclus is no longer out to save his own honor; he just wants Achilles back. His adoption of Chiron's name suggests both that he views Chiron as a father figure and that he may be subconsciously thinking about Chiron's advice not to give up on the things he cares about. His mission to find Achilles takes an interesting turn with the entrance of Deidameia, who seems to be running the island in her father's stead. Her reaction to the mention of Phthia hints that she knows where Achilles is, and her decision to make Patroclus watch a dance first seems to be her way of lording that information over him. This is the most power any woman besides Thetis has had so far in the novel. As he did with Thetis, Patroclus realizes the limitations of Deidameia's seemingly unlimited power. She rules the island now, but if another kingdom realizes that a woman rules, they'll attack and her rule will be over. Deidameia's rule depends on the fact that no one else knows she rules.

After dinner, Deidameia summons a group of women, their hair hidden and tied back. They begin to dance, Deidameia partnering with the tallest one. She dances beautifully and appears to flirt with her partner. After the dance is over, the partner curtsies and looks up, and Patroclus sees that it's Achilles, posing as a woman. Achilles embraces Patroclus fiercely. After the other women leave, Achilles (who is still pretending to be a woman) tells an alarmed King Lycomedes that his husband, Patroclus, has come to claim him, and that the two will now leave Scyros. He curtsies—and a dazed Patroclus notes that Achilles curtsies very well.

Deidameia seems to have been taunting Patroclus—since he was looking for Achilles, she planned to parade Achilles right in front of him without telling him, assuming that Patroclus wouldn't recognize Achilles. That Patroclus does recognize Achilles signals the depth of their connection—and proves that Patroclus was right when he claimed that he could recognize Achilles anywhere. As with Patroclus's earlier act of supplication, Achilles is feigning weakness (being a woman) to get the upper hand. While Deidameia is pretending she has more power than she does, Achilles is pretending he has less—which then lets him say that Patroclus has "claimed him" and get what he wants. It remains unclear why Achilles is on Scyros, or whether he chose to be. This seems unlikely, since he's now so eager to leave.

Deidameia begins to sob and shriek. She accuses the "heartless" Achilles of betraying her. She then reveals to Lycomedes that Achilles is really a man and that she and Achilles are secretly married. Achilles's pleas for her to stop only enrage her further—she says she's the only person who knows his identity, and she threatens to tell everyone. A cold voice cuts through the sobbing to tell Deidameia that she'll do no such thing; Patroclus recognizes Thetis immediately. Thetis's appearance is wilder than ever before, even demonic. Achilles tells her he won't pretend any longer, and he apologizes to Lycomedes for the deception: Thetis didn't want him to go to war, and she chose to hide him in Scyros and have him pose as a woman.

Patroclus had believed that Thetis wanted Achilles to go to war to gain honor and ascend to godhood. But clearly he was wrong: Thetis has gone to great lengths to try to protect—even hide—Achilles from this war. Deidameia tries to assert her power over Achilles by threatening to reveal his secret; but Thetis intervenes and asserts her power to insist that Deidameia do no such thing. Love, power, and control are all mixed together in this scene. While Thetis can control Deidameia, though, she now can no longer control Achilles. Her wild demonic look attests both to her power as goddess, but also hints at her loss of control.

Defiant, Deidameia says that Achilles can't leave, since Thetis married the two of them. At these words, Patroclus feels something fall from a great height in his chest. Agreeing, Thetis tells Lycomedes that he's morally bound to Achilles due to Deidameia's marriage, and must continue to secretly shelter him. In return, Deidameia can claim him as her husband someday—he'll be at the height of his fame then. The shell-shocked Lycomedes agrees; he has no choice. But Deidameia can't be silent, since she slept with Achilles at Thetis's request and needs to claim him as her husband *now* or else she will lose her honor. Thetis refuses, calling her foolish. Trembling, Deidameia reveals that she's pregnant. Achilles and Lycomedes are visibly horrified; Patroclus leaves the room, feeling hollow.

Thetis has done a lot of scheming to try to control events and protect Achilles from going to war at Troy. She has stolen Achilles away, made him marry Deidameia, and convinced Deidamia into accepting a secret marriage in hopes of one day being married to the famous Achilles. Earlier Deidameia reveled I her power—over Scyros, over Patroclus, over Achilles. But now that power is revealed as hollow. Deidameia sought to cement her power by marrying Achilles the way that a king might cement power by marrying the daughter of a different powerful king. But unlike women in this society, Achilles cannot be treated like property. This scene also reveals that honor for women is distinctly different than honor for men. Female honor apparently centers around virginity, whereas with men it's all about heroism. Patroclus, meanwhile, experiences all this as a shock and betrayal—while Achilles was compelled by his mother, he still married and had sex with Deidameia.

Achilles follows. It takes him longer than usual, because his dress tangles his legs. More upset than Patroclus has ever seen him, Achilles says he didn't want to marry Deidameia or sleep with her. Thetis said if he did, she'd tell Patroclus where she'd taken him. Patroclus wonders why Deidameia didn't think he'd recognize Achilles; he'd know him anywhere.

The way that the dress interferes with Achilles normal physical dexterity is another signal about the way women are restrained by Greek society. Achilles describes his betrayal of Patroclus as an effort to actually get back to Patroclus. Both Thetis and Achilles used Deidameia as a means to an end.

Patroclus says, dully, that it was all for nothing, as Peleus told him where Achilles was, not Thetis. Patroclus reflects that Achilles has always been too trusting, something Patroclus used to resent. He wants to reproach Achilles, but he can't: he realizes that Achilles's trust is innate, and he wouldn't want Achilles to be as afraid as everyone else. Patroclus realizes that Achilles looked at Deidameia like he didn't see her, but he never looked at Patroclus that way. He tells Achilles there's nothing to forgive.

Patroclus works through his anger in this scene, and emerges on the other side: not just a willingness to accept Achilles for who he is, but an insistence on it. He sees that Achilles's trusting nature can be manipulated, but he wants Achilles to maintain that goodness because it as it the core of who Achilles is. He also realizes that sex is not love; that Achilles feels no love for Deidameia despite having slept with her. It's interesting that Patroclus accepts Achilles's trust as an innate part of him but rarely thinks about his other innate traits, such as violence. It can be argued that Patroclus is selectively *accepting Achilles. It's easy to forgive Achilles when love is involved—it may be harder to forgive Achilles for violent actions later.*

They return to the palace on Scyros and run into Lycomedes, who tells Achilles that Deidameia is crying in her room and hopes Achilles will visit. Lycomedes asks Achilles to swear that the child will bear his name, and while Achilles hesitates for a moment, he does promise. Patroclus pities the old king. When they head to the guest quarters, Achilles's hair is disheveled, his dress torn, and he uses a high-pitched voice. The guard escorting them grins at Patroclus.

The power dynamics on Scyros have flipped. Deidameia went from ruling the island to crying in her room, and now Achilles is in the position to take requests from Lycomedes, who should have the most power on his island but because of his daughter's potentially besmirched honor. Meanwhile, the scene further highlights the weakness of women in this society when the guard—who thinks Achilles is a girl; and who further looks on with a grin at what he thinks is a girl whom Patroclus has just had sex with or perhaps even sexually assaulted this—the weakness of women in this society.

That night, Achilles and Patroclus discuss Thetis's decision to hide him from the war, which Patroclus doesn't understand. As Achilles describes it, Thetis told him that he's too young to fight. The disguise was her idea, though Achilles doesn't seem ashamed by it like another boy would be; after all, he's never experienced ridicule. Patroclus can't quite believe that this plan wasn't related to his presence in Achilles's life, and Achilles agrees that Deidameia *was* because of Patroclus, but the rest was the war.

Thetis wants Achilles to be a god, and in order to be a god, he needs to fight—that's what his skills are for, and that's the only way he'll gain glory. Patroclus's puzzlement therefore foreshadows future revelations about Thetis's reasons for not wanting Achilles to fight. While Thetis and Patroclus would prefer Achilles not fight in this coming war, Thetis nonetheless still wants full control over Achilles—as made clear by her efforts to separate Achilles from Patroclus via marriage to Deidameia. And Deidameia, meanwhile, who thought she had a power, was just a pawn. Finally, this scene once again highlights how Achilles's honor, unlike that of essentially anyone else in the novel, is innate to the degree that he doesn't register embarrassment because he can't even imagine being the subject of ridicule. The regular emphasis on this trait of Achilles is an indication that it is likely to be challenged at some point in the novel.

CHAPTER 13

Over the next few days, Patroclus and Achilles often sneak outside where Achilles can run and jump. Otherwise, living as a woman, he's confined. At night, they eat awkward dinners with Lycomedes and Deidameia, an attempt to maintain the cover story of Patroclus and Achilles's marriage. Achilles is indifferent to Deidameia, which hurts her. She assumes that Patroclus is mocking her, but really he feels sorry—he's almost asked Achilles to be kinder to her many times, but Achilles lacks interest, not kindness.

The restrictions placed on women are made obvious by the ways that Achilles's disguise as a woman is limits what he can do. Yet it is noteworthy that experiencing these limitations doesn't make him any more sympathetic to Deidameia. Patroclus is once again portrayed as the more empathetic person, here, though he doesn't actually every tell Achilles to be more kind. Patroclus is letting Achilles off the hook pretty easily, something he does often.

Achilles starts waking up early to practice with his spears before returning to "womanhood." One morning, a guard summons Patroclus on Deidameia's behalf. He passes through the women's quarters, which have no windows—Patroclus can't imagine living there for two whole months like Achilles did. Deidameia is waiting for Patroclus in her bedchamber, and he realizes that she planned this, knowing Achilles would be gone.

Achilles is able to slip in and out of "womanhood" relatively easily. Meanwhile, Patroclus is shocked by how confined Achilles was during his initial period in the women's quarters, but Achilles was only ever there temporarily. The women who live there are permanently *confined, something Patroclus doesn't dwell on. Meanwhile, Deidameia might be able to summon Patroclus to her chambers, but she has to maneuver around Achilles's schedule to do so, again proving that her power is limited.*

Deidameia watches Patroclus carefully, ordering him not to speak. He's not handsome, she says—he's even hideous. She asks what he thinks of her assessment and he replies she told him to be silent, so she slaps him. The slap shocks him, as boys are never slapped, except occasionally by their fathers; Patroclus's father often slapped him. She clearly wants him to hit back, and when she sees he won't, she triumphantly calls him a coward. She can't understand why Achilles would—but she can't finish the thought, and she begins to cry, trying to hide it. She can't fool Patroclus, who has done the same thing himself.

Deidameia clearly knows about Patroclus's relationship with Achilles. She sees Patroclus as a rival, is confused and hurt by Achilles preference, and wants to get the upper hand on Patroclus. Note that her strategy to rattle Patroclus is exactly the same as Clysonymus's: she calls him a coward and reminds him of his father's disdain for him (unintentionally). Patroclus's changed response is therefore significant. Back then, he fought back. This time he doesn't. That Patroclus isn't interested in defending his honor this time suggests that he no longer values honor the same way he did as a child, at least not honor in the traditional sense of ancient Greek society. Instead, he actually identifies with Deidameia, remembering how he used to hide his tears from others. Patroclus's status as an exile and perhaps also as Achilles's lover gives him some insight into the situation of women in this society, though even he is not so vulnerable as the women depicted in the novel.


Deidameia tells Patroclus that she hates him, but he pities her, remembering how awful indifference can be. Hands over her face, she tells him that she's leaving tomorrow to begin her confinement; a visible pregnancy would be shameful. Patroclus imagines the confinement—small house, no dances—and tells her he's sorry. She asks why Achilles doesn't notice her. It's a childish question, but Patroclus says he doesn't know. *She* knows—Patroclus is the reason. He says he should leave, but she threatens to tell the guards he attacked her. Patroclus knows that even if she did, there's nothing they could do. Wanting to make Patroclus jealous, Deidameia reveals that she and Achilles had sex twice. Patroclus says he already knew this; she can't hurt him.

Unlike Achilles, Patroclus does seem to understand just how horrible Deidameia's situation is. She's going from ruling her island to being powerless. She is also completely at Achilles's mercy: she'll be confined until she can claim Achilles as her husband, so her future depends on him. Even if Patroclus assaulted Deidameia, he'd be untouchable—she's a princess and he's nobody, but his word would still matter more than hers because of his association with Achilles. None of this denies the fact that Deidameia has acted throughout haughtily and spitefully towards Patroclus. But it puts that behavior in the context of her broader situation.

Deidameia begins crying again, but she asks Patroclus not to leave. He steps toward her, and she falls into his arms, sobbing. Achilles and his brightness feel far away in this sad room. Eventually, she starts stroking his back and he realizes what she wants. After some protests, he follows her into her room. Achilles had told him about sex with Deidameia, saying that it was quick and that he'd missed Patroclus. Deidameia asks if Patroclus thinks she's beautiful, and Patroclus says yes, truthfully. As he pleasures her, her expression disturbs him: determination, not enjoyment. He wants to stop, but he knows that if he did, he'd hurt her more.

Both Patroclus and Deidameia's lives revolve around Achilles in one way or another, and he's hurt both of them recently. Deidameia's desire to have sex with Patroclus seems to have complicated motivations: to feel desired after being ignored by Achilles, to hurt Achilles, or even to step into Achilles's shoes, either to understand why he loves Patroclus or to pretend she has the kind of power he does. Meanwhile, Patroclus frames his sexual encounter with Deidameia as a way to comfort her, but one could argue that there is also more to it than that: if he has sex with Deidameia, he's hurting Achilles in exactly the same way Achilles hurt him.


Patroclus feels resistance when he tries to enter Deidameia, and they're both relieved when he finally does. He's aroused, but drowsily; it's different than it is with Achilles. His indifference hurts her, so he moves faster, which makes her triumphant. Afterward, when it's over, he tries to hold her, wanting to offer her something, but she draws away warily. He doesn't know what she wanted, only that he hasn't given it to her. She asks him to tell Achilles goodbye. When he sees Achilles again, he's relieved, and he can almost convince himself that it was a vivid dream. But that would be a lie.

Neither Patroclus nor Deidameia are enjoying what's happening. Deidameia seems to want Patroclus to be into it, though, presumably because that would be an affirmation of his attraction to her and that he genuinely betrayed Achilles. But, if she feels a moment of power during sex, that feeling disappears as soon as it is over. In that moment afterward, she accepts that Achilles does not care about her in the way she wants him to. Meanwhile, this is the second time Patroclus has chosen to pretend that a traumatic event (each in some way related to women) was a dream. As with the oath, this seems to be a way for Patroclus to avoid responsibility.


CHAPTER 14

Deidameia leaves Scyros to go into hiding—she'll be gone until she has the baby and until she can name Achilles as the father. Patroclus and Achilles remain on the island, guilty and furtive. They begin to hear news of the war—the former suitors honored their oath, and the war will unite the Greek kingdoms for the first time. One morning in late winter, Patroclus and Achilles watch the sea for ships; Achilles remarks that he wishes he had Patroclus's mother's **lyre**, which they left in Phthia. Suddenly, they see a smudge on the horizon: an unfamiliar ship, likely bearing news from a Greek king.

Like Patroclus earlier in the novel, Deidameia is in exile. But Patroclus had killed someone, while Deidameia simply got pregnant. The boy's feelings of guilt suggest that they sense that hiding from the war—and the oath behind it—is the wrong thing to do. Achilles wish for the lyre can be taken for a wish for a return to childhood innocence—a wish he knows is beyond reach. The ship seems to indicate an end to the boy's state of waiting.



Later that day, a man finds Patroclus in his room. When he smiles, easy and practiced, Patroclus almost recognizes him. He introduces himself as one of Agamemnon's captains and says he's here to recruit men like Patroclus; the war will be easily won, and there's honor and riches to gain. As the man speaks, Patroclus notices a scar on his calf and realizes that the man is Odysseus. He's terrified that Odysseus will recognize him or perhaps that he already has. Patroclus gives his fake name—Chironides—and refuses. Odysseus backs off more quickly than expected. He wonders whether he knows Patroclus, but Patroclus says he's an exile from the south. Odysseus is surprised—Patroclus's accent is northern, like those in Phthia. He leaves, asking Patroclus to send any other young men his way.

Odysseus's pitch for joining the war mirrors Peleus's earlier: it makes war sound easy, and conflates violence, wealth, and honor. Meanwhile, the fact that this man turns out to be Odysseus—who in the suitor scene with Helen clearly established himself as the smartest leader among the Greeks and now so easily sees through the facts of Patroclus's lie—hints that he won't actually let Patroclus off as easily as he seems to be doing here. Odysseus always seems to have plans within plans, which gives him a different sort of control over events.


Odysseus is at dinner that night, and Lycomedes introduces him to Patroclus by name, which Odysseus forgot to do. Patroclus realizes he should have asked—he didn't because he already knew Odysseus. Odysseus's companion, the king of Argos, Diomedes, introduces himself as well, and Patroclus recognizes him as another suitor. As they all eat, Diomedes goads Odysseus into talking about how he met his wife. Odysseus says that when he went to Sparta to meet Helen, he arrived first and spied on the family. Eventually, Penelope caught him, and he realized she was much cleverer than her cousins and equally beautiful. Diomedes scoffs at the story, and Odysseus says he shouldn't have asked—the two have a tense banter, which makes Lycomedes uncomfortable.

Lycomedes's introduction is more evidence that Odysseus likely knows more than he lets on about who Patroclus is—in part because Patroclus seems fairly bad at subterfuge. Meanwhile, this passage further establishes Odysseus's smarts and values. He showed up early to Sparta get the lay of the land before the contest as suitors; and he valued intelligence as much as beauty. The evident dislike between Odysseus and Diomedes seems to hint that the two might have a further unknown history or different motives in coming to Scyros.

Odysseus then asks to see the foster daughters dance, which Lycomedes has to agree to—refusing would be suspicious. The girls perform, Achilles among them. When Odysseus wonders where Deidameia is, Lycomedes responds that she's visiting family. After the dance, Odysseus announces that he and Diomedes brought presents for the women and for the king: gems and silver in large trunks. The girls crowd around the trinkets, Achilles among them but in the back, testing perfume and trying earrings.

Odysseus has a knack for poking holes in people's stories. All of his actions seem to have a deeper motive. Achilles, meanwhile, continues to play at being a woman. The disguise gives him a kind of freedom, which is so different from what the actual women experience in their lives.

Patroclus notices Diomedes speaking to a servant; he assumes the conversation isn't important, because Diomedes looks bored. Achilles holds the earrings up, faking girlishness—it amuses him. Suddenly, a trumpet blasts four times, the signal for disaster. Every girl screams except one. Achilles has a sword and spear in hand before the last blast is finished, and he holds them not like a girl or even a man, but like a warrior. Odysseus and Diomedes smile and tell Achilles they've been looking for him. Achilles, mockingly, says he's honored—his tone will make it harder to humiliate him. He sheds his disguise, and Odysseus asks Lycomedes for a private room. Lycomedes is terrified, obviously thinking of Thetis. Odysseus invites Patroclus to join them, calling him by his real name—they want to talk to him, too.

Now it's clear that Odysseus and Diomedes engineered this entire scene—asking to see the girls dance, giving the gifts, then having the alarm horns blow—all to flush out Achilles. And, further, that Odysseus always knew who Patroclus was. Odysseus was always in control. Achilles amusement at playacting as a women continues to highlight the difference between him playing this role and the actual women who are living it. Meanwhile, not how Achilles doesn't just shift from "woman" to "warrior," but to a "warrior" so obviously powerful that he seems almost inhuman. This suggests that even when Achilles isn't faking womanhood, he's at least partially faking manhood*—he's something more than human. This is something Patroclus never likes to think about. Achilles was never embarrassed by his disguise, but he's now aware of how it could harm his reputation and modulates his response to the men accordingly. Clearly, his honor matters to him even if he's never had to fight for it before.*

CHAPTER 15

In the private room, Achilles is annoyed by Odysseus's trickery. Odysseus responds that it wasn't mere jesting, though: he and Diomedes want him to come to Troy. If he doesn't, Diomedes threatens they'll tell everyone about Achilles's disguise. Wearing a dress by necessity is one thing, he says, but it's another for everyone to know about it. Odysseus dismisses Diomedes's threat—saying, it won't come to that. He then continues, saying that this war will be the most important war in Greek history, even though all Achilles sees is a "cuckolded husband." Diomedes insists that there's nothing more honorable than fighting for Greece's most beautiful woman against the strongest Eastern city. Patroclus interjects, reminding Odysseus that he said the war would be quick. Odysseus shrugs, admitting he lied.

Achilles annoyance at being tricked again highlights his assumption that because he doesn't lie, other people won't, either. Throughout this conversation, Diomedes spouts typical Greek idea about honor, threatening Achilles's reputation over having worn a dress and then focusing on the honor of defending a beautiful woman. But Odysseus is different. He dismisses Diomedes threats, and seems to recognize that though the cause of this war may be slight—a "cuckolded husband"—it's political impact will be immense. Yet the ease with which Odysseus admits that he lied about the war being easy indicates that he's not a man to be trusted. He'll say anything to control events and get what he wants.

Odysseus tells Achilles that the gods shared a prophecy with him. Suddenly fearful, Patroclus realizes that he should've seen this coming, as the wily Odysseus would never rely on blackmail alone. Odysseus tells Achilles that if he doesn't come to Troy, his strength will diminish, and he'll end up like the old Lycomedes, whose kingdom will obviously be taken soon. That kind of dishonor—being forgotten—is the worst fate for a Greek. If Achilles *does* go to Troy, he'll be famous, even legendary. But Odysseus can't finish his pitch, because Thetis suddenly breaks down the door, furious and terrifying.

Now it's clear that Odysseus never planned to use the same weak arguments or attempts to shame Achilles's honor to persuade Achilles to go to war. Instead, Odysseus puts himself in the role of trying to protect Achilles's legacy, making himself seem like friend while also implicitly forcing Achilles to face the fact that his "destiny" isn't as set in stone as he always believed. He can't just choose when to fight.

Thetis tries to hit Odysseus, fists clenched, but finds she can't. Odysseus, almost apologetic, tells her he's a favorite with the goddess Athena who values cleverness, and that Athena approves of his presence in Scyros. Thetis says, tersely, that Athena doesn't have a child to lose. She reveals that Odysseus has only told part of the prophecy; if Achilles goes to Troy, he *will* be famous, but he'll also die there. A fearful Achilles asks what he should do. Thetis, betraying a slight tremor, says he shouldn't ask her to choose.

Odysseus has his own connection to the gods, which make Thetis powerless against him. Odysseus never got the chance to finish what he was saying, so it's possible he was going to tell Achilles the full prophecy. But given his willingness to lie it seems more likely that he was going to keep Achilles in the dark about his prophesized death in order to manipulate Achilles into doing what he wants. This scene proves how much Thetis loves her son; in trying to hide him on Scyros she was choosing to keep him alive above helping him to achieve greatness. Achilles, meanwhile, finds himself having to weigh that old conundrum: whether it's better to burn out, or to fade away.

Achilles and Patroclus leave the room in a daze. A thousand times, Patroclus almost begs Achilles not to go to the war, but he doesn't. Finally, Achilles says that he couldn't bear it; Patroclus knows Achilles is talking about the dishonorable future, not about his death. After all, who is he without his strength and fame? Patroclus says that he wouldn't care if Achilles amounted to nothing, but it isn't enough. Achilles says he'll go to Troy, and he asks if Patroclus will come with him. Maybe in another life, Patroclus could've refused and made him die alone. Not this one, though. He says yes, internally devastated. Achilles is relieved.

Patroclus and Achilles in this scene are forced to balance questions of selfhood, love, responsibility, and honor. Out of love, Patroclus wants Achilles to live and not fight. Yet Patroclus knows that, if Achilles refused to go to war, the powerful, impervious Achilles he loves would cease to be. Achilles, meanwhile, knows that in going to war he bears responsibility for bringing Patroclus with him. But his love for Patroclus makes him unable to leave Patroclus behind. In the end, Achilles, like all the other Greek men, has his selfhood tied up in his honor, which means he can't escape war or violence even if it will cost his life.

At dawn, Achilles goes to tell Thetis what he's decided. Left alone in their room, Patroclus imagines that their bed is a tomb, and he knows that this is what life will be like without Achilles. He leaves the palace, trying not to think at all, and climbs up the dangerous rocks that hang over the sea, which cut his hands and feet. The pain is a welcome distraction. Suddenly inspired, he screams Thetis's name. He looks up and sees her. She tells him to get down, as Patroclus's death won't save Achilles.

The image of their bed as a tomb captures the way that the novel intertwines love and violence. What's interesting, is that the bed will be a tomb either way: if Achilles stays to preserve their love for longer, he will cease to be himself. If they go to war, Achilles will, eventually, physically die. After realizing this, Patroclus's impulse is to hurt himself, as if he can somehow escape this predicament through his own pain or death. That Thetis actively seeks to stop Patroclus from harming himself attests to her devotion to Achilles—she doesn't like Patroclus, but she knows Achilles does.

Patroclus asks how much longer Achilles has. Thetis laughs cruelly, asking if he'll try to stop Achilles's death. Patroclus says he will, if he can. He kneels, and she stops laughing, maybe because of the submission. She says that Hector's death will come before Achilles, but that's all she knows. He thanks her, which irritates her; she came to speak with him for a different reason. Achilles thinks glory will be easy, but he's naive. The gods have promised fame, but haven't said how much, and the commanders won't just hand him power. She'll do what she can to help, and Patroclus must not "disgrace him." Patroclus asks if Hector is a skilled soldier, and she says there's no one better, except for Achilles.

Now that Achilles has made his choice, Thetis has made hers: she wants to ensure that Achilles will achieve as much honor and glory as possible, and she wants to ensure that Achilles has much control over the level of fame he achieves as possible. She knows that to gain true power Achilles will need more than battle skill; he'll need political skill—like Odysseus—to carve out power from the other kings. Her warning that Patroclus shouldn't "disgrace" Achilles is a reference to their relationship, and to the fact that honor in this society has nothing to do with love or kindness and everything to do with glory, warfare, and masculinity. Hector, it's helpful to know, is a Trojan prince.

After Thetis is gone, Achilles finds Patroclus on the rocks. While Achilles cleans Patroclus's wounds, Patroclus explains his conversation with Thetis, and develops a plan to keep Achilles alive: Achilles shouldn't kill Hector, since as Thetis describes Hector's skill only Achilles can, and Hector has to die before Achilles will. Achilles asks if Patroclus is trying to "steal time" from the Fates. Patroclus says that he is, which amuses Achilles; he loves defying rules. He agrees—after all, he says, what has Hector done to him?

Achilles in this scene is a healer; but he will soon head to war. Meanwhile, Patroclus has developed an almost lawyerly plan, built on logic, to try to hold off Fate. Achilles, secure in his own greatness, enjoys this sort of defiance. But this whole scene has an air of overconfidence and foreshadowing, in which the things the boys are saying are going to play out, fatefully, in a way that will turn their expectations on their heads.

Achilles and Patroclus leave Scyros that afternoon, planning to sail to Phthia with Odysseus and Diomedes. Lycomedes comes to say goodbye. There's only one thing left to do, though Achilles is reluctant to do it. He tells Lycomedes that when his child is born, it will be a boy. He then says that Thetis will come to claim the child after Deidameia weans him. Lycomedes closes his eyes, and Patroclus knows that he's thinking about everything his daughter has already lost. He tells Achilles that he wishes he'd never come.

Sure enough, Thetis had a plan for Achilles's son after all: to care for it herself. Achilles likely knew about it the whole time, which explains why he hesitated when Lycomedes asked that Deidameia's child bear Achilles's name. This is one final humiliation for Deidameia, who has now lost pretty much everything, including a child she was manipulated into having. Lycomedes's passivity and weakness has caused Deidameia pain and dishonor, since he wasn't around to prevent her marriage to Achilles. Paradoxically, Deidameia would have ended up with more power if her father had taken some of that power away from her early on, because she wouldn't have been vulnerable to Thetis's manipulation.

After boarding Odysseus's ship, Patroclus notices its prow piece, sculpted like a woman. Odysseus says that it's a tribute to his wife, Penelope. Patroclus thinks that theirs must be a marriage built on love, something enormously rare. It almost makes Patroclus like Odysseus, but he still can't trust him. Diomedes scorns the prow piece, and Achilles is amused by the Odysseus and Diomedes rough dynamic. Earlier, Patroclus thought Diomedes was Odysseus's sidekick; now he sees that their sparring is a game between equals, and he remembers that Diomedes is a favorite of Athena's, too. The two men share war stories with Achilles, who seems to have forgotten the trick they played on him. Once again, Patroclus thinks that Achilles is too trusting.

Readers familiar with The Odyssey will know that Odysseys and Penelope do love each other. So far in the novel, there hasn't been another example of a happily-married couple. Patroclus can now see that the dynamic between Odysseus and Diomedes is a game between two highly intelligent men, which makes them extra dangerous—they're both obviously expert manipulators, and they've already made Achilles trust them again. Power, as portrayed in the novel, is not just about physical strength.

The ship docks and they make camp. Odysseus hopes that one tent is enough, since he's heard that Achilles and Patroclus share rooms and beds. He tells them there's no need for shame, as this is common among boys—although they're no longer boys. Patroclus says that it's not true, but Odysseus says it doesn't matter: "truth" is whatever people believe, and they believe that Patroclus and Achilles are sleeping together. If that concerns them, they should leave that behavior behind before the war begins. Achilles angrily tells Odysseus that it's none of his business, and Odysseus apologizes and leaves.

This passage confirms that same-sex relationships between adult men aren't necessarily accepted in Greece, which means that Patroclus could negatively impact Achilles's reputation. Odysseus's motivation for bringing this up is ambiguous. He might be trying to rattle Achilles, he might just be cruel, or he might be giving Achilles and Patroclus a warning. His comment about the relative nature of "truth" demonstrates his crafty worldview and understanding of how to manipulate the world for one's own benefit.

Inside the tent, Achilles and Patroclus are quiet. Thetis had told Patroclus not to disgrace Achilles; this is partly what she was talking about. Patroclus says that maybe Odysseus is right—he could sleep outside. Achilles refuses. The Phthians won't care, and everyone else can spread whatever rumors they want. At the end of the day, he'll still be *Aristos Achaion*, the "best of the Greeks." Patroclus says their relationship could hurt Achilles's honor, but Achilles doesn't care. He's given the Greeks enough, and won't give his relationship up for their benefit.

Achilles chose to go to war and certain death to preserve his honor. But he refuses to hide his relationship with Patroclus to ensure he won't be disgraced. He seems to see the hiding from war as something that is meaningful and related to the gods and fate, while the judgment rendered by other men to be unimportant, more a matter of reputation than actual honor. Unlike Odysseus, Achilles is unwilling to play politics.

The next day, Achilles greets Odysseus coldly, though Odysseus doesn't comment on the change in attitude. When Achilles asks who the players in the war will be, Odysseus explains that Menelaus will be there. He's well-liked, and many kings have come just for him, not bound by an oath. Those kings include people like Ajax and the very old Nestor. On the Trojan side, there's King Priam, who supposedly has fifty sons and daughters and is pious. His sons include the beautiful Paris, beloved by the goddess Aphrodite.

That Odysseus's comment about Achilles's relationship with Patroclus is the thing that makes Achilles stop trusting him—as opposed to the blackmail or trickery on Scyros—demonstrates just how important Patroclus is to Achilles. This passage lays out the major characters who will play a role in the war.

Achilles asks about Hector, and Odysseus says that he's Priam's eldest son, a favorite of Apollo. He then adds that Achilles will meet him first, so he'll then be able to tell Odysseus more about him. Achilles asks why he'll meet Hector first, and Odysseus admits that he's not a skilled soldier, so he'll never fight Hector face-to-face. Achilles, on the other hand, will gain the most glory if he kills him. This proclamation chills Patroclus. Achilles, for his part, coldly responds that even if that's the case, Hector has done nothing to him. Odysseus laughs, and remarks that if every soldier only killed people who had offended them, there would be no wars. In such a world, Odysseus himself might be *Aristos Achaion*.

The fact that killing Hector will bring Achilles the most honor again highlights the tension Achilles faces in this war: between gaining the most glory and facing his own death, since he is doomed to die after Hector does. Meanwhile, Achilles idea of war is noble but simplistic—that the fighting is based on righting wrongs. Odysseus knows better: that war is a means to an end, and that right and wrong, or even what soldiers think, matters little. It also makes clear that Achilles is going to do a lot of violence to a lot of people with whom he has no personal quarrel.

Achilles asks about Agamemnon, and Odysseus says that Agamemnon's grandfather, Tantalus, was Zeus's son. They've heard the story: Tantalus was thrown to a pit in the underworld, plagued by hunger and thirst with food and drink out of reach. When he was alive, Tantalus was greedy and proud; he wanted to prove that he could outsmart the gods. He killed his son and carved up the body, inviting Zeus to a feast. When he arrived, Zeus realized Tantalus's crime and sent him to the underworld. He then brought the son back to life, who became a solid king, though some say their line was forever cursed. Now, however, the family fortune is changing, thanks to Agamemnon's skill in battle and firm leadership.

The moral of the Tantalus story seems to be that humans can't outsmart the gods and that pride is a dangerous fault to have. Both of these lessons are relevant to Achilles and Patroclus, who seem to think that together they can find a way around Achilles's fate. This passage also introduces Agamemnon, who is depicted as a powerful military and political leader, but from a line of kings known for their arrogance.

Achilles is tense at the mention of Agamemnon's leadership, noting that *all* the kings are generals. Odysseus argues that if left to their own devices, the kings would kill each other; someone has to use each general to his best abilities. Achilles says that he'll fight for himself, taking Agamemnon's counsel but not following his orders. Odysseus is amused, and he assures Achilles that Agamemnon will honor him. That's not what Achilles meant, but it's close enough.

Achilles sees himself—and all other kings—as individuals, subject only to themselves. He thinks of the kings as a group of free agents who have willingly joined together as a team of equals to fight. The more worldly Odysseus again makes clear that, in fact, for an army to work there must be politics, and someone must lead in order to ensure that the army functions seamlessly. This is exactly what Chiron was warning Achilles about: men will want to use Achilles, and Achilles should think about what that means. Achilles is acting as though he still has agency, which is both true and false, given his inevitable destiny. His humanity and desire to be his own person just makes that destiny more complicated.

That night in their tent, Patroclus and Achilles talk about the men they've met and will meet; they don't like or trust them. Outside, a storm begins. Achilles traces Patroclus's body. Later, Patroclus can hear the storm and smell Achilles. He thinks that this is what he'll miss most and that he'd rather die than miss a second. He wonders, too, how much longer they have.

Achilles has learned to distrust people—a loss of innocence but an increase in wisdom. Once again, Patroclus notices Achilles's physicality, but this time, he introduces violence to his love for Achilles by saying he'd rather die than miss the time he has left with Achilles. There's no such thing as uncomplicated love anymore, because they're on borrowed time and because Achilles's fate is inevitable and bloody. Patroclus used to ignore Achilles's capacity for violence, but now he seems to recognize that love and violence in this society can't be separated.

CHAPTER 16

They dock in Phthia the next day. The shore is full of onlookers, screaming Achilles's name and "*Aristos Achaion*!" Patroclus thinks that this moment is when their lives will change—he understands the grandness that will always follow Achilles now that he's chosen to be a legend. Peleus greets his son, saying that he'll lead the army to glory and return triumphant. Patroclus knows Achilles *won't* return, but Peleus doesn't. Achilles is stunned but pleased by the crowd's attention. He looks older, Patroclus thinks.

Achilles hasn't even done anything and he's already famous. The prophecies about his fame make him famous; fate is self-fulfilling, once Achilles chose to embrace it. Meanwhile, Peleus sees Achilles fate as purely a good thing. There is a dose of dramatic irony in Peleus lack of knowledge about the full prophecy, which through Peleus's ignorance enhances the understanding that a glorious destiny is not necessarily a happy one.

Patroclus quickly realizes that Achilles is no longer just his. Everyone wants a piece of him. When he speaks to an onlooker, his vividness makes that onlooker heroic. Achilles defers most war matters to Phoinix, who will come to Troy with them, and he often asks Patroclus's opinion. But Patroclus hangs in the back, silent. He sees the crowd's dreams of triumph and knows that triumph is impossible for him and Achilles. He begins to hide in the palace, imagining Achilles's potential deaths: a spear fight, a smashed chariot.

Achilles choice to embrace his fate has, regardless of his intentions, caused him to trade some of Patroclus's love for the love of the Greek people. In many ways, Achilles's relationship with his people is similar to his relationship with Patroclus: when Patroclus was younger, Achilles made him feel vivid and alive, too. But the relationship between Achilles and the public is a twisted one, because they're rooting for him to kill people, and Patroclus wanted the opposite. Patroclus wanted the innocent, beautiful, lyre-playing Achilles. The people want the promised deadly killer.

Patroclus asks Achilles how he's going to tell Peleus about the prophecy. Achilles says that he won't—it would only hurt him to know. He reveals that back in Scyros, he asked Thetis not to tell Peleus, either. He also asked her to protect Patroclus after his death, and he admits, ashamed, that she said no. The fact that he asked comforts Patroclus, who has felt somewhat adrift. He doesn't care that Thetis won't protect him. He doesn't plan to live after Achilles is gone.

Achilles gives his father a measure of happiness by keeping the knowledge of his fate from him. This is an example of the "bliss of ignorance"—a happiness founded on an unknown lack of control. Meanwhile, Patroclus's love for Achilles is ever more tightly connected to death and violence, as his love is so all-encompassing that he has no interest in living once Achilles is dead.

Over the next six weeks, they continue to plan the war's logistics. Peleus gives Achilles many supplies, including a charioteer, Automedon, a boy even younger than Achilles and Patroclus. He also gives Achilles an ash **spear**—it was a gift from Chiron. It would have taken Chiron weeks to sculpt, and Patroclus realizes that Chiron started it the day they left Pelion. Maybe he knew Achilles's destiny. Or maybe he just assumed what would happen, the result of wisdom built up by watching student after student die: all trained in music and medicine, all "unleashed for murder." But the spear is made from love, not bitterness—it's specifically designed for Achilles and couldn't suit anyone else. The point is sharp and deadly, but the wood itself is slippery, like a **lyre**.

Achilles and Patroclus are still teenagers, so the fact that a boy even younger than them is going to war again highlights the ways that Greek honor rewards heroism but undervalues life. The similarity of the spear to a lyre is interesting. Both are instruments: one for playing music, one for committing violence. Yet they both also only amplify what is inherent in Achilles: his innocence and ability to create beauty; his inhuman talent for dealing death. Achilles is always both of these things at once. That Chiron made the spear with love suggests an acceptance of everything Achilles is; an acceptance that Patroclus recognizes.

Finally, the departure day arrives. The Phthians have a fleet of fifty ships, a whole city of wood. Achilles wears his purple cloak, and the crowd cheers about glory and gold. Peleus waves from shore. Achilles didn't tell him about the prophecy, just hugged him. Patroclus hugs Peleus, too, and thinks that this is how Achilles will feel when he's old. Then he remembers that he'll never be old. The ships set sail, bound for Troy.

The size of this war—and the violence that will arise from it—is staggering. Phthia is sending an entire "city" worth of ships to fight. The crowd's excitement indicates that the crowd feels that the honor and glory its warriors—and Achilles—are going to win will reflect back on all of them. Meanwhile, Patroclus is always having to remind himself of Achilles fate—he keeps forgetting and thinking that Achilles might live a normal life. The fact that Achilles embraces his purple cloak and the royal status it represents further marks how he has embraced his destiny and his role.

CHAPTER 17

On the way to Troy, the Phthians first dock in Aulis, a jutting strip of land where the entire Greek army will convene before sailing to Troy together in a show of strength. As the Phthians ships arrive, the Myrmidons—Achilles's soldiers—begin chanting his name, and soldiers from the other Greek armies join them. One man loudly introduces him as *Aristos Achaion*, and suddenly the air changes: Achilles's skin turns gold in the sun, his body suddenly larger. The transformation causes even more pandemonium, but Patroclus realizes that it's Thetis heightening Achilles's fame. Achilles doesn't know what's happening, but the crowd's reaction doesn't seem strange to him.

Thetis laughed at Patroclus when he said he wanted to try to change Achilles's fate, but she's also doing her part to try to influence fate. The difference is that Patroclus wants to stop Achilles fate in order to keep him alive, and at this point Thetis is focused on maximizing Achilles's fame. That Achilles simply accepts the acclaim shows the degree to which he has simply accepted the prophecy..

As they disembark, Agamemnon waits for them on the beach, standing next to Odysseus, Diomedes, and Menelaus. Agamemnon has a harsh and commanding presence; Menelaus's gives a somewhat softer impression than his brother. Nestor, supposedly the oldest man alive, is also there. Agamemnon steps forward and opens his arms, and is clearly expecting Achilles to kneel, but Achilles simply stands. Just as Odysseus is about to step in, Achilles introduces himself, saying that he's come to bring the Greeks victory. The crowd cheers. Warning Achilles with a glance, Odysseus says that he's brought Achilles to pledge his allegiance. Rather than taking Odysseus's lead, though, Achilles says that he's come to offer help. Agamemnon responds that it's a shame that Achilles was so slow to come. After the interaction is over, Phoinix, in a way that suggests he is disapproving of Achilles's behavior, tells him that their camp is ready.

This scene introduces Agamemnon and establishes him as a commanding, charismatic man who expects those in the army he has gathered to offer him obedience. It's also clear from this scene that Agamemnon's expectation of subservience is going to create strain with Achilles, who has no intention of being subservient to anyone. Odysseus and Phoinix seem to think Achilles is being over proud and out of line in refusing to accede to Agamemnon's demands. But, on the one hand, Achilles is here for glory, and on the other may be mindful of Chiron's advice about fighting for others. Also worth noting is the way that Agamemnon responds to what he perceives as Achilles's slights against him by attacking Achilles honor through a sly reference to Achilles's being late because he was hiding as a woman from the war. Honor will be on the line in the fight against the Trojans, but also in Achilles and Agamemnon's struggles for control.

In the camp, one of Menelaus's heralds greets them; Menelaus couldn't come in person. Patroclus and Achilles realize that Menelaus is playing both sides, loyal to his brother but careful not to offend Achilles. They explore the camp. Everywhere they go, people watch Achilles. Patroclus thinks, at first, that it's Thetis's influence again, but no—it's just Achilles. They've all heard that he's Greece's greatest warrior, and now that they've seen him, they believe it.

Menelaus might be an honorable man, but honor and craftiness aren't mutually exclusive. Clearly, the war is going to be a political battlefield as well as a literal one. While Thetis earlier amped up Achilles's fame through a kind of spell or glamour, this scene makes clear that Achilles is impressive in his own right.

CHAPTER 18

That night, Patroclus notices that the air is heavy and quiet—there's no wind. If this continues, he realizes, the Greeks won't be able to set sail for Troy. The next few days are the same; the army is marooned and Agamemnon takes no action. Achilles speaks to Thetis, who says the gods are causing the lack of wind. He tells an annoyed Agamemnon this information, but Agamemnon continues to do nothing for a month even as the weather remains too still. Finally, Agamemnon speaks to the chief priest, a man named Calchas. Calchas says that the army offended Artemis somehow, and they need to make a sacrifice to the goddess in order for the winds to return.

The fact that Artemis can and will control the winds and stop a whole army in its tracks because she is offended makes plain the prodigious power of the gods, and, by extension, fate. Agamemnon's refusal to talk with the priest for a month after getting the information from Achilles implies that Agamemnon, in response to Achilles's refusal to bow down to him, won't show any deference to Achilles either.

Agamemnon asks that his daughter, Iphigenia, be brought to Aulis to help with the ritual—she's a priestess of Artemis. Agamemnon then summons Achilles to offer his daughter's hand in marriage to him, a great honor. Odysseus encourages the match, even knowing that Achilles is already married. Patroclus and Achilles realize that Odysseus wants them to stay silent about that. Patroclus knows that Achilles will say no to the marriage if he wants to, but it's just one night, and it will help his status with Agamemnon. Though he's jealous, Patroclus nods at Achilles, who agrees to the match.

Iphigenia here is presented as a uniquely strong woman, necessary for a ritual to achieve what none of the powerful men in the Greek army can. Yet the sudden honor bestowed by Agamemnon on Achilles after earlier ignoring him as a seemingly hated rival, along with the fact that Odysseus always seems to have an ulterior motive, seem suspicious. This time, Achilles and Patroclus agree to Achilles getting married together—they are both involved in the project of increasing Achilles prestige and power.

A few days later, an excited Iphigenia arrives. The marketplace has been set up for the wedding—Agamemnon, Odysseus, Diomedes, Calchas, and Achilles wait on a dais. Iphigenia is barely fourteen; when she hugs her father, she whispers something that makes him laugh, and his grip tightens. She then smiles at Achilles. He moves forward, and she moves toward him but stumbles… no, she's not falling. Diomedes is dragging her backward toward her father. Agamemnon grabs a knife and slits her throat, holding her down. The goddess has been appeased, he says. The crowd is horrified—human sacrifice is an abomination, and that was his *daughter*. But suddenly, they feel the wind. Patroclus grabs a shell-shocked Achilles and brings him back to their tent. Burying his face in his bloody hands, Achilles says that he had the power to stop them.

Now the true motives are revealed. The wedding to Achilles was a ruse to get Iphigenia to come, and also another way for Agamemnon to show Achilles who is in control. Iphigenia did have power—but it was a purely passive power, a power inherent in being nothing more than an object, of being sacrificed for something her own father wanted more than he wanted her—war and power. Odysseus obviously also knew this plan, and once again manipulated Achilles. Achilles comment that he could have stopped what happened places him in contrast to Agamemnon: he values the life of this girl he did not know more than getting to the war to win his honor and legacy .

Agamemnon calls the entire crowd back, and explains what happened: Artemis was displeased by the upcoming slaughter in Troy and demanded they sacrifice a virgin priestess, preferably his daughter. He says that Iphigenia had agreed to be sacrificed for the benefit of the Greeks. Most of the men watching weren't near enough to see her surprise and panic, and they believe him. Later, Patroclus comforts Achilles in their tent; it's the first human death he's ever seen.

Agamemnon uses lies to maintain control. Yet it is worth noting that even in the lie Agamemnon reveals that Artemis preferred the sacrifice of Iphigenia but would have accepted another virgin priestess. Agamemnon ensured his success in getting to the war by making the choice to kill his own daughter. Achilles, destined to be the greatest soldier, has never before seen human death. Achilles, even as he goes to seek his warrior destiny is an innocent. Achilles is supposed to be the inhuman weapon, but right now he seems more human than every Greek general.

While Achilles is asleep, Patroclus enters Odysseus's tent. Patroclus blames him for Iphigenia's murder, because he could have stopped it. He would have if his wife were the one in danger. Odysseus admits that he wouldn't have agreed to it in that case—but maybe that's why Agamemnon is a strong king. Patroclus is especially angry about the sham "marriage" to Achilles, but Odysseus comments the wedding was the only way Iphigenia's mother would agree to send her.

Odysseus here equates kingly strength with the ability to act cold-bloodedly in pursuit of power, which is a pretty good summation of the Greek honor code. That Odysseus himself would not act as Agamemnon did reveals he doesn't entirely subscribe to Agamemnon's methods, though one might also argue that Odysseus is willing to use Agamemnon to achieve his own goals. Odysseus always seems to be in control. Meanwhile, the ruse to bring Iphigenia to Aulis involved not just tricking Achille's and Agamemnon's daughter, but also his wife. (It's worth noting that Agamemnon's actions in the broader world of Greek myth have consequences, as described in Aeschylus's play Agamemnon.)

Patroclus says they dishonored Achilles, tainted him. But Odysseus dismisses this, saying that everyone has forgotten that Achilles was part of it. Achilles has a "tender heart," Odysseus says—and instructs Patroclus to tell Achilles that they placed Diomedes on purpose so that Achilles would witness the sacrifice too late. He gives Patroclus some advice: tell Achilles to toughen up. He's a weapon, and though "you can use a spear as a walking stick," it's still innately deadly. He doesn't say this to be cruel. Patroclus tells him he's wrong and runs away.

Odysseus here makes clear that Achilles couldn't have stopped the sacrifice—they had planned it out to thwart him. This both makes Achilles innocent, but shows how these other kings, with their plans, are in control despite Achilles skill at battle. Odysseus then also advises that Achilles should embrace what he is—a weapon. But again, this characterization still places Achilles in the role of being a tool in the hands of others. Patroclus, of course, wants Achilles to be neither of those things.

CHAPTER 19

The army sets sail for Troy the next day. Patroclus tells Achilles about Diomedes being deliberately placed so that Achilles couldn't intervene, but it doesn't help. Achilles is listless. When they're two days away from Troy, he asks Patroclus what it was like when he killed Clysonymus. Patroclus finds it hard to describe, but says he remembers the blood. Peleus told Achilles to think of his enemies as animals, but Achilles doesn't think he can kill at all. Patroclus wants to say *Good*, but he doesn't, thinking of Achilles's future immortality.

This scene is a reminder that Patroclus has an experience that the destined battle hero Achilles does not. It also shows that Achilles himself, in his heart, is still struggling with his destiny. That Patroclus finds himself unable to support Achilles in his doubt about killing shows the way that love in the novel intersects with violence. Patroclus wants Achilles—for Achilles own sake— to achieve his destiny because he knows that what makes Achilles actually be Achilles is his sense of greatness. But that greatness in Greek culture is bound to battle prowess, which means Patroclus can't stop Achilles from becoming a killer, even though he desperately wishes Achilles would not become a killer. Like Achilles, Patroclus believes that he understands the prophecy and assumes that Achilles will be happy once he has fame and glory and maybe even godhood.

Achilles can't stop picturing Iphigenia's death, but Patroclus says that not all his victims will be innocent. Achilles points out that Patroclus himself won't fight, since he hates it. He asks if Patroclus will forgive him for his future deeds, and Patroclus, rashly, says that forgiveness isn't necessary. Suddenly, Achilles's hand strikes down to kill a deadly water-snake, which Patroclus hadn't even seen. He didn't have to; Achilles did. Achilles's sadness lifts after that, but he starts carrying his **spear** everywhere, practicing.

Patroclus here is spouting platitudes that his own behavior makes clear are platitudes to help Achilles get back being a willing soldier—a thing Patroclus wishes Achilles wouldn't be. Love, honor, fate, and responsibility are all tied up here in a complicated knot. Meanwhile, Achilles doesn't start to feel better until he kills the snake and in doing so protects Patroclus. It's also worth noting that anyone familiar with the story of the Trojan war that the comment about Patroclus not fighting is in fact a bit of foreshadowing, and that foreshadowing is tied to fate and its inherent tricks and tragedies.

When the Greeks reach Troy, they see soldiers waiting for them, an unexpected development. One is large and princely; he must be Hector. As the Greek ships sail into range of Trojan arrows, and the Greek men begin to panic. One Trojan draws his bow, but Achilles throws his spear and hits him; no one else could possibly have made such a throw. The war's "first blood" belongs to the Greeks. Achilles is calm; when one of the Myrmidons, Automedon, brings Achilles more spears on Phoinix's orders, he throws unceasingly. Eventually, he has Patroclus stand behind him. The soldiers grow wild; one Greek king, drunk on glory, begins to swim to shore, but Hector strikes him down—he's the first Greek to die. The Trojans retreat, but they've made their point: they won't die easily.

Agamemnon and his lieutenants had sold the idea that this would be an easy war, leading to easy riches. Now it's clear that wasn't true, but the soldiers who joined the fight can't go back. The soldiers are just "spears" to be used by the kings. The war "statistics" being kept—first blood, first Greek to die—meanwhile, reduces the dealing of death to a game, and this juxtaposition allows the novel to critique the idea that there is honor to be won in war. Achilles does stand apart as something special; yet his death-dealing is inhuman, cold, relentless—and it's clear that despite his worries he has no problem killing.

CHAPTER 20

When they land the ships, Odysseus tells Achilles that the Phthian camp is at the furthest end of the beach, far from the other kings. Patroclus knows that Odysseus assigned the spots himself. It's the best camp by far, shady and quiet. After setting up, they return to the central camp and run into Achilles's cousin, the enormous Ajax, who behaves stiffly toward them. Patroclus knows that if Achilles weren't *Aristos Achaion*, Ajax would have that title. Patroclus gazes at the Trojan walls, which were built by Apollo himself. No one could ever climb them, he thinks.

Odysseus always has ulterior motives for his actions. It's possible to see his choice to give Achilles this particular camp in multiple ways: 1) he's trying to help Achilles by giving him the best camp; 2) he gives Achilles an out of the way camp to help hide Achilles and Patroclus's relationship; 3) he's doing these things to help Achilles to gain Achilles trust; 4) he's trying to separate Achilles and Agamemnon to keep the peace; 5) he's trying to keep Achilles outside the center of the camp to keep him isolated. It's also possible Odysseus is trying to do all of these things. Regardless, Odysseus is always in control. Ajax's response to Achilles shows that for the Greeks honor is a competition; one person having it means another doesn't.

That night, Agamemnon calls the first war council meeting for the Greeks. All the kings sit by rank, Achilles in front. The kings debate whether or not they should be diplomatic and send a parley to the Trojan king, Priam. Menelaus supports this, Diomedes is against it, and Odysseus sees both sides: diplomacy makes them seem like heroes, not villains, but raids are also a good way to start a war, and more profitable. Agamemnon agrees: they'll raid first. Raids are typical warfare; you attack the lands around a city, kill resistant civilians, capture the rest. Those who escape rush to the palace, which grows crowded, so the gates eventually have to open.

Honor and rank is always present in war, even at the meetings. Meanwhile, as the kings sit based on their rank or honor, they debate and choose tactics that target innocent civilians. This war was started with the idea of defending Greek honor to bring back the "stolen" Greek woman, Helen. But the Greek's focus is not on diplomacy, but maximizing wealth no matter the destruction.

Patroclus hopes that Achilles will object and say that killing farmers isn't honorable, but he just nods. Agamemnon then establishes the formation for the raids: he and Menelaus will be in the center, Achilles on the left, Odysseus on the right, and Diomedes and Ajax on the wings. These are prestigious positions. Some men are angry that Agamemnon has claimed the center spot for himself, but Odysseus says it was wise, as it allows Agamemnon to receive messages from all sides. Achilles says to Patroclus that he's pleased with his prime placement. Patroclus asks if Achilles thought of the men he killed on the shore as animals, but Achilles didn't; he didn't even think. He's not afraid: this is what he was born for.

Patroclus promised earlier to forgive Achilles for his kills, but he seems to be having a difficult time already; he wants Achilles to fight honorably, but as these battle plans indicate there doesn't seem to be any such thing. Meanwhile, Achilles seems to have accepted his destiny as a killer, and in accepting that destiny he's found an answer to his earlier dilemma about killing: he can just stop thinking, stop being himself. In accepting his destiny, he gives up himself. Meanwhile, as always with Odysseus, it's not totally clear what game he s is playing by helping Agamemnon save face, but he's probably not blindly loyal and instead is expecting to get something out of it.

The next morning, Achilles and Patroclus eat silently. Patroclus won't go with him on the raid; it's a king's raid, meant to grant honor, and it will be Achilles's "first real kill." Patroclus has little to say; theirs is a world of war, and you either kill and win or kill and die. Even Chiron, Patroclus reflects, gave Achilles a **spear**. As Achilles greets his men, he seems so heroic that Patroclus almost forgets that Achilles was once a child. Patroclus helps Achilles put on his armor, but he wishes he could help him escape from it instead. When he puts on Achilles's helmet, he can't see Achilles's face.

As Patroclus is forced to reckon with the reality of Achilles imminently killing people—perhaps innocent people—in close combat, he expresses frustration with the structure of their society, which considers killing honorable. At the same time, he believes that there is no escaping that structure, as he considers the fact that even Chiron ended up giving a gift of war. That he can no longer see Achilles face when Achilles is in his armor reflects the way that the warrior version of Achilles isn't the one that Patroclus knows and loves.

Patroclus returns to sleep during the raid. When Achilles wakes Patroclus up afterwards, Patroclus is revolted; Achilles is covered in blood. Patroclus worries that Achilles has been hurt, but it's not Achilles's blood—no one could get close enough. It was easy, he says. He killed twelve men, all of whom had nothing to do with Helen or Paris. Achilles assures Patroclus that they were armed and that he wouldn't kill someone who was unarmed.

This is the first time Patroclus has really had to face who Achilles is in battle. Achilles isn't someone who can be hurt by others; his gifts seem to make battle against him almost unfair. Note how Achilles attempts to maintain his personal sense of honor here by drawing distinctions: the men he killed had nothing to do with the reasons for waging the war, but were armed, so it's ok. It's worth watching whether Achilles promise that he won't kill an unarmed person will hold up.

Sharply, Patroclus asks how many people Achilles will kill tomorrow, but he immediately feels ashamed. He promised to forgive Achilles—he knows his destiny—so he apologizes and asks Achilles to continue describing the raid. Achilles tells Patroclus how his **spear** pierced someone's cheek. Patroclus imagines that these words are a story rather than relating facts. Each day the raids continue, and Achilles tells Patroclus every detail. Patroclus listens, hoping that if he digests the images, he can free Achilles and make him himself again.

Patroclus is using the same coping mechanism he used when he took the oath and had sex with Deidameia: he pretends the things Achilles tells him are fiction. In doing this, he's distinguishing between the Achilles who kills and the Achilles he loves, pretending that the killer is a character in a story and the Achilles he knows is the real one. That's both true and untrue. Achilles is *literally a character in this novel, but murder is still a part of how Madeline Miller presents him. This implies that Patroclus shouldn't bother to distinguish between the two different versions of Achilles and should instead accept Achilles as he is. After all, Achilles's complications are how he'll be remembered later—literally, because readers see the full picture of who Achilles is in this novel.*

CHAPTER 21

After each of the raids, men claim war spoils. It's custom for each man to keep what he won, and the rest is piled on the dais then divided among the men based on their position. First pick goes to the best soldier. Agamemnon positions himself as number one and Achilles as number two, which doesn't bother Achilles—he believes that it only makes Agamemnon seem greedy. In the third week, a beautiful girl stands among the objects on the dais, cheek bruised, hands tied. The men know that this means Agamemnon is now allowing bed-slaves; until now, women were just raped in the field. Agamemnon watches the girl, grinning. Without thinking, Patroclus asks Achilles to claim her instead, which he does. It's a reasonable request, and Agamemnon has to grant it—he'll have his pick of other girls.

Once again, the game like rules of warfare—in this instance, ranked picks for war spoils—just make the violence that happens seem worse. The men earn honor by dealing death, then, cash in that honor like casino chips to claim their winnings, whether gold or sexual slaves. Honor as practiced by most in this society has no connection to moral worth—it is more like a currency founded on the ability to deal violence. As the book has made clear, this society treats women as just one more object to be owned. That Patroclus is the one who pushes Achilles to claim the girl indicates that he is, instinctively, trying to protect this girl—though of course he can only do so by working within the society's rules and Achilles right to claim her. There will obviously be other women on the dais, and Patroclus won't be able to save them all.

Back in the Phthian camp, Achilles draws his knife, frightening the girl—he's still covered in blood. They're trying to free her, but she won't let them near her, and as a farm-girl, she can't speak Greek. Patroclus sees that she's afraid of rape, so he kisses Achilles to appease her. Afterwards, he dresses her wounds and takes her to her tent. The next day, he sees her watching him from behind the flap and asks if she slept well; he thinks that maybe just talking will comfort her, even though she doesn't understand. He introduces himself as Patroclus, but soon he sees that he's frightening her and he goes to leave. Before he does, she points to herself, saying her name: Briseis. It's the start of something.

It's worth noting that Achilles is bloody because he was part of the raids that ended in Briseis's capture. He may be trying to free her now, but he's participating in the culture and system that put her in this position, all to increase his own "honor." The relationship between Patroclus and Achilles deviates from that system, though, which is why Patroclus thinks it might help win the girl's trust. Also it is meaningful that Patroclus is not a part of the raids, and that too might influence Briseis's view of him.

Patroclus discovers that Briseis does know some Greek: *Mercy, please, what do you want*, all phrases her father taught her after he heard about the raids. During the day, she and Patroclus begin to spend time together in the empty camp, watching the sea. This almost reminds Patroclus of watching the sea with his mother, but Briseis's eyes are intelligent, and his mother's weren't. They pantomime to communicate; she's funny and sometimes even smiles.

The phrases that Briseis's father taught her—and the fact that the taught them to her after hearing of the raids—reflect the brutal reality of this world for the Trojan women—the best they can hope for is "mercy" from the Greek army. On the surface, Patroclus's recognition of Briseis as more intelligent than his mother is a compliment of sorts to Briseis, but it also demonstrates that Patroclus doesn't fully understand how universally bad things are for women in Greece and now Troy. Briseis might be smarter than his mother and she might be "free" when she's with Achilles and Patroclus, but she and Patroclus's mother are both in subordinate, trapped positions, dependent on the men around them.

The raids continue without any information emerging from the city, and every day there are a few more bruised girls on the dais. The girls are put to work in the camps, serving and polishing. At night, their cries are audible. Patroclus has Achilles claim as many of the girls as possible, and Diomedes jokes that he didn't even know Achilles liked girls. Each girl goes to Briseis first, and then Phoinix and Patroclus help teach them. Achilles stays away; he was part of the raids, and he knows they wouldn't forgive him. Briseis ends up teaching the girls some Greek, which she learned quickly. It's almost easy to forget the war hasn't begun yet.

Patroclus and Achilles have set up a shadow system to protect as many of the girls as they can. But in many ways, it feels like another small compromise that Patroclus is making. He can't get angry at Achilles for being part of the raids, and he can't change the structure of the war, so he's helping a handful of women instead. That's not nothing, but it also isn't a change to the larger structure, and it turns a blind eye to Achilles's role in the conflict, which the women themselves don't have the luxury to forget. This is just a prelude to the war, but people are already suffering. Diomedes joke, meanwhile, seems to suggest a willingness among the other powers in the camp to allow Patroclus and Achilles efforts to protect the girls to continue—but such willingness can always be revoked.

CHAPTER 22

One day, Priam sends out a message from Troy: he will admit an embassy (a group of Greek generals who will negotiate for Helen's freedom). The restless Greek soldiers are pleased—*something* will finally happen. Menelaus and Odysseus go to the Trojan palace, and Achilles and Patroclus speculate about the result. Achilles wonders aloud why Helen chose Menelaus, and Patroclus doesn't know; he *did* bring a generous gift, and his brother was married to her sister.

The raids were just a way to force an audience with Priam. The violent raids were supposedly aimed at protecting the honor of Helen, and has been waged against women having nothing to do with her. Meanwhile, the Greeks never initially asked for an audience, as Menelaus wanted, but instead forced Priam's hand through violence—violence was their first and preferred option. Achilles's question is timely, and raises the question of whether made her choice for personality, connection, power, or some other reason.

Achilles also wonders whether Helen voluntarily left with Paris. He thinks that she must have, since her palace was a fortress. She also must have known that Menelaus would be honor-bound to follow. Maybe she wanted to start a war for the fame. Maybe she loves Paris. Maybe she was bored. Maybe Aphrodite forced her. Patroclus thinks that Agamemnon will attack no matter the result of the embassy, and Achilles agrees. He notes that hardly anyone mentions Helen anymore, except in big speeches.

Helen may be a justification for the whole war, but this scene proves that she's actually pretty insignificant. Agamemnon wanted to invade Troy regardless. Menelaus's love for Helen was a reason to go to war, but it's not why the war is happening. Achilles speculation make clear that Helen may have had agency in choosing to leave with Paris, but in the end she has become just another tool for tool for Agamemnon to use.

Odysseus and Menelaus return at night, reporting that they were warmly received by Priam, Paris, and Hector. Priam said that Helen didn't want to leave and that they'd defend her; Diomedes thinks this is a clever way for the Trojans to avoid their guilt. Agamemnon announces that this means war, and everyone will fight for honor. Patroclus realizes, suddenly, that as Achilles's closest companion, he'll have to fight, too. The Fates haven't said anything about how long *he'll* last. Achilles promises he'll be with him.

This seems like a cleverly crafted moment of propaganda. Diomedes argues that the Trojan arguments that Helen wants to be there are just ploys to avoid admitting guilt, and Agamemnon uses that argument to cast the Greek war as one of honor (rather than one of pure politics or desire for spoils). Meanwhile, Patroclus has tried to keep himself out of the war but now realizes he and his morals don't matter: he will be forced to fight. Achilles's murderous skill, which so upset Patroclus, now is suddenly a good thing again as Achilles will use it—out of love—to protect Patroclus.

At dawn, Achilles helps Patroclus dress in armor, promising that he'll get used to the weight. Patroclus feels stupid, like he's wearing an "older brother's clothing." On the field, he joins Achilles in his place of primacy, and Achilles tells him to remain behind him. A trumpet blows. The soldiers start in an ordered rank, but these ranks break as they run, eager to kill real Trojans. During the battle, Patroclus can't see Achilles, or really anything. He kneels beside a dead Spartan to pray, but the man screams, still alive. His wound is deep and he's relieved to die. Patroclus closes his eyelids.

Patroclus's comment about the armor highlights how out of place he is in war, and how war places him in a subservient position to his partner. Patroclus's moment with the dying Spartan is instructive: he tries to honor the Spartan's death but is instead forced to watch the man die horribly. Patroclus was trying to add structure and meaning to battle, but finds that warfare is too gruesome for that. War leads to men feeling so much pain that they want *to die.*

Achilles pops up, blood-spattered and grinning. He's the only thing that Patroclus can look at without feeling dizzy. Patroclus doesn't kill anyone all day. Bizarrely, he's always in a region of empty space. He realizes later that this isn't a coincidence; Achilles can sense when someone will target Patroclus and he kills them first. Patroclus watches Achilles; he's "a marvel" in battle. Patroclus can't notice the horror anymore—he sees only how beautiful Achilles is when he fights.

Achilles no longer notices the gruesomeness of war. In fact, he seems to enjoy warfare. But once again, Achilles uses his unnatural skill to protect Patroclus, proving that he's not a human weapon at all. His love and his murderous skill are intertwined in this scene, which makes things morally complicated for Patroclus. And Achille's violence, further, is so skillful as to be beautiful; he is *born to kill, even if that's not all he does or wants to do. This used to horrify Patroclus, but in the midst of battle he now accepts its truth.*

A month passes, then two. It's a strange war—no one gains land or takes prisoners, and instead it's a battle for honor. The armies begin to adopt a schedule, fighting just seven days in every ten, taking time off for special occasions—no raids. The troops are well-matched, and soldiers from nearby regions continue to pour in to aid the Trojans, eager for glory.

The structure of warfare is now even stricter: there's a schedule and regulations. Again, this only highlights the strange brutality of war; killing becomes like just a job, with weekends and holidays and honor to be gained like salaries. Everything is honorable because there are rules, but these rules only emphasize how unnatural the war is—killing people on specific days doesn't change the fact that you're killing them.

Achilles thrives in battle, especially in the moments when every man comes at him at once. Then, he's finally able to prove what he can do. Patroclus hardly goes with him to battle anymore, since he's not a prince who needs honor or a soldier who's obligated. Sometimes Achilles asks him to come, just to watch. When Patroclus does, he notices a space near Achilles where no one goes; if he looks at it long enough, Thetis appears. She doesn't help Achilles, but just stands and watches like Patroclus does. He can't parse her expression. Maybe it's grief, maybe pleasure, maybe nothing.

Achilles has fully embraced his destiny. He used to hide his fighting ability. Now he likes to show what he can do. Patroclus and Chiron spent a lot of time accepting Achilles's fate and helping to prepare him for it, but that Achilles enjoys it complicates matters—Achilles is capable of empathy and kindness, but he's ignoring the awfulness of war simply because he was born to be so good at it.. Chiron was trying to get him to consider his actions when he asked whether Achilles would fight in someone's army, but now Achilles seems happy to fight in anyone's army—he just wants to fight. Thetis's appearance indicates her mixed feelings. On the one hand, this is what he has to do in order to become a god, and she definitely has no particular attachment to the humans he kills—or humans in general. On the other hand, the more people Achilles kills, the closer he is to death.

Patroclus learns the Greeks' fighting styles. Agamemnon hides behind his army and shouts orders, Diomedes fights like an animal, and Odysseus fakes out his opponents and kills at close range. Patroclus notices the Trojans, too: the beautiful Paris casually tosses spears from his chariot, vain in a red cloak. Hector is always alone, practiced and careful. When the armies withdraw, he washes his hands so he can pray without being tainted by blood. He's pious, and he fights for family instead of fame. Achilles and Patroclus never go near him; Agamemnon often asks Achilles why, and Achilles replies, "What has Hector ever done to me?"

The Greek kings' fighting styles seem to reflect their personalities. Agamemnon selfishly values his own life over the lives of others and wants to enjoy his power after the war. Diomedes is brash, and Odysseus is cleverer than everyone else and unconcerned with the morality of what he's doing. Paris appears to live up to his reputation as a beautiful man, but Hector is a surprise. He seems genuinely honorable and appears to have the right priorities, even if he kills just as much as anyone else. In many ways, he's much more honorable than Achilles, who is fighting to gain personal glory. Hector is fighting to save his city and family, which the Greeks are threatening. Achilles's canned line about Hector once again feels like tempting fate.

CHAPTER 23

One day, Achilles goes to see Thetis. Patroclus had thought—he now realizes stupidly—that Thetis wouldn't want to see Achilles due to her grief, but if anything, their visits have become longer. While Achilles is gone, Patroclus waits with Briseis, who is curious about what Achilles is doing. In response, Patroclus reveals that Achilles's mother is a goddess. Briseis says she figured that, because Achilles doesn't "move like a human," while Patroclus does.

Patroclus consistently underestimates how much Thetis cares about her son, even though she constantly shows that she cares about basically nothing else. Of course she wants to see him just as much as Patroclus does; they both love him. Briseis's comment suggests that Achilles doesn't seem human to other people, but as the novel has demonstrated, Achilles is both human and divine. That he doesn't seem to be makes his situation more complicated..

When Achilles returns, Briseis departs. Achilles tells Patroclus that Thetis is worried, because the gods are taking sides in the war. She's especially anxious about the prophecy: the gods promised Achilles fame, but they didn't say how much. Because of that, Thetis worries that someone will kill Hector before Achilles, though soldiers like Ajax have already tried. Achilles knows that he can't kill Hector, but sometimes he pictures it, dreamlike: throwing the spear, walking up to the body. In the dream, he knows he'll die soon and, strangely, he feels relieved. But it's just a dream.

Achilles control over the events of the war—and the fame he will win during it—has already been challenged by the politics and ambitions of his fellow Greeks. Now the gods are also getting involved, creating further obstacles to his control. Thetis concern about who kills Hector seems to have two sources: first, Hector's death will be followed by Achilles; second, if that is the case, then from Thetis's view it would be best if Achilles is the one to kill him and get that glory. Achilles dream about killing Hector is another instance of foreshadowing. This clearly isn't a normal dream, and Achilles's decision to treat it like it's just a dream mirrors Patroclus's constant coping mechanism, which has never served him well.

Anxious about Thetis's news, Patroclus looks for a distraction. One of the soldiers directs him to the medical tent and, remembering Chiron, he goes. The physician, Machaon, recognizes Patroclus as Chiron's former student and lets him help. Suddenly, a wounded man enters; he's been shot in the shoulder with an arrow. Patroclus knows he'll have to break the arrow and then pull out the arrow without hurting the man further. He braces the man's shoulder and saws the arrow, snapping off the feathered end. Then he uses a salve to draw the other part of the shaft out. It's a risky maneuver, but the shoulder heals with minimal pain. The next time someone gets shot, Machaon calls Patroclus over first.

While Achilles is killing in battle, Patroclus is healing them. Chiron is apparently widely-known for his healing prowess (which again begs the question of why he's the one to train soldiers like Achilles, since learning to heal only complicates their destinies). Chiron also ends up being right about surgery: you sometimes have to harm people or risk harming them, but the goal is still to save them. The novel juxtaposes this sort of violence—committed with the intent to do more good than harm—against the rest of the violence of the war, which involves no such honorable intent.

Two years pass in this limbo of the war. All the while, Patroclus knows that Achilles will die, but it's impossible to be afraid at every moment. The Phthian camp becomes a family. As they eat dinner together, Briseis tells stories about her gods, who are half-man, half-animal. Later, Achilles puts some of those stories to music on his lyre. Patroclus feels that finally Achilles has really seen Briseis.

Just as people can still find love and joy in all sorts of dire circumstances, Patroclus learns to live with Achilles's destiny. There is a kind of control in this, a way to live one's life within the smaller moments between the "big" events of destiny. Patroclus's concern for Briseis—that he cares at all about whether Achilles "sees" her—attest to his unique care for women's place in this society.

One day, Achilles asks Briseis what she knows about Hector. She says that she knows more about his beloved wife, whose family lives in a coastal kingdom, Cilicia. After Briseis leaves, Achilles tells Patroclus that they raided Cilicia, and that he now realizes that he killed Hector's wife's family. Patroclus knows that Achilles kills daily, but he's suddenly overwhelmed. He can feel that there will be a storm tonight, and he compares Achilles to a flood. Breaking the silence, Achilles says he left the youngest son alive. Most soldiers wouldn't—killing an entire family is a glorious thing. Leave one alive, and the line is preserved in memory. Achilles realizes that he always says Hector hasn't done anything to him, but the reverse isn't true anymore.

Patroclus's comparison of Achilles to a flood is significant. A flood is an impersonal force, something that by its nature cannot be stopped, and which cannot stop itself. The metaphor makes Achilles into something super-powerful and inhuman, but at the same time absolves Achilles of moral responsibility for his actions. Patroclus always does seem to find a way to look past or explain away Achilles killing. Achilles, meanwhile, paints himself as more moral, because he allowed a single member of the family to live. That murdering an entire family is connected to glory only further tarnishes the Greek idea of glory. And in seeking this glory Achilles has perhaps brought his fate closer to pass, by doing something to provoke Hector that he had not intended.

CHAPTER 24

More years pass. A Greek soldier starts to complain about how long the war has gone on with nothing gained, including Helen. His anger is contagious, and is amplified by the men's discomfort, as it's been a wet season with many infections and biting flies. Agamemnon has some of the malcontents whipped, but this only produces more unrest. One day, hundreds of Greeks refuse to fight at all—Agamemnon accidentally bludgeons one, and the others pull knives on him. He's unguarded and begins to realize his grave error.

The soldiers were sold a story about the war against Troy. That it would be easy, would make them rich, and would defend the honor of Helen. But now they have been there for years and have nothing to show for it. For his part, Agamemnon misunderstands his level of control. He thinks that as the leader he can do to the men as he wishes, but he discovers that if he tries to exploit and abuse his soldiers too much, they will turn on him. He has ruled through manipulation and fear, but he discovers in this moment that those have limits.

Just before they attack, Achilles stands up on the dais. He acknowledges the legitimacy of the soldiers' anger—something generals don't do—and asks them to speak. The soldier's say that they're upset at how long it's been, and Patroclus can't blame them: he reflects that these four years have been a gift to him, stolen time before Achilles's destiny comes to pass, but to these men it has been lost time from their homes and lives. As Agamemnon looks on, angry, Achilles assures the men that *Aristos Achaion* doesn't fight unwinnable wars. He says that if the men want to leave, they can, but Achilles will take possession of the treasure they would have otherwise won in Troy. The men are rejuvenated. Agamemnon just watches Achilles.

Achilles saves Agamemnon's life, but Agamemnon is clearly not grateful. In saving Agamemnon's life, Achilles also reduces his stature, and shifts the soldier's focus and admiration from Agamemnon to him. It's also worth noting that Achilles relates to the soldiers not as a king but as a fellow—if better— soldier. He does not command them, but rather projects confidence and conjures images of the wealth still to be won. All Achilles had to do to gain the soldiers' trust was listen to them, which suggests just how badly they've been treated by Agamemnon.

Afterwards, Odysseus establishes a project to keep the men busy: building a fence around the camp. Diomedes stresses the urgency of this task: if the Trojans were to burn the Greeks' ships, no one could leave. The fence will prevent anything like that from happening. Meanwhile, Odysseus finds the first mutineer and has him beaten. The discontent ends, and the men begin to think of Troy as home, building infrastructure and uniting as one single army. Once the war is over, the Greek armies won't fight among themselves for a generation.

It is not clear to what extent Achilles was manipulating the soldiers or was instead truly confident in himself and his destiny. But Odysseus and Diomedes then take over and are in full manipulation mode. The fence takes up the soldier's time, while its purpose reminds the soldiers of their eventual return home. Odysseus and Diomedes are not overly concerned about the soldier's individual well-being—they beat the original malcontent, after all—but they are adept at turning the men into a single army. Odysseus, once again, is always in control and the fact that this war unites the Greeks for a generation hints at his larger goals for this war.

Even Patroclus begins to know the other men and the other kings as he works in the medical tent, delivering children and healing wounds. He becomes known for causing minimal pain. He knows more of the men's names than Achilles; Achilles finds it easier if they just remember his. The female captives in the Phthian camp begin to take husbands. Only Briseis remains single, though not for want of attention.

Patroclus continues to act as the anti-Achilles, healing wounds while Achilles causes them. At the same time, Achilles has become increasingly remote—increasingly less human—in his interactions with other people. Achilles, it seems, is surrounded always by his fame, which comes between him and others. While it's nice that the women in the Phthian camp take husbands, it's hard to forget that they were captives. None of their choices are totally their own.

One morning, Achilles and Patroclus are lazily making love when suddenly Thetis appears. Patroclus hasn't seen her since Scyros—she looks exactly the same. She tells them that Apollo is upset, and wants to punish the Greeks, and so they need to make a sacrifice to him. Achilles agrees to perform the sacrifice, but Thetis reveals that she has more to tell them. She has learned of a new prophecy: that the "best of the Myrmidons" will die within two years, but Achilles will not be the one to die. She's afraid that they are being tricked by the Fates.

In this passage, Thetis literally interrupts the love between Achilles and Patroclus. Thetis's panic has to do with her sense of a loss of control. On the one hand, there are other, more powerful gods who can sway the direction of the war. And the Greeks seek to get the gods favor through pious religious actions, such as sacrifice. But more important is her lack of knowledge, the way that fate offers a glimpse of the future that only becomes clear once it has already happened (just as foreshadowing often works in a novel).

When Thetis leaves, Achilles and Patroclus try to puzzle out the prophecy. They think of which of the Myrmidons it might relate to: perhaps Automedon, or maybe to Peleus. At least it's not Achilles. That day, they sacrifice to Apollo. Patroclus prays to him, and he prays also for the "best of the Myrmidons."

Patroclus and Achilles continue to treat fate as a kind of puzzle that they can figure out and then evade. But fate isn't a puzzle, and can't be evaded. Fate is an outcome, and any effort to evade it ends up playing into that outcome. Also worth noting that as they try to think of who the "best" Myrmidon might be, they focus on the most powerful warriors, which is another indication of the Greek value system.

Patroclus begins to teach Briseis medicine, and in return she teaches him about local herbs. One day when they are together, he imagines her as a young girl, wishing he'd known her then. He thinks about how they could have skipped stones together with Patroclus's mother, and he can practically remember it happening. As he is thinking these things, she kisses him. Then she apologizes—she says that she knows that Patroclus loves Achilles, but she also knows that some men have both wives and lovers. Patroclus says that he doesn't want a wife, but if he did, it would be Briseis. She asks if he wants children. Not understanding her, he says he wouldn't be a good parent. When she says that *she* might want them, he realizes what she was trying to say.

Patroclus equates Briseis with innocence and love, with a time before violence in his life, when stones were something he skipped and not what Clysonymus hit his head on when he fell after Patroclus pushed him. His love for Achilles has always been tied up with Achilles's violent destiny, but his imagined love with Briseis would have been different. Yet while Patroclus imagines *a kind of family with his mother and Briseis, Briseis offers him a chance at a* real *family, one that could include her and Achilles and a child.*

That night, Patroclus keeps thinking about the child he'd have with Briseis, but he feels an emptiness in the thought: where is Achilles in this vision? And yet Briseis had offered a life with her *and* with Achilles. When Patroclus asks Achilles if he thinks about kids, Achilles reminds him that he has a child. He says that the boy's name is Neoptolemus, or "New War," and is nicknamed Pyrrhus. Achilles doesn't wish he could be with him; it's better that Thetis has him.

Patroclus is imagining a future of family and love, centered around a child. But Achilles is in a very different place: not simply because he already has a child, but because he doesn't share the vision. Achilles's doesn't wish to be with the child—to experience or give that kind of paternal love. Further, as indicated by the child's name, Achilles has already initiated his child into the Greek legacy of war and violence. While the characters in the novel don't get the reference, the child's nickname refers to a military victory that is so costly it might as well be a loss (a "pyrrhic victory"), which offers a further commentary from the novel on the war-mongering of the Greeks and of Achilles.

Patroclus waits for Achilles to return the question and as if Patroclus wants kids. When Achilles doesn't, he asks Achilles if he likes Briseis. Achilles is confused. Does Briseis want a child with Achilles? Patroclus says no, and Achilles takes a moment, but he figures out that she wants one with Patroclus. Achilles asks, tensely, if she's pregnant, then if Patroclus wants her to be. Achilles has s never been jealous before; he doesn't know what to do with the emotion. Feeling that he's been cruel to Achilles, Patroclus says no—and though Achilles carefully says it would be okay if Patroclus did want a child with her, he's clearly relieved.

The fact that Achilles doesn't ask if Patroclus wants children implies that Achilles takes Patroclus's love for granted. He assumes that Patroclus will constantly prioritize him. So far, Achilles has been right. Earlier in the novel Achilles commented that no one had ever taken anything from him; Briseis's offer to Patroclus, though made without any ill intent toward Achilles, now threatens Achilles sense of his own primacy for the first time.

CHAPTER 25

One day, after Greek raids, a priest's daughter ends up on the dais to be claimed. Achilles is about to claim her, but Agamemnon does first, to the displeasure of the priest Calchas. Less than a month later, the girl's father—a high priest of Apollo—comes to ransom her with an enormous amount of treasure. He should, technically, be kneeling, but instead he stands tall and claims that his daughter was taken "unlawfully" from their temple. Diomedes and Odysseus nod at his speech, and Menelaus is about to say something, but suddenly Agamemnon harshly declares that there won't be any ransom. He's angry that the priest isn't begging. The priest leaves—later, people say he was crying.

Diomedes, Odysseus, and Menelaus are willing to ransom the girl back to her father—perhaps because it seems like the pious thing to do given the priest's claim of his daughter being taken unlawfully, and also likely because if they can both be pious and get some treasure that would be even better. But Agamemnon values deference to him more than he values making the moral or pious choice. Agamemnon's ancestor once tried to punish the gods. What Agamemnon does here is less extreme, but still involves him arrogantly putting himself before the rules of the gods.

That night, the plague begins. All the Greek army's mules and dogs die. Machaon, Achilles, and Patroclus burn the bodies. The next morning, men begin to drop, too. Eventually, Patroclus and Achilles give up building individual funeral pyres for each fallen man, and instead burn heaps of bodies. Most of the other kings, except for Agamemnon, begin to help with the burning. No kings die at all, and neither do any women. On the ninth night, Achilles asks his mother about the plague. She confirms that it's the work of the gods, spurred by the priest whom Agamemnon spurned.

Crossing the gods—and their priests—has consequences. Agamemnon's arrogance and impious need for total control and obedience has led to this plague against the Greeks. That the plague doesn't target women implies the way that women are perceived as not being a part of the war. That it targets soldiers and not kings indicates the way that all *the powerful people, including the Trojan priest, see the soldiers as pawns or objects.*

On the tenth day, Achilles climbs onto the dais and calls for everyone to gather around. This is the first time that a general—and not Agamemnon—has called a meeting in all these years at Troy. Agamemnon is angry, but he can't chastise Achilles, since he should have called a meeting about the plague days ago. Achilles says that they need to figure out what they've done to make the gods angry, and he summons Calchas, pretending that Agamemnon recommended he do so. Calchas is afraid to speak, worried that his words will make someone upset. He says that it's Apollo who's angry, specifically at the treatment of the priest. To appease him, Agamemnon needs to return the priest's daughter, pray, and sacrifice. Agamemnon clearly didn't expect this, which Patroclus thinks was stupid of him.

Agamemnon resents Achilles standing on the dais because he sees it as Achilles asserting a leadership role that is rightfully Agamemnon's, even despite the fact that Achilles is careful to help Agamemnon save face by saying that it is Agamemnon's idea to figure out the truth behind the plague.Achilles hates lying, but he's lying now to try to protect Agamemnon and keep the peace. Agamemnon is a bad leader and a politician, unable to see more than a few steps ahead of him at a time and interested only in maintaining strict control. Achilles, meanwhile, is proving himself a pretty good politician, able to sway a crowd and solve problems.

Achilles insists that Agamemnon send the girl back, but Agamemnon refuses. He says that they should have left Achilles in Scyros, hiding in a skirt. Agamemnon has put up with Achilles's arrogance for long enough, and he insists that Achilles swear his loyalty. Achilles responds coldly that he's in Troy of his own volition—and that it is Agamemnon who should kneel.

Agamemnon responds to what he sees as Achilles threat to his control by threatening Achilles honor (by revealing Achilles time on Scyros). Once again, Achilles insists that he is beholden to no one but himself. But he takes it a step further this time and demands that Agamemnon defer to his *authority. Previously, Achilles was only trying to prove that he was his own person; now, he seems to be acting out of anger and pride.*

Seeing an opportunity, Agamemnon draws attention to Achilles's pride. He says that he'll punish Achilles for it by taking his war prizes, beginning with Briseis. Agamemnon says that Briseis is a "living embodiment of Achilles's honor"; taking her is the greatest insult. Achilles's hand goes for his sword, which Agamemnon doesn't notice, but he stops himself for some reason. Achilles says that Agamemnon's words will cause everyone's deaths: he won't fight anymore, and the army will lose.

Agamemnon doesn't see Briseis as a person at all. Instead, she's representative of Achilles's honor, and taking her is a way to get back at Achilles. This demonstrates exactly how little agency women have, even women like Briseis, who was given free reign of the Phthian camp. That Achilles stops himself from physically attacking Agamemnon suggests that he has come up with another plan. What that plan is, though, is not yet revealed.

Patroclus returns to the Phthian camp with Achilles, who rages about Agamemnon and the cowardly crowd. On Phoinix's orders, Automedon comes to tell Achilles what the other kings are saying: Agamemnon says that Achilles hasn't even killed Hector, so they don't need him. He also reveals that Agamemnon's men are coming for Briseis. Patroclus suggests that they hurry and hide Briseis, but Achilles, who is about to leave to see Thetis, says that they should let them come, since Agamemnon will condemn himself. Patroclus doesn't understand, but Achilles says that he can't help Briseis, although he and Patroclus both know what Agamemnon will do to her. Patroclus asks where Achilles's honor is and then, suddenly, understands what's going on. Horrified, he goes to warn Briseis.

Agamemnon managed to turn all the kings against Achilles simply by pointing out his pride—apparently the other kings also refuse to see themselves as beneath Achilles. Meanwhile, Patroclus had assumed that just because he *would find it morally reprehensible to allow Agamemnon to take Briseis, Achilles would, too. Both he and Patroclus know that Agamemnon plans to sexually assault Briseis, but Achilles is willing to let it happen in service to some plan. Put another way: Patroclus's primary concern is Briseis as a person; Achilles primary concern is his honor and conflict with Agamemnon, and he, like Agamemnon, us willing to use Briseis as a pawn in that struggle.*

When Briseis sees Patroclus's expression, she asks if he and Achilles are all right. Ashamed, Patroclus tells her that Apollo caused the plague and that Agamemnon wants to punish Achilles, so they're sending men to take her. She asks what will happen and while Patroclus can't answer, she understands. He tries to comfort her, but it's all lies—they know what's about to happen. Achilles knows, too. Internally, Patroclus wishes for an apocalypse, a flood. Briseis tells him to leave.

Briseis doesn't care about Achilles personally, but she cares about Patroclus and so she asks if Achilles and Patroclus are all right. Now Briseis realizes that her freedom within the Phthian camp was just an illusion; she was always a captive of the Greeks above all. Patroclus compared Achilles to a flood after he learned that Achilles killed the family of Hector's wife. Now he wishes for a flood to wipe out everyone around him: that may be a desire for Achilles to come and protect Briseis by killing Agamemnon and his men, or it may be a more general wish for total destruction of all the Greeks—including Achilles—to wipe away what Patroclus now sees is a corrupt and immoral society.

CHAPTER 26

Patroclus watches Agamemnon's messengers approach. He wishes they'd die and imagines Achilles snapping their necks. However, Achilles acts like a martyr who can't do anything to stop them, and Patroclus clenches his teeth. When Patroclus quietly apologizes to Briseis, she doesn't say that it's all right, but she kisses him briefly. She turns back to look at Patroclus and Achilles, hopeful, and Patroclus watches Achilles, but Achilles doesn't look up.

Earlier in the novel Achilles killed a poisonous snake to protect Patroclus. Patroclus is wishing for that same kind of act from Achilles now: he wants Achilles to use his skill at killing to protect others. Yet Achilles offers no such protection. This scene also shows how much Achilles has changed since the start of the novel. He always hated deceit and trickery, but he now puts on a show of martyrdom for Agamemnon's guards, even though he'd been furiously angry only moments before. He seems to have a plan in place, and rather than protecting others he is protecting his honor.

Patroclus asks how Achilles can let Briseis go. His face blank, Achilles goes to speak with Thetis. Patroclus thinks that he doesn't know Achilles anymore, and he won't forgive him; he imagines breaking Achilles's lyre or stabbing himself, just to make Achilles grieve. Achilles expects Patroclus to sit idly and wait for him, since Patroclus has nothing to offer Agamemnon in exchange for Briseis's freedom. Suddenly, Patroclus remembers Chiron saying that if a wolf hunts you, you have to offer it something better. He grabs a knife and heads to Agamemnon's tent.

Patroclus also recognizes how much Achilles has changed. His desire to destroy Achilles lyre is also a recognition that Achilles has now lost the innocence that the lyre represents, and which Patroclus loved. It is worth noting, though, that Achilles acts monstrously every day and has shared each sin with Patroclus. He told Patroclus how he killed Hector's wife's family. Patroclus has been able to excuse or justify or ignore those actions throughout the novel because he loves Achilles and doesn't know Achilles's victims. Things different now because Patroclus loves Briseis, too. Patroclus is also beginning to understand that he's the only person Achilles really cares about. If he wanted to hurt Achilles, he'd have to hurt himself, which is the only thing that could make Achilles "grieve." Patroclus and Achilles love is now even more closely intertwined with violence.

Patroclus sees Briseis immediately; she's in the corner with her hands tied. Agamemnon is triumphant at Patroclus's appearance, thinking that he'll beg or ask for mercy on Achilles's behalf or get pointlessly angry. Instead, Patroclus slices his wrist, swearing on his blood that he's about to speak the truth. He says: Agamemnon is in danger, and Achilles doesn't know that Patroclus is here. Patroclus explains that Achilles knows what Agamemnon wants to do to Briseis. According to Patroclus, Achilles let Agamemnon take her because if Agamemnon violates her, his army will despise him, since she belongs to Achilles. Violating her would violate Achilles, so Achilles could kill Agamemnon for it—or the men will kill Agamemnon themselves.

This scene reveals Achilles's full plan for the first time: he wanted to allow Agamemnon to act dishonorably so that he had an honorable reason to kill him. To do this, he was willing to use Briseis, and expose her to rape and death, all to protect his honor and get the upper hand in the struggle for pride, power, and control with Agamemnon. This plan makes it as clear as possible that Greek honor has very little do with morality.

Shocked, Agamemnon says that his counselors—Odysseus and Diomedes—didn't mention this. Patroclus replies that maybe they want Agamemnon to die so that Menelaus will rule with them by his side. Agamemnon understands how important this information is and that Patroclus is betraying Achilles to convey it, which delights him. Nothing will hurt Achilles more. Finally, Agamemnon says that he'll release Briseis if Achilles kneels. Patroclus frees her wrists and tells Agamemnon to be kind to her.

Patroclus is just speculating about Odysseus and Diomedes here, but his speculation is plausible—that Odysseus and Diomedes are fed up with Agamemnon's leadership and want to run the army themselves. Odysseus has never had a problem with allowing innocent people to be hurt for a greater good—he let Agamemnon murder Iphigenia, after all. The only difference between Odysseus and Achilles is that Odysseus never claimed to be an honorable person or to care very much about his honor. Both men are capable of justifying horrible things, but Achilles believes he's acting honorably, while Odysseus seems to accept his moral bankruptcy. Agamemnon is obviously not a very good politician, since he didn't see any of this coming. However, he's smart enough to know that Patroclus has given him valuable information and *that Patroclus's betrayal will hurt Achilles more than Briseis's rape. Patroclus, meanwhile, is willing to betray Achilles in this way in order to protect Briseis, just as he wished Achilles earlier would have killed to protect her.*

Achilles is waiting for Patroclus in the tent, and when Patroclus enters he bandages Patroclus's wound. When Patroclus reveals what happened, Achilles is furious. He accuses Patroclus of trading Briseis for Achilles's honor, but Patroclus responds that Achilles's plan was never honorable. Achilles interprets this as Patroclus choosing Briseis over him, but Patroclus gently says that isn't the case: he chose her over Achilles's pride. Achilles becomes sorrowful, but insists that his reputation is the only thing he has; he'll be dead soon, as Patroclus knows. But Patroclus responds that he wants Achilles's memory to reflect *him*, not his worst intentions. Weary, Achilles says that Patroclus is a better person than he is. Patroclus responds that Achilles only left himself temporarily, but Achilles says Patroclus doesn't know everything he's done.

It's ironic that Achilles is the one to bandage Patroclus's wound when he's the reason that wound exists at all, literally and figuratively—Patroclus is hurt both emotionally and physically because of Achilles. It does show, though, that Achilles still has that part of him that is a healer, at least for Patroclus he does. Their argument here is a disagreement about the fundamental nature of honor: Patroclus thinks that honor means doing the moral thing, while Achilles is caught up in the Greek definition of honor, which has more to do with defending your "property" than it does with acting empathetically. Achilles seems to be almost jealous of Briseis, accusing Patroclus of choosing her over him—this suggests that, at least subconsciously, Achilles also didn't mind that his plan involved hurting Briseis because she was an obstacle between him and Patroclus. Achilles and Patroclus are both worried about Achilles's legacy, but Patroclus wants this legacy to reflect Achilles as Patroclus sees him and believes him to be. But the fact that Achilles was more concerned about his legacy than the well-being of someone else suggests that Patroclus doesn't always see Achilles clearly. And as Achilles final comment makes clear, Patroclus not only doesn't but can't see the full Achilles: there are terrible things that Achilles has done that he hasn't told Patroclus about. Finally, Much like he did when he decided to go to Troy, Achilles seems to be putting his honor over his love for Patroclus, since he claims his reputation is the only thing he has—this isn't true, since he has Patroclus.

CHAPTER 27

While Patroclus was talking to Agamemnon, Achilles went to Thetis, and she came up with a plan: she'll ask Zeus to ensure that the Greeks lose without Achilles fighting for them, so eventually Agamemnon will beg for him to return. After Achilles tells him this, Patroclus remembers a conversation he and Achilles once had with Chiron, in which Chiron disparaged the concept of a "nation," telling them that no man's life is more valuable than someone else's. Achilles wondered at the time whether it matters if you know one person and not another, but Chiron protested that everyone is important to someone. In that light, he asked, whose life matters more? When they were 14, the question seemed impossible, and now that they're 27 it still does. Patroclus knows that Achilles's honor is his "child, his dearest self," and Patroclus can't save everyone who gets in the way of that honor, even though he saved Briseis. He now knows the answer to Chiron's question: there's no answer at all.

Earlier, the Greeks killed many Trojan farmers who had nothing to do with Paris or Helen. Now, Achilles will allow thousands of Greek soldiers to die who have nothing to do with Achilles's quarrel with Agamemnon, and he'll do so in order to maintain his honor. Again, this demonstrates how dishonorable *Greek honor can be, since people's lives are less important than the abstract concept of honor. Patroclus's memory of Chiron demonstrates how radical Chiron really was: he essentially railed against the very concept of war itself, because wars are obviously founded on divisions between nations. That Achilles treats his honor like his child—when, in fact, he has an actual child—just shows how warping the Greek conception of honor is.*

Patroclus goes to see Briseis. Achilles told Patroclus to say sorry to her on his behalf, though it's not clear if Achilles is only sorry for what he did because he now has hit upon his new plan. Agamemnon has dressed Briseis in jewels, and has stipulated that Patroclus can come see her whenever he wants, though Agamemnon will remain in the room. When he arrives, Patroclus speaks to Briseis in her language, and asks if she's alright. She says yes and asks how long it will be until she can leave, but Patroclus doesn't know. The next morning, everyone but the Phthians go to fight. Patroclus and Achilles have as much free time as on Pelion, but it feels like they're just waiting for something.

Achilles's apology to Briseis does not indicate a larger change of heart. He still prioritizes his honor above all others, and is willing to see others hurt as he protects it. Briseis is in the same position she was going to be in when the war began. Agamemnon was planning to claim her as a war prize before Patroclus intervened, but she ended up as Agamemnon's slave anyway, again suggesting that she never had any real agency. Even the fact that Agamemnon isn't assaulting her is the result of someone else's—Patroclus's—intervention. Patroclus and Achilles are now in the same position they were in as children, able to spend their day freely, but this only reminds readers how far they've come since childhood: neither boy is innocent anymore, and their free time is the result of Achilles's monstrous actions.

CHAPTER 28

That night, Phoinix tells them about a duel that happened earlier: Paris offered to fight for Helen in a duel with one person, settling the whole affair at once. Menelaus stepped up to the plate, but just as he was about to kill Paris, Paris disappeared. An arrow hit Menelaus, and though it was just a surface wound, all hell broke loose. No one knows where Paris went. Hector then offered a second duel to set things right, and Ajax was selected from a random draw. The fight ended in a tie. Achilles is excited to hear about these events; he's beginning to dream of killing Hector. Patroclus feels that something is starting to shatter.

The offered duel raises the question of why a duel wasn't something the Greeks originally proposed, and again suggests that claiming Helen is not the whole reason the Greeks waged war on Troy. Meanwhile, the magical disappearance of Paris implies that the Gods truly have engaged in the war. As Hector fights to a standstill with the Greeks' second best warrior—Ajax—the honor to be won by defeating him only grows. Achilles's excitement about killing Hector now shows just how much more Achilles has come to value his honor over his life.

The next morning, a new army arrives: the Lycians, who are Troy's allies and have one of Zeus's sons among them. The Trojans, led by Hector, begin to make progress in throwing back the Greeks, and the Greeks grow desperate. Achilles knows it's only a matter of time before Agamemnon caves, and Patroclus tries not to dwell on the smell of burned bodies. He knew every single man who died.

The arrival of the Lycians with Zeus's son among them makes clear that Zeus is honoring his promise to Thetis.Patroclus is once again able find a way to look past the way that Achilles's quest for honor leads to misdeeds, even though Achilles is now (indirectly) hurting people that Patroclus knows personally.

Phoinix, Odysseus, and Ajax come to Achilles's tent, where Achilles is playing the lyre. They eat dinner, and afterwards, Odysseus begins to list objects they can offer Achilles: horses, armor, Briseis. Then he lists dead men. He reveals that the Trojans are close to the Greek wall and will soon charge, burning the ships. But Achilles says that his honor is worth more and only Agamemnon's public apology will fix it. Odysseus tells him that, shockingly, Briseis is unharmed; her honor, and Achilles's, will be easily retrieved if Achilles fights. Achilles retorts that he hasn't left his honor behind at all, and that it's up to Agamemnon.

Achilles is playing the lyre here, but it's not Patroclus's mother's lyre, which makes sense: Achilles is no longer innocent. In fact, his adoption of his old childhood pastimes only reminds readers how altered he is. Odysseus's pitch to Achilles is obviously unlikely to convince Achilles. Achilles doesn't care about riches, Briseis isn't his lover, and he's shown he doesn't care about any of the men who died. Further, the prophecy means that Achilles will never go home, so the burning ships wouldn't matter to him, either. All in all, it's a terrible attempt at swaying Achilles. Because Odysseus is a master manipulator, it's safe to assume that his real goal is something different from convincing Achilles.

Suddenly, Odysseus asks why Hector isn't dead yet. He says that he's not looking for an answer, just repeating what everyone is already thinking. Patroclus realizes that Odysseus must know about the prophecy. Achilles has evaded fate, Odysseus says, but the gods won't let him do that forever. Odysseus adds that it would be better to let fate happen on his terms rather than on the gods'. Achilles insists that that's what he's doing.

Odysseus's pointed question confirms that he knows Achilles will die after Hector. His comment that Achilles should die on his own terms is interesting, because it suggests a different sort of control: not of evading fate, but of choosing your path to fate's inevitable outcome.

Phoinix interjects: there's a story he wants to tell Achilles. Many years ago, the hero Meleager was winning a war. (Patroclus realizes that he's heard this story before, back in Phthia.) Phoinix continues: Meleager was insulted by his people and refused to fight. He went to his wife, Cleopatra, for comfort. (At these words, Phoinix looks at Patroclus.) Eventually, Cleopatra could no longer endure the deaths of all of her friends, and she begged Meleager to fight. He agreed, but by that point, everyone hated him. Patroclus knows that Phoinix wants him to beg Achilles just as Cleopatra did in the story, but he can't; his fate is already sealed. Odysseus seems unsurprised that their meeting didn't succeed, and Patroclus realizes that Achilles's refusal makes him look insane. Everyone will despise him, just as they despised Meleager.

Odysseus must have known that his bad arguments wouldn't convince Achilles. The real reason the three men came was to appeal to Patroclus to intervene. When Peleus first told this story, Patroclus never heard the ending because he was too besotted with Achilles to pay attention. Patroclus is still paralyzed by his love for Achilles, but now the parallels are obvious, and Phoinix is suggesting that Achilles's legacy will be tainted if he refuses to fight. He's not telling Patroclus to save the Greeks' lives, but rather to save Achilles's legacy. That Patroclus doesn't take the bait, blaming his own inaction on fate, once again shows a moment when Patroclus chooses passivity over agency. Meanwhile, Odysseus's casual attitude seems to imply that he's already accepted Achilles's choice, which is worrisome. Odysseus must believe he can benefit from Achilles's mistakes in some way, or else he'd be fighting harder to change his mind.

Patroclus goes to see Briseis, which is dangerous, because Agamemnon is so furious at Achilles. She hides him in her bed, and he tells her that the Trojans will enter the camp tomorrow, so they need to hide her. She disagrees; if the Trojans take the camp, she'll surrender to them, since she's Trojan herself. Agamemnon interrupts to see what's going on, and she lies and tells him she's praying. He replies that if Achilles keeps saying no to his offers, he'll claim her himself. Afterwards, she insists to Patroclus that it's an empty threat. Agamemnon likes her to be afraid, which horrifies Patroclus.

Patroclus apparently forgot that Briseis is still a Greek captive, even if she was "free" in the Phthian camp. Patroclus never fully understood Briseis's lack of agency, even though he tried to help her as much as he could. His shock at Agamemnon's threats is more proof of this, because Agamemnon clearly views Briseis as disposable. She understands Agamemnon's cruelty and seems unconcerned by it, which suggests that she sees it as just an inescapable part of life.

Briseis tells Patroclus that the men now blame Achilles for Greek deaths in battle, which Agamemnon has encouraged. She adds that if the Greek camp falls, she'll claim Patroclus as her husband. This might stop the Trojans from killing him, as long as he doesn't reveal that Achilles was his lover. She also asks him not to leave Troy without her. He agrees, not mentioning that he'll never leave Troy. For a moment, he imagines what their life together would have looked like if he'd never met Achilles. She tells him to be careful, calling him the "best of the Myrmidons."

Briseis's intel proves that Achilles really is like Meleager; his people have turned on him and might not forgive him even if he changes his mind and fights. Briseis seems to fundamentally misunderstand Patroclus's love for Achilles, because she assumes that Patroclus would want to live after Achilles is dead. Patroclus proved he was his own person when he defied Achilles and saved Briseis, but that independence only goes so far. He can fantasize about a different possible life, but in this life he can't even conceive of a world in which Achilles is not his main priority. Briseis's parting comment refers back to Thetis's statement that the "best of the Myrmidons" was prophesized to die soon. The "best" refers not to war skill but kindness and empathy. If that's the case, the Fates seem to be mocking Achilles's notion of honor by implying that even if Achilles is a gifted soldier, Patroclus is still better and more honorable than he is.

That night, Patroclus watches Achilles sleep. He looks innocent while sleeping, almost a child again—this is his "truest self," Patroclus thinks. Patroclus believes that Achilles is in over his head with Agamemnon and Odysseus's games and political machinations; they've "baited" him and confused him. Patroclus wants to free him from all of that, if only Achilles would let him.

Patroclus's belief that Achilles's true self is innocent and childlike is delusional at this point. Patroclus continues to separate the good parts of Achilles from the bad parts, and to insist that only the good parts are his true self, but that's no longer logical. Achilles knows exactly what he's doing. Odysseus isn't manipulating him, and Agamemnon certainly isn't playing games—he's revealed himself as a terrible politician and wouldn't know how to manipulate Achilles even if he wanted to. Patroclus loves Achilles, so he wants to believe that Achilles is fundamentally good, but that's just a way to excuse Achilles's actions.

CHAPTER 29

The next morning, the Trojans are at the Greek gate, aided by Zeus. They're about to burn the ships. This, Achilles imagines, is the moment he's been waiting for. But he still won't intervene unless Agamemnon begs, Hector attacks what belongs to Achilles, or Agamemnon dies. Patroclus worries the men will hate Achilles, but Achilles insists that they should despise Agamemnon instead. Achilles continues to speak cheerfully about where they'll go for a swim tomorrow, as Patroclus imagines the corpses from the day's battle.

Again, Zeus seems to be fulfilling his promise to Thetis by helping the Trojans, but Achilles and Thetis should both be suspicious of his intentions. Achilles's comment that the only way he'd fight Hector, apart from Agamemnon begging or dying, is if Hector harms something of his, can be taken as foreshadowing. Patroclus learned as a child that nothing good comes from defending your honor in this way, but Achilles seems to ignore this lesson. As the Greek ships are about to burn, Achilles almost plays at being a child again, swimming whenever they want, but the context is different and now that "innocence" in the context war feels immoral.

As they see someone pass by on a stretcher, Patroclus goes to the medical tent to see who it is. It turns out it's the doctor, Machaon, who was shot by an arrow. Nestor, who is also injured, screams about the other wounded kings: Diomedes, Agamemnon, Odysseus. Machaon asks if Patroclus can speak to Achilles. Patroclus remembers the story about Meleager and Cleopatra, and he imagines her trying to say no to her people. He rushes out of the medical tent and notices that the Greek wall is falling. Patroclus has healed these men; now he watches them die because of Achilles, and because of Patroclus.

Working at the medical tent was always a way for Patroclus to feel that even if Achilles was hurting people, Patroclus was helping them. Now, that's turned on its head: Machaon is hurt and everyone Patroclus once healed is vulnerable again. Worse, they're begging Patroclus to help them, and if he doesn't at least try to convince Achilles to fight, he's partly responsible for their deaths. This is the first time he's really acknowledged his own responsibility and dishonorable actions; Achilles might be the one refusing to fight, but Patroclus is the only person who could convince him to change his mind.

The ships are aflame now. Hector stands at the prow of one of them. He throws a torch directly on the deck, and it catches immediately. He smiles, and Ajax, on the same ship, screams. A spear pierces Ajax's thigh—right through the muscle—and he falls.

The fact that the ships are burning and Ajax—the Greeks' second-best fighter—is at the very least injured suggests that Achilles's plan is paying off and the Greeks are helpless without him. Yet the human cost of Achilles's "plan" is made clear here, and so the plan "working" at the cost of the lives of his compatriots makes the plan seem like the product of an obsessive pride.

CHAPTER 30

Patroclus runs to Achilles, sobbing. He says that no one will ever remember Achilles's heroism—they'll only remember this. He tells Achilles about Ajax and begs him not to let the Greeks die for Agamemnon's madness. More ships burn and crumble outside. Patroclus insists that the Greeks are their people, but Achilles says he's only responsible for the Myrmidons. Patroclus warns him that he'll be hated forever, and Achilles tells him not to ask again.

Patroclus sincerely cares about Achilles's legacy, and here tries to make Achilles see the cost of what he is doing to himself. But Patroclus once again has a false image of Achilles—if Agamemnon is acting "mad," Achilles is, too. Both men are too stubborn to put the lives of others over their own personal quarrel. Meanwhile, Achilles clearly never internalized Chiron's lesson that no one's life matters more than anyone else's, because he prioritizes the Myrmidons' lives over the lives of other Greek soldiers.

Patroclus kneels, asking Achilles to save the Greeks for him alone. He knows exactly how much he's asking, but he asks anyway—if Achilles loves him, he'll fight. Visibly torn, Achilles says that he can't. If he does, Agamemnon will dishonor him and no one will respect him. Patroclus, suddenly inspired, says that he should at least send the Myrmidons. Patroclus will wear Achilles's armor and they'll think it's him; Achilles will keep his vow, and the war won't be lost. Patroclus notes that the words seemed to be "spoken straight from a god's mouth," shocking even him.

Patroclus is the only person Achilles really loves. Achilles's refusal to fight makes clear that even genuine love isn't enough anymore to overcome his need for "honor." Patroclus's plan brings together so many thematic threads of the novel: he seeks to save Achilles honor, take responsibility for himself, and control the situation by threading the needle on helping the Greeks and Thetis deal with Zeus, since he'll inspire the Greeks by seeming to be Achilles without actually having Achilles fight. Yet the fact that it seems is if his plan is spoken straight from a god's mouth implies, also, that this plan might be playing into fate rather than averting it.

Achilles refuses at first, but Patroclus says he won't really fight—his appearance alone will be enough. Agamemnon may know it's not Achilles, but the soldiers will adore him. Even Achilles's "phantom" will be more powerful than anything Agamemnon could ever do, and everyone will think that Agamemnon is weak. Imagining their gratitude, Achilles makes Patroclus promise that if he goes, he won't fight. Giddy, Patroclus agrees; he's found a way to save the men *and* Achilles.

The plan grows more and more appealing. Not only will Patroclus's performance as Achilles rejuvenate the Greeks, but it will secretly humiliate Agamemnon, who will eventually find out that Achilles never really fought. If the plan works, Achilles will get everything he wants without facing any consequences and without compromising his false ideas about honor. Achilles is clearly swayed by the idea of everyone feeling grateful to him, while Patroclus continues to think that he can outsmart fate.

Achilles buckles Patroclus into his armor, again instructing him not to fight and to remain with Automedon. He should force the Trojans to retreat, but he shouldn't fight them, and he should avoid the Trojan wall and its archers. Achilles hands Patroclus two spears and a helmet: with the helmet on, he looks just like Achilles, only different in the eyes. Achilles kisses him. Patroclus plans to take the chariot with Automedon; he knows that the way he walks is like the way Achilles does, and wouldn't fool anyone. Achilles tells Patroclus to be careful, but he says nothing else; there will be time for talking later.

The scene of Achilles putting on Patroclus's armor mimics the earlier scene when Patroclus did the same for Achilles. That Patroclus in the armor looks just like Achilles, except for the eyes suggests the ways that war and violence reduce the individuality of men, but also makes clear that the things a warrior does on the battlefield changes him on the inside. Patroclus and Achilles seem to think this plan is foolproof, because they don't even say goodbye.

When the men see Patroclus (in Achilles armor) and Automedon in the chariot, they scream and Patroclus screams back. The Trojans begin to flee in terror, and Patroclus raises his spear at those who stay. Maybe it's all those years watching Achilles, but Patroclus no longer feels awkward; he throws his spear, and it hits a Trojan, killing him. Automedon warns Patroclus that Achilles didn't want him to fight, but Patroclus keeps throwing while the men around him yell Achilles's name. The Greeks start to gain confidence, while Hector begins leading the Trojans in a full retreat. Patroclus insists that they follow the Trojans, and Automedon reluctantly obeys.

Patroclus steps onto the battlefield intending to simply be a figurehead, experiences the adulation of the other troops, and suddenly starts fighting and recklessly pursuing the enemy. Patroclus has watched the fighting from the outside and not engaged in it, but now the implication is that he feels the "thrill" of battle and loses himself to it. In a sense he has become Achilles not just in the armor he wears, but also "in the eyes."

The Trojans have retreated far enough that Patroclus could stop following, but he doesn't. The men scream Achilles's name. Because he spent so long in the medical tent, Patroclus knows exactly where to aim the spears to kill. Zeus's son, Sarpedon, appears; he's the one who broke down the gate in the Greek wall guarding the ships. Sarpedon throws his spear, which knocks Patroclus backward from the chariot. Now Patroclus faces Sarpedon, alone. Patroclus throws his own spear. It knocks Sarpedon down, who falls to the ground, dead. Patroclus repositions the spear so that it'll look like he hit him square in the chest, as Achilles would have.

Patroclus is using his medical knowledge, which was supposed to help people, to hurt them, in a perversion of Chiron's teachings. Chiron always viewed surgery as a necessary violence, but the violence Patroclus inflicts is far from necessary. Meanwhile, though, the fact that Patroclus is able to kill Sarpedon, a half-god, is surprising—in fact it is so surprising it signals that something else may be going on in this moment beyond just Patroclus getting a case of battle fury.

Automedon and Patroclus escape and end up at the Trojan gates. Everything happened so quickly that there are no archers there to shoot at them. The Trojans "deserve to lose" Troy, Patroclus thinks—the whole war is their fault, and Achilles is fated to die because of their actions. Angry, he runs to the wall and begins to climb; he'll capture Helen, and no one else will die for her "vanity." Suddenly, he sees a beautiful man with black eyes leaning on Troy's wall: it's Apollo. Apollo smiles and grabs Patroclus, dropping him off the wall. Still determined, Patroclus begins to climb again—he forgets why he fell, forgets about the gods. Maybe climbing walls is all he's ever done, he thinks. Apollo isn't smiling anymore. He grabs Patroclus again and lets him fall.

Patroclus has spent much of the war justifying or excusing Achilles's actions. Now, in the midst of battle fury, he justifies his own: he blames the Trojans; he blames Helen, who never had much agency at all. Violence in this scene seeks to justify itself, to make itself "honorable." Meanwhile, in this scene, Patroclus comes face-to-face with proof that the gods are interfering in the war and chooses to ignore it. His reference to perpetually climbing walls feels like a metaphor for fate: he's constantly trying to outrun Achilles's fate no matter the obstacles. In this case, his belief that he can outrun fate leads to Apollo taking action against him—to fate pushing back against him.

Patroclus's head hits the ground hard, and men gather. Are they here to help? His helmet is gone and Apollo has undone the straps of his armor. The Trojans scream in anger, realizing they've been tricked. Patroclus runs away, dodging spears. Then a spear hits him in the back. Someone pulls it out. A familiar man walks toward him: it's Hector. Patroclus suddenly remembers that he can't let Hector kill him, because Achilles will kill Hector if he does, which will ensure Achilles's own death. Patroclus begs the men around him to stop Hector, but they don't. Hector lifts his spear, and brings it down. The final thing Patroclus sees is Hector, and the final thing he thinks is: *Achilles*.

Patroclus tried to outmaneuver fate—to protect the honor and life and the person he loved—but in doing so he himself turned to violence and only ended up becoming the instrument of the very fate he sought to deny. Achilles has said that he would only fight Hector if Agamemnon begged or died, or if Hector harmed something of Achilles. Now Patroclus's plan to protect Achilles's honor has led to Hector killing Patroclus, whom Achilles loved above all else. Patroclus begging that the gathered men stop Hector might be taken as cowardice, but in fact Patroclus begs not for his own life but because he understands that he has set Achilles final fate in motion. Even in his own moment of death, Patroclus puts Achilles first. And this entire cycle of fate captures how violence leads always to more violence.

CHAPTER 31

Achilles watches the battle from camp. He knows that soon Patroclus will return—but he sees someone fall, and then Odysseus and Menelaus bring a body back. Achilles realizes what has happened, and he screams and sobs, holding Patroclus's body. Patroclus—whose soul is still present in the room, though he's dead and invisible—can almost feel him. Briseis enters, sees what happened, and wails. Menelaus tells Achilles that Hector did this. When Achilles grabs his spear, Odysseus tells him he has to wait until tomorrow. Thetis comes, and tells Achilles that Patroclus doomed himself. Watching her son madly cradle a corpse, she says that she'll bring him armor.

The ancient Greeks believed that when someone died, their body needed to be burned, ashes buried, and grave marked before they'd be able to go to the underworld and be at rest. This is why Patroclus is still present and narrating the novel's events—no one has buried his body yet, so his soul is remains present. Achilles was tempting fate every time he said that Hector had done nothing to him and when he told Patroclus that he'd be angry if someone took something from him. Hector ended up taking the only thing Achilles cares about, and Achilles is clearly going to kill him at the earliest possible opportunity, which will lead to his own death eventually. Further, it was Achilles's own pride that led to Patroclus's death. Thetis's statement that Patroclus doomed himself is, at best, incomplete. But Thetis has often pushed Achilles to set aside his human half in her desire to have him ascend to godhood, and this may just be another part of that effort. Regardless, now Patroclus's death will drive Achilles to kill Hector—love driving violence.

Achilles receives visitor after visitor. Agamemnon comes to return Briseis, not realizing that she already came to see Patroclus's body. Agamemnon seems to expect gratitude for bringing her back. Telling Achilles that he's glad they're allies again, Agamemnon asks if he'll fight; Achilles says, very fiercely, that he will and that he'll be dead soon. Patroclus, whose soul is observing the scene like a ghost, thinks that Achilles must be picturing Hector's death. Agamemnon says that Patroclus killed Sarpedon, which was a brave act. Dully, Achilles tells Agamemnon that he wishes Patroclus had let the whole Greek army die.

Agamemnon continues to see Briseis as an object, now he uses her to barter his way back into Achilles's good graces (still not realizing that Achilles doesn't care about Briseis and that Briseis only cares about Patroclus). Achilles seems to have stopped caring about his honor—his love-fueled need for vengeance at Patroclus's death has made him uninterested in his honor-based conflict with Agamemnon. When Achilles came to Troy, he chose his honor over a life with Patroclus. Now, he's giving up on honor and his life for Patroclus's sake; though this decision has come too late. And Achilles isn't exactly doing what's best for Patroclus, either—Patroclus never wanted Achilles to kill Hector, because that would result in Achilles's eventual death as well. It's safe to assume that Patroclus also wouldn't want Achilles to turn into a cold-blooded killer, but that's exactly what Achilles has decided to do. In fact, Achilles clearly didn't learn anything from this whole ordeal: he says that he wishes Patroclus had let everyone die, when Patroclus died to prevent exactly that from happening. Even though the Greek conception of honor doesn't mean much to Achilles anymore, he's not embracing Patroclus's ideas of honor either.

Briseis comes to clean the corpse. Achilles yells at her to leave, but she insists that she loved Patroclus, too. She blames Achilles for letting him go, and accuses him of caring more about Patroclus now that he's dead. Patroclus was worth "ten of" Achilles, she claims, and Achilles indirectly killed him. Achilles screams that he never wanted Patroclus to fight, but Briseis presses on: Achilles never deserved Patroclus, and Achilles was the one who gave him no choice but to go. Patroclus wanted to save Achilles's reputation, but Achilles doesn't care about anyone but himself. She says that she hopes Hector kills him. Achilles responds that he hopes that happens, too.

Briseis forces Achilles to confront that he put his honor over everything else before Patroclus's death, and that he should have prioritized his love for Patroclus. Briseis's claim that Patroclus was better than Achilles again implies that Patroclus was the "best of the Myrmidons," and that he was the "best" not because of his fighting skills but because of his kindness. Achilles seems unwilling to take responsibility for his actions even now—although he did love Patroclus, Briseis is right that he also indirectly caused Patroclus's death. Achilles's comment that he hopes Hector kills him indicates that he feels that, with Patroclus dead, he has nothing to live for. This is an expression of love, but also of continued self-centeredness: Achilles focuses only on his own pain.

The next day in battle, Achilles charges at Hector, killing everyone in his path. Hector evades him. It's not cowardice; he just knows he won't live if Achilles finds him. Hector is wearing Achilles's armor, which he took from Patroclus's body, so it looks like Achilles is, bizarrely, chasing himself. Hector jumps into a river to avoid Achilles, and a large figure emerges to block Achilles from following: Scamander, the river god. Achilles doesn't have any spears, just a sword—his spears are in the bodies of others.

Violence always leads to more violence, spilling out on all sides: Achilles in his quest for vengeance kills not just Hector but anyone in his way. That it looks as if Achilles is chasing himself symbolically captures the idea that Achilles anger is not just at Hector, but also at himself. He wants vengeance on Hector, but he also knows that the only way he himself can die is if he kills Hector. Achilles's despair at losing Patroclus drives him to vengeance, but also suicide. Throughout the novel Patroclus has imagined Achilles as having too selves—an innocent, human true self and an inhuman murderous "other" self. Yet in this scene both selves are warriors, both are killers—the idea that Achilles ever had two selves is shown to be false; he only ever had one complicated self, capable of beauty and innocence, and also dreadful violence.

Scamander keeps grabbing for Achilles, who dodges him. Eventually, Achilles begins to grow tired. He leaps for Scamander, but he isn't fast enough and he stumbles. The god swings his staff—but he and Patroclus (whose soul is watching the scene from afar) should have both known better, because Achilles never stumbles. Achilles stabs Scamander, who limps away. The other gods watching start to worry: Achilles just beat one of their own, and Troy isn't supposed to lose this war yet. Patroclus knows that they shouldn't be concerned; Achilles only wants Hector.

Achilles's tricking of Scamander is not something he would have done at the start of the novel when his personal honor code outlawed deception of any kind. This fighting style is closest to Odysseus's; Patroclus noted earlier that Odysseus likes to fake out his opponents. Achilles has given up on all forms of honor now. It's interesting that the gods are fearful that Achilles's might will allow him to subvert fate after all. It seems that fate is mysterious to everyone, even the gods—and also shows why the gods would always try to thwart Achilles.

Achilles finds Hector in a grove below Troy's walls. Eyes wide, Hector asks Achilles to return his body to his family after he dies. Achilles refuses to make a bargain with Hector; instead, he says that he'll "eat [him] raw." Achille's ash **spear** strikes Hector's throat. Covered in blood, Achilles drags Hector's body back to the Greek camp, refusing the feast Agamemnon offers. Thetis encourages him to return Hector's body to the Trojans, but Achilles won't.

There's no mention of Hector's weapon here, which suggests he may be unarmed. Earlier in the novel, Achilles claimed that he'd never hurt someone who was unarmed, but that was when he cared about honor. Achilles refusal to treat Hector's dead body with respect is an even more fundamental refusal of basic Greek and Trojan propriety and religious practice. Achilles's last words to Hector recall his earlier declaration to Patroclus that he would be the first hero to be happy, and that he could "eat the world raw." At the time, he believed that his love for Patroclus would save him. Now, it's obvious that his love for Patroclus has driven him to a despair so deep he is defying every tenet of Greek religion, and is even defying his goddess mother. That he kills Hector in cold blood with the spear that Chiron gave him—a weapon, but one that resembled the lyre of Patroclus's mother—signals the utter end of Achilles connection to innocence and beauty. Meanwhile, Agamemnon remains grotesque himself, with his suggestion of a feast to celebrate victory in light of all that has happened.

While Achilles sleeps, Patroclus speaks to him from the grave. He asks Achilles to burn Patroclus's corpse so that Patroclus's soul can find peace. Patroclus will then wait for Achilles in the underworld, where they can be together after death. But Patroclus can't finish his instructions before Achilles wakes up, sobbing and clutching Patroclus's corpse.

Patroclus offers Achilles a possibility of hope and peace, of being reunited in the afterlife. But Achilles clearly hasn't fully accepted Patroclus's death yet, because he's fixated on Patroclus's corpse.

Achilles begins dragging Hector's body around. Back in his tent, Thetis tells him to stop, that he's angering Apollo. Thetis claims that her power has saved Achilles, but Achilles scoffs, saying her power can't bring Patroclus back. He adds that she always hated Patroclus, and if she hadn't gone to Zeus and asked him to ensure that the Greek army lost without Achilles, Patroclus would still be alive. What good is Thetis if she can't help now? Thetis tells him that she shouldn't have left Achilles on Pelion; it softened him, such that he's no longer her son. She says that Pyrrhus is only twelve, and he's already "more of a man," the next *Aristos Achaion*, and that when Pyrrhus comes to Troy, Troy will fall. She continues, saying that Achilles has given up greatness for a rotting corpse. Finally, she tells him that she's glad Patroclus is dead. This is the last thing she'll ever tell him.

Not only does Achilles not return Hector's body, he further desecrates it, in cold blood. Thetis at first attempts to guide Achilles; she still hopes to get him to ascend to godhood. But Achilles refuses; he cares more about Patroclus than about his honor, legacy, or earthly or divine power. As Achilles embraces his human love for Patroclus, Thetis disavows him as her child—while the implication is that she never cared about Achilles human half, Thetis's tone implies that she may just be lashing out because Achilles has hurt her. Achilles's accusations against Thetis, after all, can't be described as fair either; his grief has made him impossible to be reached, but also made him unwilling to take responsibility for his own role in what happened. This scene also reintroduces Pyrrhus, and establishes him as someone who will uphold the ideas of Greek "manliness" that Achilles never entirely believed in and has now given up on entirely. Achilles's whole story is proof that Greek honor only leads to misery, but Thetis is clearly still instilling the same values in Pyrrhus.

CHAPTER 32

At night, Priam (Hector's father and king of Troy) sneaks to Achilles's tent, soaking wet from swimming to the Greek camp. Slightly stunned, Achilles offers him food, and Priam thanks him, seeming old and fragile. Priam says that Achilles isn't known to be a cruel man and asks him to return Hector's body to be buried so that his soul can rest. Priam says that he was guided to Achilles's tent by the gods, and adds that he knows that Achilles can kill him, but he thinks it's worth the risk to ask for Hector's body. Priam expresses sorrow for Achilles's loss, and says that he's sorry that Hector caused it. he then says that, in their similar grief, they have to look out for one another. Priam tells Achilles that they should give the dead peace, as "there's no peace for those who live after." Achilles, moved, agrees to send Hector's body back. The next day, he burns Patroclus's body, and he tells the Greeks to mix his own ashes with Patroclus's ashes after he himself is dead.

Priam's appeal to Achilles has an entirely different tone from Hector's and Thetis's. Hector asked Achilles to return his body without giving a reason, but the implication was that it would be the honorable thing to do. Thetis told Achilles to return the body because failing to do so would anger Apollo. Priam is asking Achilles to return the body based on an experience of shared grief. In this grief, Priam confirms to Achilles that the concept of Greek honor no longer matters: even if Hector was justified in killing Patroclus and Achilles was justified in killing Hector, Priam now sees them as so irrelevant that Priam is willing to apologize on Hector's behalf. Priam's comment that there's no peace for the living explicitly recalls the story Chiron told about Heracles. At the time, Achilles couldn't understand why the gods punished Heracles by forcing him to kill his wife and children and leaving him alive. Now, Achilles understands Heracles's pain, because he's alive and Patroclus is gone. Priam and Achilles have nothing in common except their shared grief at loss of a loved one, but that's enough for Achilles to do the right thing and return the body. In this way, Achilles's love ends up redeeming him, and allowing him to see outside himself and his own grief. Priam's visit therefore also spurs Achilles to tend to Patroclus's soul by burning his body—this is the first thing he's done since Patroclus's death that's truly for Patroclus's sake. (As a side note, the novel Ransom tells the story of Priam's trip into the Greek camp and meeting with Achilles from Priam's point of view.)

Heroes come to Troy to replace Hector and Sarpedon and to kill Achilles. One of them is Memnon, the king of Aethiopia, whom Achilles kills easily, wearily. Another is the horsewoman Penthesilea. Achilles is grieved to kill her; he thinks she seemed quick enough to strike him. Achilles also slaughters Priam's youngest son, Troilus, who is seeking revenge. One day, Paris strings a bow from within the Trojan walls, asking Apollo where to aim. He thought Achilles was indestructible, except for his—but Apollo cuts him off. Achilles isn't a god, and if someone shoots him, he'll die like any other man. So Paris shoots. The arrow hits Achilles's back, and Achilles smiles when he falls.

Violence breeds violence. Heroes die, and new heroes rise to take their place. Achilles kills one hero, and others come to prove themselves by killing him. That Achilles continues to play this game—despite wanting to die himself—shows just how prevalent the Greek concept of honor won through battle is. Yet despite Achilles power, Apollo makes clear that he's no god—Thetis efforts to manage Achilles's fate have failed just as Patroclus's did. Note how: Apollo cuts Paris off before he can say where he believed Achilles was vulnerable. This is a reference to Achilles's heel. In some versions of Greek mythology, Achilles is invulnerable except for his heel. However, this novel doesn't abide by that mythology—and in this moment, and earlier in the novel when Patroclus noticed Achilles's heels "flashing" as he ran, Madeline Miller is slyly referencing the aspects of the Greek myths that she didn't use. The point, also, is that Achilles was always vulnerable, always able to be killed. It was his skill in battle that kept him alive. But he was also always just a man. Achilles, meanwhile, is happy to die—happy to be reunited with Patroclus in death.

CHAPTER 33

The sea-nymphs take Achilles's body. When he burns on the pyre, they weep at the loss of beauty. But some onlookers don't cry at all: Briseis watches until the last flame dies. Thetis and all the soldiers stand, impassive and tearless. A bandaged Ajax almost cries, but maybe he's just glad that he'll be promoted. Odysseus asks Thetis what they should do with the ashes. It's impossible to tell what she's thinking or if she grieves. She tells him that she doesn't care, but she's aware of what Achilles wanted them to do with the ashes. Someone mixes their ashes, and from wherever his soul is, Patroclus can tell that it's happened. However, he can't feel anything physically—his soul and Achilles's are separated and will be until their names are marked together on their grave.

The only people who cry for Achilles are the ones who didn't know him. And they cry not for who he was, but for his lost beauty. Achilles's final act of kindness—returning Hector's body—may have redeemed him to some degree, but clearly Phoinix was right and some people will never forgive him for refusing to fight. No one has a real reason to mourn Achilles except for Thetis, but her last conversation with Achilles ended their relationship on a complicated note. The fact that Thetis allows the mixing of the ashes suggests that even though she hated Patroclus and his influence on her son, she never wanted Achilles to be unhappy.

Agamemnon calls a meeting to talk about where to put Achilles's tomb. Menelaus suggests a central location, and Odysseus suggests a place near the Phthian camp. Suddenly, a voice interrupts: it's a young boy with bright red hair who is coldly beautiful. He looks exactly like Achilles, except for his chin, which resembles Thetis. This is Pyrrhus, Achilles's son. He takes Achilles's seat and offers himself to the Greeks in his father's place. Agamemnon is displeased, as he'd hoped to be rid of Achilles. He says that Pyrrhus seems too young to take this position, but Pyrrhus retorts that he has been raised by the gods and the Fates have declared that Troy will only fall once he has joined the battle.

Once again, Odysseus is looking out for Achilles and Patroclus. He's the one who placed the Phthian camp so it would be far away from the other kings, and he's trying to make sure Achilles and Patroclus remain undisturbed by placing their grave there as well. Odysseus might be manipulative, but his motives seem to have never been about cruelty or dominance. Meanwhile, Pyrrhus matches Achilles in looks and in pride. Unlike Achilles, though, Pyrrhus seems nothing but excited about his destiny, and he resembles Thetis more than Achilles did. This suggests that Thetis was right: Pyrrhus is like the version of Achilles that Thetis wished for because she raised him herself.

Menelaus tells Pyrrhus that they were just talking about where to bury "them." Pyrrhus is confused; why is the tomb for two people? There's a pause before Menelaus explains that the second is Patroclus, Achilles's companion. Achilles wanted them to be buried together. Pyrrhus tells them that Achilles shouldn't be buried with a "slave" and that while he can't unmix the ashes, he won't taint his father's legacy by marking the grave with Patroclus's name. The kings look at each other, and Agamemnon agrees to follow Pyrrhus's wishes. From afar, Patroclus can't do anything about this. They mark the huge gravestone with Achilles's name—its size speaks to Achilles's greatness.

Achilles died finally understanding that love mattered more than honor. Pyrrhus immediately disregards his father's wishes, in the name of honor and legacy. Meanwhile, Agamemnon sees one more chance to thwart and control Achilles, and he takes it.

Pyrrhus's banners have Scyros's symbol, not Phthia's, but he claims the Myrmidon army as his own. He notices Briseis and recognizes her name—that she's the reason that Achilles refused to fight. That night, he calls her to his tent. When she arrives, he's lounging casually. Patroclus notes that Achilles might have sat in the same position, but Pyrrhus's eyes are empty and Achilles's never were. Pyrrhus tells Briseis that she must have been a great bed-slave if Achilles stopped fighting for her. Briseis says she's honored, but that's not the reason; she's a war-prize, and Agamemnon was trying to dishonor Achilles by stealing her. She wasn't even his bed-slave.

Pyrrhus has claimed his grandfather's throne at Scyros, and now claims his father's army as his own. He takes what he wants, based on his bloodline as his legacy. Pyrrhus's casual position when Briseis enters the room echoes Achilles's stance when Patroclus first met him, but the first thing Patroclus noticed about Achilles was that he wasn't cruel, since Achilles didn't joke about Patroclus's poor social position. In contrast, Pyrrhus's interaction with Briseis is purposely cruel. That it's founded on a misunderstanding—Pyrrhus believes that Briseis was Achilles's bed slave—is also revealing: Pyrrhus can only imagine women as being "valuable" if they are sexual objects.

Pyrrhus doesn't believe Briseis. She pauses and then asks if Pyrrhus has heard about Patroclus—Pyrrhus says no, because Patroclus doesn't matter. Briseis presses on: Achilles loved Patroclus and would want them buried together. He didn't need Briseis. Angry now, Pyrrhus tells her to come forward. Patroclus hopes she'll run, but she doesn't. Instead she grabs a knife from and tries to kill Pyrrhus, but she's never killed anyone—he evades her attack.

Briseis seems to be hinting about Achilles's real relationship with Patroclus by saying that Achilles loved Patroclus and never slept with her. This is a huge risk on her part, the same kind of risk that Patroclus took when he saved Briseis from Agamemnon. In this case, she's taking this risk to save Patroclus's soul, not his life. But Pyrrhus is only angered at this possible slight to what he sees as his father's honor. He responds to her statement of love with implied violence.

Now Briseis runs all the way into the ocean and begins to swim. Pyrrhus grabs a spear and his guard tells him to throw it, but he waits for her to get further. Patroclus is glad—she's too far for any man to hit her, except for Achilles. But Pyrrhus is Achilles's son, and his spear strikes her back. Phoinix sends someone out to find the body, but they don't. Patroclus hopes that her gods are kinder than the Greek gods and will let her rest anyway. He thinks that he'd die again just to make that happen.

Achilles as youth had rules for who and how he would fight—he had an internal code of honor. Pyrrhus has the same skills as his father, but he kills Briseis as if it is a game, and in a way that is as cruel as possible. Pyrrhus is like a version of Achilles who has completely bought into the Greek conception of "honor" as simply a product of battle skill and a willingness to kill and wield power absolutely—and he is a brutal monster, revealing what that code of honor extended to its logical endpoint would result in. Briseis, meanwhile, ended up powerless, her body lost, despite the fact that for a large chunk of the novel she had more power than other women.

True to the gods' word, Troy falls with Pyrrhus's help, with a horse, and with a plan from Odysseus. But it's Pyrrhus who kills Priam and Pyrrhus who finds Hector's wife. He smashes her child against the wall, something that horrifies even Agamemnon. The Greeks pack up quickly, and though Patroclus haunts all of their dreams, begging them to help him, they don't notice, or they don't listen. The night before they leave, Pyrrhus demands a sacrifice in Achilles's name. He grabs the Trojan princess Polyxena and slits her throat, claiming that Achilles's soul is happy.

This passage speeds through the remaining most significant events of the Trojan War, likely because Patroclus doesn't care about them; he was only invested in the war when Achilles's honor and life were at stake. Pyrrhus's monstrousness, meanwhile, shocks even Agamemnon. Pyrrhus, meanwhile, is doing all of these things in Achilles's name. He and Achilles may have shared all the same skills and Achilles may not have cared about strangers' lives, but Achilles was capable of love and sometimes even empathy; Pyrrhus obviously isn't. Achilles was horrified at the sacrifice of the innocent Iphigenia, and now Pyrrhus has sacrificed a similarly innocent woman and claimed that it was for Achilles. Pyrrhus is all the worst parts of Achilles with none of Achilles's love or occasional kindness.

Patroclus haunts Odysseus in his sleep, saying that he helped Odysseus when Achilles wouldn't. Odysseus knows exactly what Patroclus meant to Achilles; he knew that even before they came to Troy, and now it's up to him. Odysseus goes to find Pyrrhus, who apparently never sleeps, and says he feels guilty, which doesn't happen often. He says: when they leave Troy tomorrow, every man who died will have been buried, except for one.

Despite all his trickery and manipulation, Odysseus is the Greek king who would best understand Patroclus's relationship with Achilles, because of his own true love for his wife Penelope.

Odysseus adds that he wasn't Achilles's friend, but he valued him, and he got to know him well after ten years. He knows, therefore, that Achilles wouldn't want Patroclus forgotten. Pyrrhus asks if Achilles said so, and Odysseus says that he asked for their ashes to be mingled and for them to be buried together, so it's probably safe to assume. Patroclus appreciates how clever he is, for once. Odysseus adds that Patroclus was once a prince, that many soldiers respected him, and that he killed Sarpedon.

This is a masterclass in manipulation. Odysseus frames his request from Achilles's perspective, even though Patroclus is the one who's been haunting him. Odysseus is framing the need to bury Patroclus as fulfilling Achilles's wishes , Achilles's legacy. He also bends the truth so it seems like Achilles was concerned about how Patroclus would be remembered. Achilles wasn't—his burial request had more to do with allowing their souls to rest together than it did with Patroclus's legacy—but Odysseus acts like Achilles was invested in Patroclus's honor, something Pyrrhus can understand. Odysseus then gives examples of Patroclus's honor honed to appeal to the bloodthirsty Pyrrhus: his killing of a hero.

Pyrrhus argues that Patroclus's actions are only significant because of Patroclus's connection to Achilles. Odysseus agrees, but he notes that fame is fickle—some men are only famous after death. No one knows who will be remembered. One day, Odysseus could be more famous than Pyrrhus, a notion at which Pyrrhus scoffs. Odysseus asks if Pyrrhus has a wife—Odysseus's voice is thick with emotion as he says that he doesn't know when he'll see her again, and his only solace is that should he not see her again that they'll one day find each other in the underworld. Pyrrhus responds that Achilles had no such wife. Resigned, Odysseus says that he did all he can and asks that his attempt be remembered. Patroclus, his soul silently watching, remembers.

By dismissing Patroclus's actions, Pyrrhus is suggesting that dependence on someone else is inherently dishonorable, which again proves that he doesn't understand love. Odysseus's response is both ironic and meta-textual: he will *be more famous than Pyrrhus, as the titular character of Homer's* Odyssey, *while Pyrrhus is only a minor character in Greek mythology. Further, Odysseus's fame is based in part on his tricky intellect, but also for his steadfast love for his wife and relentless efforts to return to her. Odysseus's fame is based on love, which Pyrrhus scoffs at and can't understand. Ultimately, Odysseus is right that unexpected people become famous, which means that Pyrrhus's ideas about honor and legacy—the same ideas Achilles had earlier in the novel—are wrong. Odysseus's kindness in making this effort is genuinely honorable, whereas the Greeks' ideas about honor—as embodied in Pyrrhus—will seem cruel someday. The reason Odysseus is capable of being genuinely honorable is that he, like Achilles and unlike Pyrrhus, understands love.*

The Greeks leave Troy, and Patroclus remains, hovering near Achilles's grave. Achilles is in the underworld, and Patroclus can't be with him. As time passes, visitors come like tourists to see the monument. The stone depicts Achilles's greatest acts of violence: killing Memnon, Hector, Penthesilea. This is probably how Pyrrhus's grave will look too, Patroclus thinks. This is how people will remember Achilles.

Achilles's gravestone isn't incorrect about who he was: he did kill everyone the stone depicts. But it does seem unfair that his gravestone will look the same as Pyrrhus's, because while both men were killers, Achilles was also capable of love. Patroclus always attempted to separate Achilles the soldier from Achilles the man, but now everyone will only remember the former, and Achilles was definitely both. Achilles's legacy has turned out to be his cruelest acts, rather than those things Patroclus loved about him: his beauty, innocence, and ability to love and show empathy.

One day, Thetis comes to the monument. Patroclus hates her more than before—Pyrrhus was her doing, and she cared more about him than Achilles. He tries to speak to her and she leaves. But she comes back every day, and he always lashes at her with angry words. He tells her that she thought Chiron "ruined [Achilles]," but that it was she who did that. Now, he tells her, people will remember Achilles for the cruel acts he committed while half-mad with grief. The gods might call that glory, but there's no glory in murder. Humans die easily, and Achilles should be remembered for other things.

Patroclus has sometimes blamed Thetis for things that aren't her fault, but these criticisms strike true. Thetis did believe that Achilles's humanity and capacity for love weakened him, when in fact those traits were what kept him from being as monstrous as Pyrrhus. One might argue, in contrast, that Patroclus here swings too often swung in the other direction by suggesting that Achilles's grief, which stemmed from love, meant that the murders he committed weren't entirely his doing. But Thetis's fault is greater, as she drove Achilles to deny what made him unique among heroes in order to chase glory and godhood. That Thetis now keeps returning to the monument each day, despite Patroclus's verbal attacks, suggests that she misses Achilles, and feels some regret over her actions.

Thetis asks what things, and Patroclus tells her, newly unafraid: returning Hector's body to Priam, playing the **lyre**, claiming the Trojan women. Thetis interjects, saying that was Patroclus, not Achilles. He responds to ask why she's not with Pyrrhus, and she responds that Pyrrhus was murdered by Agamemnon's son for raping his bride. Patroclus asks, scornfully, if Pyrrhus was really better than Achilles. She asks him to share more memories, so he does; he wants Achilles to live. He tells her about small moments of joy with Achilles, such as the way he ran and how his hair looked in the sun.

Once again, Patroclus sees Achilles as just a little bit better than he really was. Achilles did return Hector's body and he was skilled with the lyre, but Achilles certainly wouldn't have saved the Trojan woman without Patroclus's urging. By reminding Patroclus of this, Thetis forces Patroclus to come to terms with Achilles's complications and contradictions. At the same time, Patroclus forces Thetis to value Achilles's humanity. She seems to realize that she made a mistake with Pyrrhus—ultimately, he died because he wasn't capable of love or empathy, and Achilles died because he was. It's not hard to see who she should have appreciated more. Her request that Patroclus share more memories seems to be an acknowledgment that Achilles's humanity meant something—that it made him special. In this scene, Patroclus is building a new, verbal memorial to Achilles, totally unlike the memorial on Achilles's grave. This is the legacy he always wanted to build for Achilles, and although people will always remember Achilles's cruel deeds and might even consider them honorable, he's ensuring that they'll also remember Achilles's kindness. This memorial is only heard by Thetis, but it's made permanent on a meta level: Patroclus's memorial of Achilles is the one that readers of the novel will remember, since it comes at the story's end.

Thetis, in turn, tells Patroclus of her rape and that it came about because of the Fates' prophecy about Achilles prior to his birth: that he'd outshine his father. This frightened the gods, so they forced her to mate with a mortal to lessen Achilles's potential power. Now she can't go to Achilles in the underworld, so this monument of him is all she has.

This story of Thetis's rape is very different from the one Patroclus heard earlier. He believed that her assault was a reward for Peleus's piety, which may be partly true. But the gods also needed Thetis to bear a son with a mortal because they knew her son would end up being more powerful than his father. If his father was a god, that would make the son unimaginably powerful. Thetis's agency was taken away not just to reward Peleus but to maintain the patriarchal status quo—to ensure that the male gods weren't outshone by an unborn child. Thetis had no control then and she has no control now: all of her scheming was for nothing, because she can't even see her son.

When Patroclus has shared everything he could, Thetis tells him, sorrowfully, that she couldn't make Achilles into a god. He says it doesn't matter, because she "made him." After a long pause, she tells Patroclus that she did it, and he notices that the grave now bears both of their names. Achilles is waiting for him, she says. He goes; two shadows find each other in the darkness, and light emerges.

Patroclus is basically telling Thetis that the fact that she loved Achilles is enough, and that the fact of Achilles uniqueness as a mortal outshines whether he would ever become a god. In the end, the love Patroclus and Achilles shared saves Patroclus's soul, because this love of Achilles that he shares with Thetis convinces her to mark the gravestone with Patroclus's name. Achilles's final act of love for Patroclus also factors in: his kindness toward Priam was one of the things that must have swayed Thetis, and he returned Hector's body only because he could understand Priam's grief. Achilles's love for Patroclus redeemed him, while Thetis's love for her son redeems her is hers. She's been cruel to Patroclus for years, but she wants Achilles to be happy even if that happiness excludes her. And in marking the grave, Thetis takes agency in a way she never has before, despite all her scheming. At the end of the novel, Patroclus's soul is at rest with Achilles's and readers remember Achilles as the full, complicated person he was, rather than the one-dimensional hero depicted on his grave or one-dimensional innocent Patroclus constantly tried to justify. Because the novel ends with their reunion, the real legacy Patroclus and Achilles share is their love for one another.

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