

ACHILLES

on Skyros



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R

Mature Readers

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Achilles on Skyros

Cooper and Kadee

Thetis looked up from the scroll she'd been reading, and the breath caught in her throat as she saw Peleus, her husband, standing in the morning sun that poured through the eastward windows in her seaside cottage. The sun caught in his golden hair and highlighted the ridges in his chiseled body, from the bulging chest to the hard ridges of his stomach.

"Mother," Achilles said, stretching. "I'm going hunting."

"Achilles," Thetis said. He looked more and more like his father every day. "Oh. I'm making breakfast. Stay and eat with me."

"I'll eat what I kill," Achilles said.

"But I've cooked all this oatmeal."

"Oatmeal is for horses, mother. Anyway, I'm meeting some of the other men. We're going to drill for the great war."

The mention of the war sent a pang of fear through Thetis' heart. It had been foretold that Achilles would die in the war, but he was determined to go and fight. She would wait for a better time to try, again, to save him.

"Well, at least come and eat lunch with me. You'll be famished, and I will make your favorite."

"I will be hunting, mother."

"In the afternoon? What sort of..."

"In the afternoon, I hunt not food, but females."

He really was like his father, Thetis thought, this time bitterly. “You shouldn’t toy with a girl’s heart,” Thetis said. “Girls are sensitive and emotional, and they will be hurt so deeply by your false intentions.”

“Bye, Mother,” Achilles said, leaning down to give her a kiss on the cheek. He strode out of the house and into the morning, leaving Thetis alone with her pot of bubbling oats. She’s stirred them, thinking about Achilles’ father, Peleus. Thetis had refused his advances repeatedly, changing shape to escape him when he pursued her— a doe, an eagle, a dolphin. She screamed at him, told him to stay away from her, that she would never marry him. Men. He refused to listen, insisted that she wanted him, that he could see it in her eyes.

She felt sick now even thinking about it, how frustrating and terrifying it had been to have this man hunt her like an animal. Finally, he had snuck into her cave while she slept and bound her with magic ropes given him by that ass, the sea god Proteus. She’d awoken, terrified to find Peleus in her home, to found herself bound, him leering. “You are mine,” he’d said. “And I will keep you imprisoned here until you relent and swear before the gods to be my bride.”

“Never!” She’d spat, and taken the shape of a flame, then a lioness, a mighty serpent, but she could not break the bindings, and Peleus just sat there, laughing at her. She’d tried tears and bribes, but he had only laughed and laughed. Days passed, and she starved, grew parched, became delirious, took forms more terrible, more repulsive, but Peleus only drank and laughed, placed food just out of reach, water. She didn’t know how long it had gone on, but finally, aching with hunger, exhausted, her will broken, she’d agreed and sworn to Zeus and Hera both that she would be wife to Peleus.

He'd grinned, putting his hand non her cheeks and kissing her, he'd said, "I love you so much."

"Love?" She whispered, looking into his hard, glassy eyes, eyes that seemed full of something more like hate than love. "You call this love?"

"I will show you," he said. "Now that you are *mine*."

It had been like that between them. She was just a thing to him, a possession, to be trotted out and shown off, a prize. She, a nymph, he a mortal, she'd been his singular prize, the trophy he felt proved above all else that he was better than other men. And, of course, a receptacle for his pleasure.

How often she had wished he could know what it was like to be a woman, to be a woman married to a man like him. How she would have loved to see him reduced to a pretty bauble, clinging to some man's arm. She didn't know if she would have stayed with him until his days came to an end, given how much her spirit had been broken, and how fully she'd bound herself to him in the very presence of Zeus, but her son. She had to protect her son. She didn't want him to grow up to be such a foul man. She'd spirited Achilles away, given him to the wise centaur Chiron to raise him, to teach him the arts and to make him the best of men.

And for what? It seemed Achilles had too much of his father in him. And now he was to go off to war and die a hero's death, and it would only be when he found himself a shade that he would realize the futility of his pursuit of glory.

Well, there was still time. Perhaps she could find some way to save him, but for now, she decided, she would make good use of all these extra oats. Taking the iron pot from the fire, she poured the steaming oats into a clay jar, wrapped it in woolen cloths and then made her way outside,

walking the winding paths to where her grandmother, Tethys, lived with two of her daughters. “Thetis!” Tethys cried when she saw her granddaughter entering the compound. She got to her feet and hurried to her, gathering her into her arms for a great hug.

Thetis’ aunts, nymphs like her, also gave her hugs, and then they sat down at a stone table beneath a grove of fig trees. Without even asking, Tethys began mixing figs and almonds as well as molasses into the oatmeal, something that would have infuriated Thetis if her mother had done its but which, coming from her grandmother just made her feel warm and cozy. Soon, they were joined by a flock of giggling girls, children of this one of that one who’d come to live with Thetis.

“I wish I had had a daughter,” Thetis said, braiding one of the girl’s hair. “It would be so much easier than raising a son.”

“Ha!” Her grandmother said. “You must not remember how you drove your mother to distraction with your foolishness as a girl.”

“Was Cousin Thetis a bad girl?” The little girl whose hair Thetis braided asked, flashing a gap toothed smile.

“No. Not bad. Just a girl like any other too freely governed by her heart.”

Thetis smiled, thinking of some of the mischief she’d gotten into as a child. “Well, whatever else the case may be, daughters do not go off to war.”

“Is Achilles to leave soon for the war?” Thetis said, putting her hand on Thetis cheek.

“Yes. And there he will die. It has been foretold.” A tear rolled down her cheek. She sniffled.

“All mortals must pass on to Hades,” Tethys said. “It is their doom, not that it makes it any easier for those that love them.”

“I know. But he could live a long life, and I could have more years with him if only it weren’t for his obsession with fame and glory. He would sacrifice everything for nothing.”

“Men,” Tethys said. “It is always the same with them. They think it takes courage to die, but we women know it takes far more courage to live. If only Achilles had been born a girl, he would know this.”

“If only he’d been born a girl...”. Thetis said. And then she thought, *or became one*. She snickered at the thought, imagining Achilles as a slender young woman, thinking what his father would say to find his mighty son was now a girl and no longer a warrior. But, of course, that was all impossible. Achilles would never agree to such a thing. He was a man and all man.

She went about her day, but the idea would not leave her.

Chapter Two

“It could be fun to be a girl,” Thetis said.

“I am a man,” Achilles said, his voice full of disgust. “There is a war coming, and I will go and stand with the men of Greece to win glory and fame!”

“You will die,” Thetis said. “It has been foretold.”

Achilles could see the fear and sorrow in his mother’s eyes, and he gave her a hug. “Mother, you give too much credit to the superstitious murmurings of these witches. A man is not bound by fate or the stars. He forges his own destiny with the strength of his arm, the reach of his sword, the thrust of his spear.”

“I am a nymph, Achilles. I know very well the truth of the prophesies. If you go and fight, you will gain great fame, and your name will be remembered down through the ages, but what good will that do you when you are but a shade dwelling in the cold, lifeless realm of Hades? You get one life, my son, and one only. Do not throw it away for Menelaus and his ego. Men, Achilles, men fight and kill and die for nothing more than pride, a pride which turns out to be as false and fleeting as fame, as glory.”

“Paris kidnapped Helen, Mother. He seized her and dragged her off in the night. Should we not defend this poor girl, rescue her from that fiend whose actions were fueled by the very false pride you now decry? We must put him in his place, he and all men who think they can treat the Achaen women as cattle. Would you really have your own son respond to such an affront not by protecting this poor girl, but becoming a girl, himself, to cower in dresses while other men fight and die?”

“Paris did not kidnap Helen,” Thetis said. “She went with him willingly.”

“Mother. Please,” Achilles said. “You must forget this foolishness. Had I been born a girl, then would I gladly accept a woman’s place and a woman’s life, but this is not my fate.”

Thetis looked on her son, and knowing his fate, she felt as if she had a dagger in her heart, that all the life would drain out of her. He was all she had, the one thing she lived for, and she could not bear the thought of life without him. “One day,” she said. “Agree to spend one day living as a girl. Just for fun. Haven’t you ever wondered what it is like to live life as a member of the fairer sex?”

Achilles snorted with disgust. “Never,” he said. “I have no desire to be a foolish girl.” Achilles had, however, sometimes wondered what it was like to be a girl, especially as he had gotten older and begun to appreciate their charms and their difference. Often when he spoke with girls he felt like he could never truly speak to them, and they could never speak to him with honesty. There was something in being a member of the opposite sex that placed a barrier between them, he felt, and he had sometimes wondered what it would be like to talk to a girl as a girl, with none of the nervousness and anxiety between them. He had also, seeing a group of girls dancing in the meadow, or sitting in a circle, or swimming in the ocean, felt a desire to be among them, not as a boy but as a girl, free to giggle and laugh, to sing and dance. He had wondered what girls talked about when there were no boys around, and what it felt like to wear such soft, silken gowns. To be small and pretty, and

But no. He pushed the thoughts away. A man must not indulge such thoughts. A warrior must never allow anything weak and feminine and womanly to linger in his mind.

“Just one day,” Thetis said. “Do it for me. Please?”

“Mother, no. You know the shame I would bring on myself should I be discovered dressed as a girl.” Achilles got up. The conversation was beginning to disturb him, awakening in him shameful thoughts and fantasies he had worked to bury deep in his heart. “I am going hunting,” Achilles said. “And I beg you to let this matter pass. I am disturbed to know you think so little of me that would make a maiden of me rather than a man.”

“I do not consider a maiden less than a man.”

“Well, right,” Achilles said. “I have to go. Metina is meeting me down at the cove.”

“Metina?” Thetis said. “I don’t like her.”

“Well, you don’t have to kiss her, then, but her lips are like the sweetest wine to me!”

“She has you wrapped around her little finger!”

“That’s what I let her think,” Achilles said, bounding out the door.

Thetis frowned. Her son! So maddening! So driven by his passions! He would follow them right into the jaws of death. Maybe she should let this idea go, this notion that she would convince him to become a girl. It was foolishness. Truly, she could force it on him, but then he would merely proclaim his true identity to the world, and they would come and restore him to his true shape. He was far too valuable to the Greek cause, and as well it had been foretold that they could not win the war without mighty Achilles at the scene. The only thing Achilles loved as much as making war was loving women, and he would get to do neither if he were to become one.

That is, unless he were to fall in love with a girl who preferred the fairer sex. Thetis thought immediately of Deidamia, said to be one of loveliest girls in all the world, and one who loved girls more than men as well, which in her country was quite acceptable. What if she Achilles were to fall in love with this girl? Would his passions than overtake his manly pride?

In a flash, Thetis flew to the heights of Mount Olympus, where she found Zeus sitting on his porch drinking wine. "Thetis!" He cried. "You are looking as lovely as ever!"

They embraced. "Don't let Hera hear you say that," Thetis said. "Or I will find myself turned into a toad."

"Hahahaha. She still holds a grudge against you for protecting me when she and the other Gods tried to overthrow my rule. So, what brings you to Olympus?"

"I have a favor to ask," Thetis said, and then she leaned close to Zeus and began to whisper.

Chapter Three

Achilles woke, sat up and stretched. Scratched his balls. Swinging his legs over the side of his bed, he found his feet hit the floor before expected and his heels barked. He squinted. Looked around. This was not his room. Pastel colors. Figurines. He reached out and picked up one of the eggshell blue figurines on the table near the bed— a mother goat with her kid. This was a girl's room. Had he fallen asleep in one of his conquests; homes? Her father would be furious. He smirked, only then realizing that he wore a girl's gauzy night dress. He snickered, looking around for his clothes, but found nothing but gowns, jewelry.

A knock on the door. "Zeus' beard," Achilles murmured.

He went to the open window, meaning to climb out, make a run for it, already thinking about the fun he would have when he told this story to the boys, but when he got to the window and looked out over a city of whitewashed houses descending to an emerald sea. He did not recognize the city, and he paused, trying to remember. Who had he been with last night? He didn't remembered anything other than going home and sleeping in his own bed.

The door creaked open behind him. Achilles braced, ready to confront an angry father, a furious mother, feeling a little awkward wearing a girl's night gown. The boys would laugh when he told them this story—

"Good morning, Achilles."

"Mother?" He shook his head. "What is this?" Then, he remembered their conversation, her ridiculous suggestion that he should become a girl. He felt... threatened, suddenly, as he looked again at the soft, girl's room, plucked at the diaphanous material of his dress. "No. I told you no!"

“Please, hear me out,” Thetis said, walking to Achilles, meaning to take him in her arms.

Achilles pushed her away. “Stay away. I can’t believe you would do this to me. Where are we?”

“We are on Skyros, my son. You could hide here, live a happy life.”

“I will NOT be a girl,” Achilles shouted. “You must let go of this ridiculous notion.”

They argued, Achilles won. Thetis sat, her head down, defeated. “Mother,” Achilles said, once more dressed in his own clothes. “You know I love you. I would that you would love me, too, as I am.” He had begun to feel that Thetis did not love him, that she bore him some ill will he did not understand. It seemed odd that a mother would want to see her son reduced to daughter, denied all opportunity to glory and doomed instead to a life as wife and mother.

“I love you as you are,” Thetis said. “I will always love you. You are the very image of your father.”

“Well, I am glad that is all settled. We return to Thessaly, and I to train with my brothers in arms.” He cracked his knuckles.

“Could I ask you one favor, my beloved son?”

Achilles sighed. “The matter is settled.”

“Not that. No. But, the Festival of Pallas begins tomorrow, and King Lycomedes has invited me to attend the festivities. It would be quite rude for me to fail to honor the king’s invitation.”

“King Lycomedes is a great warrior and a man of honor,” Achilles said. “You must attend.”

“And I would love for you to accompany me.”

Achilles crossed his arms over his chest. “As your son?”

“As my son. I swear, I have seen the foolishness of my silly whims.”

“I would be honored then, to stand at the side of my lovely mother and meet the great king.”

“Oh, you are the best son a mother could ever want. I am so pleased. Now, I am off. I have a fete to attend. Why don’t you explore the city? It is said to be among the best in all the world.”

“I’ll find something to do,” Achilles said. “I doubt there is much wild game here, but there are bound to be women and wine.”

“You’re so bad!”

“I know.”

Thetis went off to the palace, where she had arranged to meet with the King’s daughter, Deidamia. “Princess,” she said as she entered. “So pleased to make your acquittance.”

Deidama rose, and Thetis looked her over, pleased. Deidama was tall, with long, lithe legs and arms. She was clearly an athletic girl, as her limbs showed the lean, rounded muscle a girl only got when she spent time running, swimming. She had a beautiful face, with big eyes that blazed with intelligence, but a strong face and an almost manly chin. It was the face of one born to rule. “Thetis,” Deidama said. “Who rescued Zeus himself? Who summoned the hundred armed giant to Olympus? Descended from the Titans? It is my honor.”

The women hugged and clasped hands in mutual respect. They ate, drank wine and chatted. Once they had grown comfortable with one another, Thetis got to business. “So, Deidamia. You know of my son, Achilles?”

The slightest shadow passed over Deidamia’s face, quickly masked with her usual calm and pleasant demeanor. “Your son is a legend, even at a

young age,” Deidamia said. “It is said that he alone holds the key to a Greek victory in the great war to come.”

‘Indeed. It is also said that he will die in that very war.’

Deidamia’s heart went out to Thetis. “It must be hard for a mother to know her son faces an early death, but a comfort to know it will be in the pursuit of glory.”

“I have a proposal for you regarding my son,” Thetis said, wanting to get down to business.

“I am so sorry,” Deidamia said. “But I do not wish to marry, and you would need my father’s permission, and—“

“Not marriage,” Thetis said. “Something else.”

“What, then?”

Thetis sipped her wine. Took a deep breath. “I do not want my child to die. I wish, and I am asking for your help, in hiding Achilles here on Skyros.”

“I don’t understand why you would need my help for that,” Deidamia said. “Nor why Skyros should be your choice.”

“You and the King’s other daughters are protected, almost cloistered. Were Achilles to be among you, no one would ever find him. He would live a long, happy life, and I would have him with me.”

“Thetis, I am so sorry. A man can not live among the royal girls, and especially not one with, forgive me for saying so, your son’s reputation.”

“Yes. I know of my son and the way he treats women, and I would never suggest that fox be let loose in the henhouse. I mean, my suggestion, well, let me blunt: I mean for Achilles to be reshaped into a maiden.”

Deidamia put her hand to her chest, a bark-like laugh escaping from her. “A maiden?”

“You laugh, and I know it must sound foolish, but it is a way to keep my child alive! Oh, forget I even raised the idea and please don’t—“

“Wait. Thetis, I am most intrigued by the idea of Achilles reshaped as a girl. I laughed out of surprise, not contempt. From what I have heard it would serve him right, if you don’t mind me saying. But, where do I come into this plan? My mother would be the one to seek to get *Achilles* into the castle.”

“I must find some way to get Achilles to agree to become a girl, and to live and act as one. To accept not only a girl’s shape, but her life as well. I believe I could do that if he were to fall in love with a girl—who liked other girls.”

Deidamia’s eyes sparkled. “Achilles, turned into a girl and made my lover?” Her hand went to her throat. She bit her lip. She had fantasized about such a thing, turning some swaggering male into her pretty little plaything. It had shamed her and made her feel that she was somehow weird or broken, and yet now along came Thetis, this beautiful nymph, and offered up her own son? The great warrior, Achilles? She pictured him with soft breasts, wide, round hips, slender little arms, his skin so soft, so clear. She imagined Achilles batting his eyelashes and asking in his small, tea kettle voice, “Do you love me? Please tell me that you love me!”

Her mouth felt dry, and when she spoke her voice was hoarse, scratchy. “Tell me more,” she said, pouring each of them another glass of wine. “Tell me everything.”

Achilles, meanwhile, had met a beautiful peasant girl with full, firm breasts and inviting lips. "I will take you away from here," he promised as he led her into a wine cellar they'd passed along the road. "I leave for Thessaly tomorrow, and you can live with me in my mansion."

"You have a mansion?" The girl said, her eyes going wide. She heard her mother's voice somewhere deep down inside, warning her about boys like this, the ones who swept you off your feet with promises and more promises. But he was so tall and so handsome, so much better spoken than any of the local boys.. and that golden hair! How it shone. How could such a handsome boy be anything but truthful?

"I have many mansions," Achilles said. "And I would show you all of them."

The girl did not get a chance to answer. His lips were on hers, and she felt the fire pass through her entire body, even to her finger tips. His hands were on her body, squeezing, caressing, and she pressed herself against him, moaning, kissing, and he reached back and untied her dress, pulling it off her. He seemed overcome with passion, and it thrilled her to know it was she who had driven this boy to such savage need. Yet, she knew if he wanted it all, she would say no. She found herself on her back, he on top, staring down at her with these piercing eyes. "I want to make love to you," he said.

Summoning all her will, she said, "No. I can't "

"You want it," Achilles said, running his hand across her cheek. "I see it in your eyes."

She sighed, the need within her growing deeper, the fire hotter. But, "I do not want to risk being with child."

"You won't. It never happens the first time."

“My mother...”

“Forget your mother,” Achilles said, finding a soft place to put his hand, squeezing, lifting. “I need to do this. Please. I am on fire and only you can keep me from combusting and dying in a blaze of frustrated passion.”

“I have to save myself for my husband.”

Achilles’ hand slipped down her body, found her most vulnerable place, a place he knew well. The girl yelped, bucked, her eyes going glassy.

“Oh,” she gasped. “Please. I mustn’t. Find some other girl.”

And then he said the words that shook her right to the core of her being. “You’re special,” he said. “You’re not like other girls. You’re the one I must have. You and only you.”

Special. She’d always believed it. And now to hear it from this perfect man? “Yes,” she cried, the word being torn from someplace deep within her. “Take me, Ulysses. Take me!”

After, she lay on her back, staring at the ceiling. Achilles ran his finger along her sternum, then between her full, firm breasts. He then ran it along the base of her right breast, and then along the side, and he cupped her breasts, her nipple against his palm, and he felt it hardening against his hand, getting stiff, and then he rubbed it with his thumb. “How does that feel?” He asked.

“Good,” she answered.

“But, how, I mean? Can you describe it?”

“When you touch me there, it is like you touch me all over and even inside. I feel... a tingle, a charge, through my whole body.”

“It is known that the gods made women to be creatures of pleasure,” Achilles said.

“Oh?”

Achilles smiled. Women. He did love their bodies. So soft and so full of contradictions. The flat tummy, the round breasts. The narrow waist. The wide hips. He loved the smallness of them—the tiny hands and feet. The soft voices, like the morning bird. Such delicate things, and so well designed to please a man.

How could his mother have ever thought he would accept such a lesser life? Reduce to a toy, really, a beautiful thing pleasing to the eyes and the hands, fated to be a wife, a mother, but never to have any glory of her own? No, not he. He loved women, but he would never want to be one.

He kissed her on the lips and got up. “I have to go,” he said. “Be good, beautiful girl.”

She pushed herself up on her elbows and watched as he dressed, drinking in that tall, perfect body for what she knew was the last time. Part of her wanted to just let him walk out, to let him believe he’d fooled her. But something made her say it. She buried her hands in her hair and pulled it back over her shoulders, away from her face. “I know you are never coming back for me. It was all just a fantasy.”

Achilles looked at her, annoyed. “Yes, but did you have to ruin it by saying so?”

Chapter Four

At dawn, Achilles woke to the sound of the trumpet blast coming from the palace that stood at the highest point in the city. They blasted three times, and Achilles felt his heart race as it brought to mind the call to arms, the mustering for war. It was answered not by the battle cried of the generals, but the cheerful shouts of the revelers who had gathered from all over Skyros and all the islands of the Sporades archipelago for the great feast of Pallas. With the rising on the sun and the trumpet call, the festival began, music filling the streets, wine flowing and the revelers beginning their revels.

Soon, Achilles and Thetis found themselves pushing through the crowds, making their way toward the palace. In every square musicians played, or actors performed plays. Many of the revelers wore masks, and as was common many men dressed as women and women as men, Great grills had been set up throughout the city, and filled the air with the smell of charcoal and charred meat, and everywhere the pipping sounds of children's voices as they ran between and around the legs of the adults, playing at tag and hide and seek and keep away and other such games as children played.

"Why are we going to the palace?" Achilles asked as he chewed on a great goose leg he'd bought from one of the vendors, fat and joules dripping from his chin.

"The daughters of the King are to do a dance for Pallas," Thetis shouted into Achilles' ear. "I told you last night."

"Oh, yes. Dance. Why don't we stay here?" Achilles said. A group of musicians were hammering out some rustic tune while a group of women

wearing fairy wings drunkenly danced around bare breasted, acting out some legend or another.

“The dance is said to be most exquisite.”

“But there won’t be any naked breasts! Go on without me.”

“Achilles!” Thetis said. “You promised to accompany me.”

“Very well,” Achilles said, taking another bite out of his goose leg.

“Besides,” Thetis added. “The daughters of the king are said to be quite lovely.”

“So you keep telling me. Let’s go then, mother, to see the *exquisite dance*.”

The great courtyard to the palace was open on this day to all, and it was packed with people commoner and royal alike, as Thetis and Achilles entered. They had seats reserved in the royal box and were led there by a pair of guardsmen as soon as they arrived, making their greetings and taking their seats just as the performance began.

“This is so exciting!” Thetis whispered, covering Achilles’ hand with her own, though her real excitement came from the plan she was about to unfurl, the one she hoped would save her son’s life.

Achilles rolled his eyes. The music began, and the royal girls came from behind a curtain, their slender arms in the air, bells clinking from their fingers. They wore short dresses that left their long legs exposed, and Achilles admired their lithe, brown bodies. They were all quite pleasing to the eye, with long, thick hair, and firm young breasts, but his eyes were drawn most to the tallest one. She had a strong, athletic body, the kind a girl gets from swimming, running, and looking at her round, well-formed limbs Achilles imagined it would be pleasing to bed her. She looked like

the kind of girl who could put up a fight, which would make the moment she yielded all the more pleasing.

Having roved over her body, his eyes rose to her face, and even from some distance he could see the fire in those dark eyes, the passion.

Just as their eyes met, Cupid, who had been lingering in the shadows, smiled and loosed his arrow, watching with glee as it plunged right into Achilles heart.

Achilles, who had been appreciating the beauty of Deidamia, suddenly felt like he had been kicked by a horse. His whole body grew hot as he stared Deidamia, and he felt a hollowness in him, a need he had never known. "Who is that girl?" He whispered to his mother. "The tall one?"

Thetis smiled to herself, knowing about cupid, whom Zeus had ordered here, the favor she had asked. "Her name is Deidamia," Thetis said. "She is very pretty."

"I have never seen anyone like her," Achilles said, so overcome with love for her that he didn't think to hide it from his mother. "She is I don't even have words."

"Would you like to meet her?" Thetis said. "I could introduce you after the dance."

"Yes," Achilles whispered. "I would like that." He watched her now, but not with the same appraising eyes as before, the same arrogance. He watched her now a man totally in awe of a woman, and he admired her shape, her spirit, her passion. He had to be with her, and he knew even at that moment, he would do anything to be by her side.

When the dance ended, Thetis led Achilles to a place back stage. Deidamia, her body beaded with sweat, talked to some of the other girls, who quickly scattered in a cloud of giggles as Thetis and Achilles

approached. "Thetis!" Deidamia said, giving her a hug, but keeping their bodies apart so as not to get sweat on Thetis dress. "You look so lovely!"

"Thank you! Oh, this is my son, Achilles."

"Your dancing was heavenly," Achilles said, staring right into her eyes. When he first met a girl he longed for, he always stared into her eyes until she looked away.

"Yes," Deidamia said, meeting his eyes, unwavering. "I am the best dancer in all of Greece. It is well known."

The arrogance! Achilles thought, deciding he needed to put her in her place. "Dancing is a fine little hobby for a girl, but, of course, of little real value in the world."

"Oh, and I suppose you think going around hitting people with lumps of metal is some great accomplishment? Or stabbing helpless animals with sticks?"

They kept staring into each other's eyes, and the whole time Achilles longing only grew hotter. How he needed this girl and all her fire and arrogance. "What sort of fool girl are you?" Achilles asked.

"The kind who doesn't like men," Deidamia answered with a wicked grin.

Achilles dropped his eyes, giving the victory to Deidamia. He didn't care. He felt like he'd been struck with a dagger right in his heart. Could it be possible? Could the gods be so cruel? "You don't like men?"

"I like sweet, pretty girls, with soft skin and pretty voices," Deidamia said. "I love everything about girls and care nothing at all for..." and she gestured up and down Achilles' body... "Man. Now, goodbye." And with that she turned and strutted away, leaving Achilles standing there, feeling an empty sadness like he'd never known, feeling like any hope he ever had to be

happy was walking away from him now, having expressed nothing but contempt for him.

I will find a way, he vowed. I will win her!

“She’s amazing, isn’t she?” Thetis said, coming back to stand next to her son.

“Yes,” Achilles said, watching as she vanished around a corner. “But...”. He was about to tell his mother that Deidamia liked girls, but then it all clicked, just as his mother had planned. He could become a girl. He could be with Thetis.

“What?”

“Nothing.”

“Well, consider yourself lucky. The King is quite protective of his daughters. They rarely leave the palace grounds, and none but the royal family are allowed near them until they are married. Today is the only day you would ever have had a chance to meet her. Did you like her?”

“Oh, she was tolerable. I must say her face was more pleasing than her tongue.”

“Well, let’s go and enjoy the festival! I am feeling a bit parched, aren’t you?”

“Yes. Very,” Achilles said. “I need wine. Lots and lots of wine.”

Thetis had determined to say nothing more about Achilles becoming a girl. She wanted it to come from him, and so all day long she plied him with wine, knowing it would weaken his inhibitions, his reluctance to assume female form. Likewise, she knew the love that cupid had implanted would grow and grow, the need and desire build until it would come rushing out in a torrent.

It finally happened as Apollo finished his journey across the sky. She and Achilles had gone down to the cove and sat on an ancient seawall, watching the sun set out over the ocean, painting it and the clouds in purples and reds. Just as the sun passed below the horizon, but while the light yet lingered. “Mother,” Achilles, his speech slurred with wine, had said. He had an embarrassed grin on his face, and even in the gathering gloom she could see him blushing. “Would you think... I mean... I am shamed to say it.... The thing is...”

Thetis just smiled, waiting, knowing it was hard for him to say the words.

“Do you know how you talked of me? Me? Me... um... living with the king’s daughters?”

Thetis noticed he couldn’t even say becoming a girl, but she understood. “Yes?”

“Well, and it is not because I am afraid of war or fighting or death or anything like that!”

‘Of course not.’

“But I... well...”

“Yes?”

“I would do it. To please you. I would.”

“Oh, Achilles,” Thetis said, and she could not stop herself crying. “I am so happy. Let’s go and do it now, then. Right now.”

“Now?”

“Yes. I have a potion given me by Hecate. All you need do is drink it.”

They made their way back to the rooms where they were staying. Achilles heart raced, and he changed his mind three times on the way back, but each time he thought of Deidamia and her fiery eyes, and he

resolved to go through with it. He would face anything to win her, even this.

And so, he found himself standing there, a clay jar in hand. “Drink,” Thetis said. “And have this adventure.”

“It would be an adventure, wouldn’t it?” Achilles said, and then he giggled. “I can’t believe I am going to do this. Mother, I am going to be a girl!”

“I know. I’m proud of you.”

Achilles’ heart raced. His hand trembled. He closed his eyes, and he lifted the jar, pouring the liquid into his mouth. It tasted sweet, like honey, and he swallowed it down, then opened his eyes and said, “It’s done. What now?”

“Sleep, my daughter,” Thetis said, leading him back to his room.

“Daughter?” Achilles laughed. “I guess I will have to get used to that.”

“And so much more,” Thetis said as Achilles lay down, his eyes heavy, and immediately fell asleep. She kissed him on the forehead and looked at his face, that handsome face that reminded her so much of her husband. In the morning, she would have a daughter, and though she would miss her son, she felt good knowing that her new daughter would be safe and live a long life.

While Achilles slept Thetis threw away the last of his male clothes, and she lay out a pretty dress for him to wear in his first day as a young woman.

Chapter Five

Achilles woke, sat up and stretched his arms high above his head. He felt his chest sway, felt his nipples pressing against his night shirt, but that felt like they were floating inches away from his chest, and he looked down to see round breasts filling the tops of his shirt, then at small, white hands, delicate wrists, and he remembered it all. He'd drunk the potion. He'd agreed to become a girl. "No... no... no..." he whispered, putting a hand to his throat as he heard the chirping of a baby chick coming from his mouth. He felt sick with shame and fear as he leapt out of bed and ran to the mirror on the other side of the room, feeling his breasts bouncing with every step. A slender girl with red and golden hair stared back at him, her pretty eyes wide with shock and terror.

A kind of animal cry escaped from her plump, pink lips, "aaahhhhhhhh" and she looked over herself in horror, disgusted and ashamed of every single part of her body from her tiny, stick like arms to her long, rounded legs, her long, slender neck to that face, a pretty face, a kissable face, a face that embody feminine vulnerability, a face men would long to kiss, to touch.... And breasts. He had soft breasts now, just like any girl. "Ahhhhhhh," she cried again, lifting her shirt, and seeing that she was truly a female in every way. "No," she chirped again, terrified of that empty space, that lack, that gap. "No!"

Spinning, his long hair swirling around his head, he bolted from his room, ignoring all the wrongness of his body, his legs, his hips, the jiggling and swaying. 'Mother! This is a mistake! I don't know what I was thinking! Turn me back! Turn me back!'

Thetis, who'd been preparing breakfast, looked up at the pretty girl who'd come storming out her room. She was a vision of loveliness, long limbed, delicate, with a face that men would die for, and she was Achilles, the mighty warrior, and she could see in his wide, pretty eyes how scared he was at the thought of being a girl. Thetis smiled. "It's going to be okay."

"No," Achilles said, grimacing at the sound of his voice, higher and smaller now than his mother's. "It's not. I can't do this."

"Achilles," Thetis said, getting to her feet and crossing to her son. "There's no turning back."

Achilles realized he was looking directly into his mother's eyes. He looked around the room. Everything seemed higher now. "I'm as short as you," Achilles squeaked. "I'm.... I'm short. Tiny."

Thetis reached out and brushed his bangs from his eyes. "I'll help you," she said. "I'll show you how to be a maiden."

"No," Achilles said, feeling trapped, terrified. He turned away from her, hugging himself. "It was a mistake. I don't want this. Please. Change me back."

"I can't," Thetis said. "The potion. It was gifted me by Hecate, herself, in return for a favor I did her. You are a maiden now, and a maiden you must remain."

Achilles turned, his eyes filling with horror, and tears. "I am stuck like this, then?"

"Yes. I am afraid it is so."

"No," he said, sinking to the floor as the tears poured down his smooth, soft cheeks. "No...."

Once Achilles had cried himself out, his mood shifted, as mercurial as any girl's. He wiped his cheeks and pulled the hair back from his face. "Well," he said. "I suppose I shall have to make the most of it."

"You will make everything of it," Thetis said. "You'll see. Deidamia and the other girls are all such fun."

Deidamia. The name burned in Achilles' heart and reminded him of why he'd agreed to do this in the first place. A strand of hair got in his mouth and pulled it out, annoyed. "This hair is maddening."

"Let me braid it for you," Thetis said, delighted at the opportunity to play with her daughter's beautiful hair. "Oh, you have such lovely hair. The other girls will be so jealous!"

Achilles sighed. He had never wanted to make them jealous, but rather hot. Still, there was a certain girl he did hope would find his hair very pretty. As his mother sat behind him and began to weave his hair, he looked down at the embarrassing swelling of his chest. He cupped one of his breasts, lifted it and squeezed, feeling a pleasant tingle through his whole body. He took his hand away, confused and ashamed.

"I will show you how to walk and move with grace as a girl must," Thetis said.

'Ugh!"

"And speak in a modest, maidenly manner."

"Why should I want to do that?"

Thetis had given much thought as to how to motivate her son to embrace feminine decorum. "You would not have the girls that you were once a man, would you?"

"No," Achilles answered, horrified at the thought that anyone would know he had been reshaped into this shameful form.

“Nor would you, I expect, want to be an outcast, scorned by all the girls due to your rough speech and clumsy walk?”

“I suppose not,” Achilles said, resigning himself to the coming humiliation.

“Well, then, you must learn to walk and sit, to talk and move as a young lady.”

Achilles took a deep breath, feeling his breasts rise, press against his shirt.

“There,” his mother said, finishing with his hair. “All done. Take a look. You look so pretty I am jealous.”

‘I don’t care. I don’t want to look.’

“Well, then, go put your dress on and your sandals. I lay them out for you.”

Of course, Achilles thought. A dress. “Do I have to wear a dress around our house?” Achilles protested.

“You must get used to wearing a dress,” Thetis said, delighted, actually giddy. “Now, go, put it on and I will lay out breakfast. You can work on your table manners.”

Achilles went back to his room, the feminine room his mother had prepared for him. It had only been yesterday morning that he’d thought he’d won, that he made it clear he would never be a girl, and now in a day he has asked for it, and now he pulled soft, thin girl’s gown over his head, adjusted the slender straps on his shoulders, and felt another part of him die as he strapped on her sandals, complete with flashing little baubles only a girl would consider sensible.

Ruefully, determined to face his new reality, he stepped in front of the mirror and saw he was truly and even more a girl now than even that

morning when he awoke. Having a girl's body was shocking, but seeing that same body, seeing himself with his hair braided and pinned to his head like any girl's, seeing himself wearing the dress, that exposed his ridiculous little arms, his long, coltish legs, seeing how the dress clung to his breasts and hips, but seemed to tuck in to emphasize his slender waist, he felt he was not just a girl in the physical sense, but somehow mentally as well.

He was a bauble. A pretty thing. A girl. Men would want to lay with him, and his dress, his hair, it all spoke to the world and said, "I am a silly, pretty little thing." I am one of them now, he realized, the thought hitting hard. Girls. They had always been these mysterious, other, lesser things he'd looked at from afar, strange and incomprehensible. When they'd been young, he and the other boys had teased them, and when they gotten older hunted them, always talking about who had the best legs, breasts, who was willing to do what.... And now he had somehow crossed that chasm. He was now one of those mysterious and puzzling females.

And just what kind of girl had he become?

Petite. He was the girl people called petite. Tiny. Small. Like a bird. Delicate. He looked like the slightest blow might break him apart like a China doll. What good was a girl like this, what use other than as decoration?

Why? Why did I do this? His body shamed him. Every inch of it. He always been proud of his body before— his bulging muscles, his height. But now he felt only shame at his puny little arms and narrow shoulders, the swelling little breasts. A mistake. A terrible mistake. Am I really to be this girl now? Forever?

But then he thought of Deidamia. She would like him now, right? She would long to lay with him. She had to. He had done this for her. Become

this for her. And now, he was going to do more, become less and less a man, and if it didn't win her love he didn't know what he would do, how he would go on living! Pulling himself away from the image of that tiny little woman in the mirror, he left his room.

"Are you ready to learn how to be a lady?" Thetis asked, pleased at the sight of Achilles in his pretty dress.

"Yes," Achilles said. "Teach me."

The lessons began with breakfast, Thetis urging him to take small, birdlike bites of his food, instead of gulping it down as he had done when a boy. "Is it is crime for a girl to be hungry?" He asked, that piping sound of his little voice still grating in his ears.

"A girl should never seem hungry," Thetis answered. "You must always eat as if it were an afterthought."

"I was joking."

"I am not."

Achilles rolled his eyes. Thetis then drilled him on his walk, having him walk back and forth across the room as she offered instruction. "Smaller steps! Smaller!"

"Ugh!"

"And dainty. Like you are walking on eggshells!"

"Why?"

"Because. Now, again."

Thetis smiled, delighting in the sight of Achilles trying so hard to walk like a maiden, to be graceful and feminine. It suited him right after him being such a ruffian, and more it moved him ever further from the man he'd been, the warrior doomed to die and more into the realm of the lovely

maiden, blessed with long life. Further, she couldn't help but delight in how horrified His father would be to see his son walking and moving like a girl.

"I feel like a fool," Achilles said.

"You will feel better once you are among the girls. They all walk with pleasing gaits. Stop slouching! Shoulders back!"

"But it makes my... these things... stick out!"

"Of course it does," Thetis said. "And you do have lovely breasts."

"Mother!"

Shoulders back. Now, again."

The walking lessons progressed to sitting. Thetis demonstrated.

"Knees together, and you will lower yourself into the seat, like so." She sat, just as she had always sat, but now Achilles watched, noticing her posture and movements.

He walked over to the chair as gracefully as he could manage, then lowered himself into the seat. Feeling his dress bunch up under his legs, he tanked at the hem and wiggled uncomfortably. Thetis laughed. "What?"

"That was terrible!" She said.

"I'm trying!" Achilles squealed, exasperated.

"I know. Oh, dear, do not be offended. But I suppose you will admit already it is harder to be a girl than you supposed."

Achilles rolled his eyes again, and Thetis noted that while it had annoyed her when he'd been a boy, it now just looked cute. "So much more."

"Watch me again and notice how I keep my dress from riding up my legs like that. Also, you glanced down at the chair. You mustn't do that. Keep your chin up at all times— parallel to the floor."

"But how am I to see where I am sitting?"

“You just know. Watch.” Thetis sat, Achilles carefully noting her every move.

This time, he walked over to the chair and sat in as perfectly a maidenly way as any girl. He looked over at Thetis expectantly, brushing his bangs out of his eyes with a slender hand. “Well?”

“Perfect!” Thetis said, clapping. “Just as lovely as any girl!”

Achilles smiled with pride and relief, and it pleased Thetis to see him already taking pride in his femininity. Achilles, however, noticed his mother’s joy, and he slit his eyes. “You’re enjoying this, aren’t you?”

“I am. I always longed for a daughter, and now to have you and to spend this time with you. It is a dream come true for me! I am just, I don’t know how to say it. But, yes, I am pleased to see you in this shape, and doing so well at playing the maiden. I just know this is what’s right for you!”

“I wish I were as certain,” he said. Feeling that he needed to assert at least some little manhood, he frowned and said in as deep a voice as he could manage, which was not very deep. “So, is that it? Are these idiotic lessons done?”

“No,” Thetis said. “I am afraid not. We must train you to maidenly modesty in your speech.”

“Maidenly modesty?” He thought of how girls talked, and it sent a shiver down his spine. “Not all maidens are modest.”

“You must be, or they may guess your true sex.”

“I am sure I can mimic the foolish talk of girls,” Achilles said, and then letting his voice rise to an even higher register he waved his little hands about and said, “Oh, isn’t that dress the most darling little thing I have ever seen! Let’s go play with dolls and braid each other’s hair!”

Thetis crossed her arms. “You don’t really imagine that is how women speak to one another?”

“No. Okay. Fine, then. Teach me!”

They practiced, drank tea, practiced more. “So, what are your thoughts on the Trojan War?” Thetis asked.

Achilles took a sip of his tea, thinking through his answer before he spoke, something his mother had drilled into him. “I’m sure I wouldn’t know much about that,” he said. “I just pray to the Gods our brave men come back safely!” He smiled.

“Very good,” Thetis said.

“I feel like an idiot,” Achilles said, getting up and going to the window, looking out over the now dark city. “Does being a girl mean being a fool?”

“A little. Yes. Especially around men. They will only be offended or laugh at you should you offer opinions on war or business, politics or even religion. Your posture.”

Achilles realized he was standing with his legs spread wide and brought them together into a more ladylike pose. “And what about around women?” Achilles asked, feeling as if he were shrinking as they talked, being reduced more and more into a mere shadow.

“In public I would hold my tongue. Speak only of pleasing things, like the latest play or the newest fashions from Athens. In private, someone you are closer with, you make speak freely.”

“Speak freely?”

“Like a man.”

“Well, thank goodness for small blessings,” Achilles said in a sweet, sing song voice.

“Perfect,” Thetis said, and they both started to laugh.

“So, am I ready?” Achilles said. “I am to join the King’s daughters tomorrow and live among them. Can I pass as a proper girl now?”

“A girl, yes,” Thetis said. “But you are not yet proper. You do seem more like a rough girl than a clumsy man, but it will take practice.”

“I am exhausted and shamed already by all of these foolish womanly manners you seek to instill in me, mother. How am I to remain like this for the rest of my life? Biting my tongue, talking about like a doe, forever silent in the presence of men even should I know more than they will ever know about war and the martial arts?”

“You will find the strength,” she said, getting up and joining Achilles at the window. He turned to face her, and she put her hand to his cheek. It was soft and smooth as a baby’s. “You are still Achilles, and in your breast beats the heart of a warrior. You now must fight a different battle, but you will find a way to win, just as you always have.”

“Tomorrow, I am to go and live among women as a woman. I will be in their world, living their lives. I feel... mother, I feel frightened. This is all new and strange to me. Can’t you come as well? Be with me as I take this journey?”

“I can’t, sweet daughter. I will visit at the end of each week, but I can’t hold your hand as you pass through this trial. You’re a big girl now.”

“Big girl?” Achilles choked on the phrase. “Madness. It seems impossible to me that I am a girl, to live as a girl. I don’t know if I can do it alone.”

Thetis kept her hand on Achilles’ cheek, looking into his pretty eyes. Only the day before, as a man, he’d been ready to charge off into battle, and now he trembled, terrified at the thought of facing life as a girl. It was not his sex, she knew, or not his body. She doubted whether most men

had the courage to live as women. “You don’t have to do it alone,” she said. “You must make friends, Achilles. Seek out girls to help you in your journey. Now, we need a new name for you! A pretty young girl can’t go about calling herself Princess Achilles, now can she?”

“Princess?” Achilles said, his face turning sour.

“You are the daughter of a king,” Thetis said, pushing some stray strands of his hair behind his ear. “That makes you a princess.”

“I think I am going to be sick.”

“I didn’t mention it to you sooner because I knew— Oh! I have your name! Pyrrha! For your lovely red hair!”

“It’s.... Fine, I suppose” Achilles said, and then spoke the name, trying it out. “Pyrrha. Ugh. I don’t know. I do not know.”

“You will get used to it, Princess Pyrrha,” Thetis said, cupping his chin.

“Please don’t call me that,” Achilles said, giggling at the absurdity of his situation. “I did not think this through when I drank that potion.”

Shortly after, Achilles went to bed dressed in a girl’s night dress. “Sleep well,” Thetis said. “Tomorrow will be a big day.”

“Goodnight,” Achilles said. As soon as the door closed, he found himself tossing and turning. He couldn’t find a comfortable position in his new body. He tried to lay on his stomach and immediately rolled onto his side, disturbed by the feeling of his breasts smooshed against the mattress. On his side, though, they were pressed between his arms, and when he lay on his back, he felt like his butt was too big, plus the weight of his breasts puddling on his chest made it hard to breath. “Ugh,” he hissed, rolling onto his side again. “I guess I will have to get used to it.” But even as he tried to get used to his strange new body, his mind started racing as he thought about the morning, when he would meet all the girls as a girl. He had no

idea to be a girl, how to act. His mother had given him some suggestions, but he felt— insecure, nervous- and he had never felt those things in his life.

And what of Deidamia? He could see her in his mind— so tall, so beautiful. His heart fluttered even at the thought of her, of her name. What is she did not like him? What if he wasn't the kind of girl she desired? She had said she liked pretty girls with soft voices, and he was certainly that, but she had also said sweet. Sweet. No one had ever called Achilles sweet. But he could learn, couldn't he? He could be that girl, couldn't he?

He thought of his image in the mirror. Dainty. Petite. He hadn't thought about what sort of girl he'd become. It had never occurred to him. But if he had, he thought now, he felt certain he would have expected to be tall and athletic, just as he had been as a boy. More like Deidamia, and not such a.... little bird of a girl.

But he was now. He was pretty and small and delicate. And he could only hope that Deidamia would love him, or else he had given up all for... nothing. Oh! He tossed and turned all night, consumed with feminine insecurity and the pangs of a girl's first true love.

Chapter Six

The morning was a mad blur of preparations. Thetis woke him before dawn and got him into a bath scented with all manner of flowers and oils, and then spent what seemed to him an eternity working on his hair, brushing it out, weaving and braiding. “Why is it taking so long?” He groaned, bored just sitting there with his hands in his lap, his knees together.

“You are meeting the girls of the court for the first time, and you must take a good impression. There are high expectations for a princess.”

“Stop calling me that!”

Thetis just smiled as she joyfully worked her daughter’s hair into an elaborate and beautiful style befitting her royal lineage. Next, he was draped in the most delicate gown of silk, and bracelets slipped over his dainty wrists and ankles. The dress had a lunging neckline that revealed the sides of his soft breasts and the pretty valley between them, where nestled a sparkling emerald set in a gold chain that dangled from his slender neck. His mother pierced his ears as well, and he felt the weight of earrings tugging at his earlobes, brushing against his cheeks when he moved his head.

Achilles just sat there prettily enduring it all, keeping in mind that he had done this for love, for Deidamia, and he would endure this and a thousand times more to be with her. “Stand up and let me look at you,” Thetis said.

Achilles stood, giving his mother a surly look.

“Like a proper maiden,” Thetis scolded.

Achilles put one hand on his hip, lifted his head and smiled his brightest, prettiest smile.

“Oh,” Thetis said, putting her hand to her chest. “You’re a vision! Come, take a look.”

She led Achilles to his room to his mirror, standing at his side, beaming with pride. “You’re gorgeous! You look like a goddess!”

Achilles sighed, the smile fading from his face. He was beautiful, there could be no doubt, and for the first time, seeing his mother standing at his side, he realized he look just like her. They could be sisters. And he knew what men thought of his mother, as all of his friends had at one time or another becomes obsessed with her beauty. And yet, he felt himself consumed with shame to see himself with this body— the tiny arms, the budding breasts, the rounded hips, the.... Face. A face to kiss, to admire, to paint, but never one that would ever command.

“What’s wrong?” Thetis said, playing with his hair, kissing him on his bare shoulder.

“I’m a man,” he said in his little voice, watching as that stunning woman said the words, the words coming from her full, pink lips. “I... this body brings me only shame. Such shame I can’t even find words.”

“You’re a beautiful girl,” Thetis said.

“That’s what Disgusts me....” He said, “Oh, mother, I can’t face the world like this.” He turned from the mirror, went and sat on the edge of his bed. “Let me stay here with you. I will hide this face from the world, remain in hiding for all the rest of my days. I don’t.... I don’t want anyone to see me like this.”

“Daughter,” Thetis said. “Sweet Pyrrha. No. I know you still have the same heart as before, the heart of a warrior, a heart forged of courage. You must face this fear, overcome it. You will, for you have never failed to do the brave thing, the right thing.”

“I’m not the man I once was,” he said, holding up his small, soft hands, the bracelets sparkling at his wrists.

“I will not let you use your sex as an excuse, Pyrrha. You were ready to go to war? Let me tell you, this is your war now. To walk out that door and learn to be a woman, to live a woman’s life. I know your courage will not fail. You are daughter to Thetis, and the women of our family have never lacked courage. Now, stand, and let us go to the palace.”

Hearing the words his mother spoke, and feeling the love and pride behind them, Achilles felt his strength return, his courage rise, and he stood, shoulders back, chin up, and he said, “Thank you, mother. I will do this.”

“That’s my brave girl,” Thetis said, giving him a hug. ‘Never forget that you are daughter to Thetis, who when all the Gods rose against Zeus did stand by his side and restore him to rule. You are the daughter of a goddess and king, descended from the mighty Titans, Gods before the Gods!’”

A carriage had been sent to bring them to the palace. Achilles was thankful he would not have to walk through the streets of the city, to be gazed upon by the eyes of men. He knew what men would think to look upon him now, and it made him feel— ill at ease— to know the dirty things they would think of him now.

They palace entered the gates of the palace and brought them to a garden, where they climbed out to find all the girls of the court scattered about, sitting before easels, painting the scene. “Is this how I am to spend my time now?” Achilles murmured to his mother.

“You are a gifted artist!” Thetis said. “How delightful you shall have time to paint!”

Achilles did not have time to answer, for Deidamia had risen from her painting and now waded toward them, smiling. Achilles noticed how smooth and gracefully she walked— as if floating across the ground, and then he saw Deidamia’s eyes fall on him, and she looked him up and down just as a man might do, and when she met his eyes he felt his cheeks blushing as he was overcome with the most unexpected shyness, feeling a muddled storm of fear, want, insecurity, shame and hope and pride... and Oh! He didn’t know what to feel or think, but he was fairly sure that Deidamia was pleased with his shape, and he clung to that hope, clung to it for all his life, just managing to keep afloat on a stormy sea of terror.

“Thetis!” Deidamia cried, throwing her arms around Achilles’ mother, kissing her on the cheek. “So lovely to see you!”

“It is always such a pleasure to see you,” Thetis sang back. “You are more lovely each and every time I see you!”

“Speaking of lovely,” Deidamia said, looking Achilles directly in the eyes. Achilles’ eyes dropped down and to the side as he felt his cheeks burning even more. “This must be your daughter, Princess Pyrrha.”

“Oh!” Achilles squeaked, shocked and appalled to hear Deidamia refer to him with that humiliating feminine title. ‘I’m not....’ Hearing himself speaking in that absurd voice, sounding so... silly... talking to the girl he loved.... He suddenly found he couldn’t speak, couldn’t find words, and he felt a feeling growing in him, a feeling that he should just... run. Run away.

“She is not usually so shy,” Thetis laughed, putting a hand on Achilles’ shoulder, steadying him, grounding him. “But then, as I told you, she was raised largely in seclusion, and is not used to being around other girls.”

Deidamia grabbed Achilles’ hand and squeezed. “She’s delightful. Thetis, I promise I will take good care of your little girl.”

When Deidamia grabbed his hand, Achilles felt a shock pass through his whole body, felt tingling in his fingertips and toes. Deidamia had called him *little girl*, and his mind flashed with confusion. Something new in him, the girl he was to become, felt warm and fuzzy, cute, she liked being called little girl by this tall, strong woman. But the man in Achilles recoiled and grew hot with rage to be so insulted. "I'm NOT a little girl," he said, the words coming out like a furious mouse.

"Pyrrha!" Thetis said.

"Oh, she has some fire! Well, well..."

Achilles tried to pull his hand free from Deidamia, but she held tight, and finding himself overpowered, held by Deidamia filled Achilles once more with some strange new pleasure and delight, a feminine warmth and delight.

"I better be off," Pyrrha said. "I will miss you, sweetheart!" She touched Achilles' cheek. "Be good!"

"I... will..." Achilles said, his heart filling with fear as his mother walked away, leaving him with this... woman... these girls. Once more, it brought home to him that he was one of THEM now. No longer one of the boys, one of the men, he was now to live as and among the women.

"Come," Deidamia said, holding tight to Achilles' little hand. "Let me introduce you to the other girls."

Achilles let himself be dragged away, glancing back over his shoulder to watch his other getting back in the carriage, offering him one last wave and smile as he was dragged away to live as a girl. He waved back, his body and mind a mass of conflicting feelings, fears and needs. The carriage door closed, and Achilles felt as it closed on his whole life before, his life as a man and a warrior, and for a terrible moment, he thought he would cry.

But then Deidamia squeezed his hand, and he kissed him on the cheek. He felt the spot where she kissed him burn, and he looked up at her and bright smile spread over his face, and he.... goddess... he giggled. “What was that for?” Achilles said, covering the spot where she’d kissed him with his free hand.

“Because you’re pretty,” Deidamia said, giving his hand another squeeze.

Pretty? She thinks I’m pretty? Achilles felt like a thousand butterflies had been loosed, flying all through his belly, through his whole body. The smile spread and he giggled again, confused at the way his female body was reacting but not caring because he was holding hands with the girl he loved, and she had kissed him on the cheek and called him pretty, and that was EVERYTHING.

Achilles found himself so completely blissful and full of joy he barely noticed the way the girls reacted to him. Usually when he met girls they fawned over him, stared, blushed and giggled. They couldn’t help themselves, and he was used to being surrounded by girls staring up at him in awe.

Not anymore. Each one smiled and hugged him, held his hands, but behind her well-practiced smile and sparkling eyes, he could sense the cold appraisal as she assessed a rival, a girl who might steal attention from her, or even a prize mate. He was pretty, he knew it and felt it more than ever, but all of these girls were pretty. But he saw how their eyes lit up when Deidamia called him “Princess.” Immediately their attitude shifted, their smiles widened. “Oh, and your father is?”

“She is daughter to Peleus and the nymph, Thetis,” Deidamia would say, and the girls would nearly swoon.

“A nymph? You’re part nymph? Oh, I have never met a nymph before. And a princess? You are too much.”

Achilles decided it was good to be a princess, though none of it mattered. None of it, as long as he could hands with Deidamia, could have kiss him and adore him. Introductions complete, Deidamia sat him down at an easel near hers. Achilles focused, lowering himself into the seat as daintily as he could, knowing that Deidamia washed him. He glanced at her after he’d sat, wanting her approval, but when he saw that she stared at him with those hot eyes of her, her felt himself tremble, and the was enough.

The girls painted for a few more hours, a warm, fragrant breeze blowing through garden, rustling the leaves. Seagulls pinwheeled in the distance, and high, chalky clouds hovered against a powder blue sky. Achilles felt himself calm as he sat there, carefully painting the scene before him. He took a deep breath, feeling his little breasts rise, press against his thin dress. And so, this is my life now. He considered as he sat there, knees together, brushing hot red paint against the green abundance of leaves he’d already created, what this would be like. To live this gentle life among the women. Boring, he thought. Tedious. But then he looked over at Deidamia, beautiful Deidamia, and he decided that nothing could be more exciting than the prospect of spending his life with her doing whatever pleased her, whatever made her happy. As long as she was happy, he knew he would have a joyful heart.

Is this what it was to be a girl in love, he wondered?

But he had felt this way as a man. It was this love that had driven him to give up his manhood, this feeling that he could only be happy if he were with her. Had love emasculated him? Yes. He could not deny it as he

looked at his little hand, the bracelets on his slender wrist. He was so lost in thought he had not realized that Deidamia had gotten up and now stood behind him, examining his painting.

“The Aegina style is so refined,” she said. “Your strokes so precise.”

Startled, Achilles made a small “Oh!” And looked back at Deidamia. “I didn’t realize you were behind me. “I’m not usually so easily frightened,” he said, embarrassed both that he had been frightened and that he cried out like a kitten.

“I think it’s cute,” Deidamia said. “And I am impressed with your painting. It’s so... feminine!” She kissed him on the head. “Come. Time for our mid-day meal. We call it Appollian, as Apollo rides directly above us in his chariot.” She put her hand to Achilles’ elbow, the way a man would help a maiden stand. Achilles felt himself tingling and blushing again, embarrassed and strangely pleased to be The girl? Was he to be the girl in their relationship? It had never occurred to him he would be the girl, and yet it suddenly became so obvious that from the time she met him, Deidamia had treated him as the maiden, and he had... he had ...

Well, no matter, he would eventually get the upper hand. It was just that he had not yet grown used to this female shape and the way it reacted to things. That was all. They all gathered around a large table, and bowl and salad were brought out. Achilles made sure to take small bites, to eat like a lady, though it tried his patience, as did the lack of bloody, roasted meat. Surely these girls didn’t survive on nothing but grass? Yet, looking at how slender most of them were, he could believe it.

Looking down the table, he noticed that a group of girls sat together in a cluster who seemed different. They had dark paints around their eyes, blush on their cheeks, and something on their lips as well to make them

shine. They seemed to wear more jewelry, prettier dresses. Achilles had noticed these girls before, but seeing them now in a cluster he wondered, “Do those girls come from Athens?”

“The mermaids?” Deidama’s friend, Issa said, her voice dripping with irony.

“Mermaids?” Achilles asked.

“They are not from Athens,” Deidama said. “But they are obsessed with all the latest fashions, just as they are obsessed with being pretty. We call them the mermaids because they delight in laying about and entrancing men.”

“Those girls,” Issa said, nodding toward another group of girls who sat on the other side of the table from the mermaids. “Call themselves The Calliope Collective. Or, TCC for short. They are all forever reading and writing poems, though they must know no one will take the writings of a girl seriously.”

Achilles felt a jab in his heart at the truth of the words that he had never felt as a man. As a man the “fact” that no woman could ever write anything of merit was just a matter of fact, a simple reality. Now that he was a girl, the words seemed... violent. It seemed immodest of him and unladylike to voice such a thought, so instead he asked, “And what of you? Which group do you belong to?”

“We are the Olympians,” Deidamia said. “We are the fastest swimmers, the swiftest runners.”

“The goddesses,” Issa said.

Achilles smiled. He knew which group he would belong to. He had always been an athlete and had always excelled at athletic games.

He got his chance that very day. After Appollian, the girls all changed into their beach wear, and they made their way down the stone steps to the soft, sandy private, royal beach. It was beautiful, with clear, crystal waters and bobbing palm trees. Achilles watched as the Mermaids gathered in the shade, spreading blankets and stretching out on the sand, chatting amiably. The Olympians and the TCC, meanwhile, all moved to the far end of the beach, and Achilles followed them. The girls all started stretching their legs. "We're going to race," Deidamia said. "You better loosen up."

"Race?" Achilles brightened. "I love to run."

"Are you fast?"

"I have always been one of the fastest... girls. Always."

"Truly?" Deidamia's eyes filled with challenge, and she looked Achilles up and down. "You won't even come close to catching me."

"You are too bold!" Achilles laughed, rising to the challenge. "I will beat you!"

"Never," Deidamia said, looking down at him.

"We'll see."

One of the girls blew a horn and Achilles pushed his toes into the soft sand, willing his legs to run, but as soon as he started running it all felt wrong. His hips seemed too wide, his legs too long, and his breasts began bouncing up and down on his chest sending the most awkward and embarrassing feelings through his body. He threw an arm across his breasts, trying to keep them from bouncing so terribly, but then it threw off his balance, making him throw his other arm out to the side, trying to balance himself even as he tried to get used to the swiveling of his hips. He saw that the other girls were rapidly leaving him behind, saw Deidamia

glance back and laugh, and trying to save face her pretended to stumble and fall into the sand, feeling it slam against his soft breasts.

As the girls reached the other side of the beach, he heard shouts of triumph and squeals, looked up to see Deidamia jumping up and down, and then hugging Issa. The way they hugged, the way they looked at each other, it filled Achilles with molten jealousy, and he punched his little fist into the sand as he squatted there on his knees.

Deidamia looked over and saw him there, and she covered her mouth, laughing, her eyes dancing with mirth. “Oh, you, little nymph! The girls on Aegina must be turtles.”

“I... fell...”. Achilles said, then bit his lip, a few strands of hair in his eyes, feeling foolish but also.... Cute? Was he being cute?

Deidamia walked across the beach and reached down, taking Achilles’ hand and pulling him to his feet, giving him a pat on the butt. “Come on,” she said.

“I want a rematch!” Achilles squeaked.

“One day, but not now.” Deidamia put her hand on the small of his back and led him toward an orange grove that grew on the edge of the sand. “Pyrrha and I are going to look for shells!” She called. The girls all giggled. Achilles blushed. Was she? Were they going to?

Deidamia led him into a sandy clearing among the orange trees, and as soon as they were away from the other girls, she kissed Achilles right on the lips. Achilles, surprised and unused to a girl being so aggressive with him, resisted at first, trying to push her away, but she had her arms around him and held him tight, forcing him to stay there and accept the kiss, and then the hot, slick tongue that pushed between his lips and found her own.

As soon as Achilles stop struggling and accepted the kiss, the tongue, his body burned with passion, a slender flame of feminine need, and his knees grew weak as he pressed his breasts into Deidamia's, raised his leg and ran his calf up and down her soft thigh.

He found himself on his back. Deidamia's strong thighs gripped his rib cage, and she held his face as smothered him with wet, hot kisses. Everything felt wrong and perfect at the same time. Achilles' nipples had grown hard and ached with pleasure, and he felt himself getting hot and wet, and his skin, his whole body sang with pleasure and need, and even inside him he could feel something clenching and sending waves of pleasure through him. He wanted to be on top. The man in him longed for dominance and he grabbed Deidamia's arm, meaning to roll them over so she would be on her back.

Deidamia, looking into Achilles' big, pretty eyes, saw the man in them, a flash of aggression, the look of the bull, and when he grabbed his arm she knew what he wanted, and the look of shock and surprise on his face when she instead pushed him arm above his head and pressed his shoulders deeper into the sand gave her a thrill. She grabbed at the shoulder tie of his dress and pulled it free. Achilles' face now filled with fear as she pulled the dress down, revealing one of his firm breasts, the pink nipples hard and pointing toward the sky, begging to be touched.

"I'm not...". Achilles said as he tried to put his arm over his bare breasts, but Deidamia smothered his objection with her lips, blocked his arm and grabbed his breast, squeezing and then pinching his nipple.

Achilles' eyes went wide, and a soft, feminine moan escaped him as he bucked his hips, overcome with impossible female pleasures, his mind thrown once more into a chaotic storm of manly shame and feminine

excitement. Once more he tried to roll them over, to take command, but once more Deidamia easily overpowered him, and he saw the thrill in her eyes, the triumph as he struggled, so helpless, so small.... And his frustration began to give way to.... Pleasure. The pleasure of surrender.

Seeing him break, smile, giggle, soften back into the sand, Deidamia patted him on the cheek and said, "You are so beautiful."

Beautiful. Achilles smiled and giggled some more, throwing his little arms over his head and whispering words that seemed to come from somewhere deep within him, someplace he didn't even know existed. "I just want to please you."

They kissed. Touched. Laughed. After, Achilles sat with his knees pulled up to his chest, a warm, fuzzy feeling washing over his body and mind. Deidamia sat next to him, their shoulders pressed together, and she was playing with strands of his hair. "Have you ever made out with a girl before?" Deidamia asked.

Achilles thought, wondering what she wanted to hear, what he should say that would please her. "Not like you," he whispered. He was looking down at the sand, idly running his fingers through the soft, white powder, creating a circle.

"There are no other girls like me," Deidamia said. She cupped Achilles' chin and turned his face toward hers, so they could look in each other's eyes. "I like you," she said. "I feel you have the potential to be my girl."

"Potential?" Achilles said, a sudden feeling of terrifying feminine insecurity washing over him. Potential meant that he was lacking something, imperfect in her eyes.... Unworthy? "What's wrong? Did I say something? I am not used to being among girls, and I have to, I will learn, I will try harder, and I really can run, and I am a good swimmer..."

Deidamia heard the fear in his voice, saw it in her eyes. It thrilled her to see manly Achilles so Girl. Cupid's arrow truly had slain him. "Hush.... Hush..." she said, quieting Achilles with a kiss. "It's not that. I prefer butterflies. Sweet girls, pretty girls, girls who are the most perfect embodiments of femininity."

"But you're an Olympian?"

"Opposites attract, dear Pyrrha." Deidamia patted his knee, and the next words she spoke were as orders from a general to a foot soldier. There was no hesitation and not the least notion that the person she spoke to had any say in the matter. "I need you to become a butterfly, to learn to paint your face and make yourself even more pleasing, to think always of being delicate and helpless, meek and mild. I am going to introduce you to Apollonia. She is the most perfect embodiment of femininity I have ever known. She will teach you."

Achilles, unused to having anyone speak to him that way, felt his anger rise, and the man in him once more attempted to assert himself, though with the voice of a pixie. "You say this as if I have no choice in the matter."

"You don't," Deidamia, grabbing his arm and pulling him to his feet. "You will do whatever I tell you." She stood with her legs wide apart, her fists on her hips, and she stared into Achilles' eyes. Achilles stood with one ankle hooked behind the other, legs together, his hands clasped to his chest, and he stared back, trying to find the manly will to stare her down, to refuse her demands, but those hot, dark eyes drained it all from him and he did a little knee bend without even thinking about it. All objections and resistance melted away, and he dropped his eyes in manly shame, maidenly modesty. Deidamia smiled, took his arm and said, "Good girl."

She led him back out of the grove and across the beach to where the butterflies lie in the shade. As they approached, the chirping chatter quieted. “You girls could make a statue swell,” Deidamia said, and the girls all giggled. Seeing how they reacted to Deidamia reminded Achilles of how girls had reacted to him when he was a man. “Apollonia. Train this one.” Deidamia kind of pushed Achilles toward them.

Apollonia’s eyes flashed with excitement. “As you wish,” she said. Deidamia walked away, leaving Achilles there standing alone, feeling awkward. He grabbed at his dress. Apollonia patted the sand next to her. “Sit,” she said. “Let’s get to know one another.”

For some reason the girls all giggled. Achilles sat, and as soon as he did, he felt the need to say, “Deidamia wants me to do this. I never thought I would be a butterfly.”

Apollonia touched him on the ear, and then ran her fingers along his smooth cheek. “Darling girl,” she said. “You are half nymph and a princess. You were born to be a butterfly.”

If you only knew, Achilles thought, but he smiled his brightest smile and adopting the sign song voice he’d be taught by his mother, he said, “You’re so pretty.” He had no choice. He was to be among these girls now, and he needed to make friends. They would teach him what he needed to know to please Deidamia, and that was all.

Chapter Seven

The next two weeks, Achilles worked tirelessly to walk and move and speak in an ever more feminine manner. The girls taught him to dress his face, to enhance the feminine softness of his features, to braid and set hair. Some took the form of instruction from Apollonia, but for the most part spending all his days and nights with these girly girls just rubbed off on him. He mimicked their speech, their gestures, the way they walked. He learned to talk about fashion and romantic poetry, the latest dramas from Athens, skin care and tricks to keeping himself looking young. They chatted about what sort of men made good husbands and which lovers. It was all.... Boring. Terribly boring. Achilles did not care about these things at all, but he thought constantly of Deidamia, of how beautiful he felt when she looked at him, kissed him, and so he endured it all, pretending to love every moment of it, pretending to become the sweet, feminine girl his lover wanted him to be.

Deidamia, for her part, was aloof. She seemed to be avoiding him, and on the few occasions he managed to get near her and try to speak, she would seem impatient and disinterested. "Keep working with Apollonia," she would say. Or, "You have a long way to go."

It hurt Achilles more than he had thought possible. He had never known such sorrow, such loneliness. It seemed to him that maidens truly did feel more deeply than men, and he sometimes wept himself to sleep to pain of being separated from Deidamia felt so great. When the other girls ran or swam, competed in bocce or even, and this was kept secret from the King, threw javelins, Achilles found himself exiled to the shade with the other butterflies, girls too delicate and refined to engage in such activities.

Watching the girls run, he knew he could do better than he had. Many of the girls had breasts like his, small and firm, and they bounced as his had, but the girls bound them, and his were not so large that he could not compete with the other girls. They had simply seemed too large to him, his having been a man. In fact, if anything, his were slightly smaller than the average gal, though perky and firm and, looking at them with a man's eyes, quite alluring. Watching the girls run, their long legs flashing in the sun, he ached to run with them, to be an athlete, to compete. But Deidamia would not love him if he were that kind of girl.

Apollonia had large breasts, two or three times larger than his. They jutted out from her chest, a full foot or more from her body, and when her dress sometimes slipped open Achilles saw that she had huge nipples, much larger than his. He wondered what it would be like to have such a full, womanly figure, and he was glad he didn't. Apollonia spoke of back aches, and he saw how they bobbed and swayed with every motion. He didn't understand why some girls dreamed of having so much up top. It just seemed something that would hobble them further, make them even more helpless.

Early in the mornings, the butterflies did exercise— in secret. "A girl must never let anyone know she is working on her body," Apollonia explained. "All must believe she is a natural beauty, that all her charms came to her as gifts of the gods. More," she added. "You must never let anyone see you perspire." They worked on their butts and legs, and they did exercises said to increase their busts, but they avoided anything that might strengthen and thicken their arms. They all took great pride in how small their arms and shoulders were, how weak. Achilles understood it, and he struggled to learn to like it. As a man he had always thrilled at the

sight of a girl with little arms, and so he knew how men thought— and Deidamia.

Other than the exercises aimed at enhancing their hourglass shapes, the only physical activity for him was the shameful reversal of dances the girls put on during feast days. Remembering how he had watched these girls dance, how it had pleased him as a man, how they had seemed such delightful little feminine creatures, it pained Achilles to realize how truly he was no a girl, and how he would have to stand before the masses and dance, putting his curvy little shape on display.

At least he did not have to content with men and their roving eyes, cloistered here among the girls. That was a relief. Almost.

Since the day he'd arrived, it seemed to Achilles that King Lycomedes had... given him looks... that set off all kinds of warnings from Achilles' female intuition. It wasn't just the lust he saw in the man's eyes, though that alone gave Achilles the creeps. But when Lycomedes looked at Achilles, he felt the man was seeing right through Achilles' dress, seeing him naked, and it would make him shiver. Too, he would sometimes just sense something was wrong, and looking back he would see Lycomedes huddling behind a pillar, staring at Achilles back side, or pretending to examine a wall, but glancing constantly at Achilles' bust.

Achilles wanted to talk to someone about it, but it seemed to him he was just being a silly girl. He was man, and he could handle it, he told himself. Finally, though, he overcame his pride and mentioned it to Apollonia. "I am.... Afraid of the King," he said. "He gives me the most... lecherous stares! I am think... well, I think he is imagining me naked!"

Apollonia, who was plucking Achilles' eyebrows, smirked. "He is a man, isn't he?"

“Um, yes?”

“Then I am sure he was imagining you naked. They all do.”

Achilles felt foolish. Of course, he'd done the same as a man. But, “It seems different to me. I feel.... Like I said... I'm scared of him.”

“You should be scared of all men,” Apollonia said. “They are beasts and cannot govern their passions. Each and every man out there is a danger to take you or to kill you. It is said that the Gods, Zeus, himself, sometimes comes down and has his way with a mortal girl. You must ever be on guard! Didn't your mother teach you this?”

“I don't think every man is such a brute,” Achilles objected.

“They are all animals,” Apollonia said. “However refined they may seem, they are wolves, and we are sheep. They are bigger and stronger than us, and that is why they feel the right to do with us as they will. You should never go anywhere alone, and certainly not with a man!”

The thought gave Achilles pause. Did all women truly feel this way about men? He had never forced himself on a girl, would never. Of course, he'd been aggressive and sometimes he'd had to persist and pressure, but he'd always broken their wills with his words and not his muscles. Still, there had been times when the girls had seemed more resigned than amorous. How would he feel now if a man kept pestering him, pushing him, demanding his charms?

He would have to talk to Thetis about all this, but in the meantime, he would be on guard against Lycomedes. He was sure, as shocking as the thought was to Achilles, the man meant to lay with him and that he would not take no for an answer. Achilles, who started to feel at home in his slender new body, felt insecurity once more seeping into him. What good would these skinny arms do him if Lycomedes attacked?

Oh! It was all too much! It made him long for the simple, privilege life of a man, but for the love of Deidamia!

Chapter Eight

Thetis knew that if she had moved to Skyros, Ulysses and the rest of the Greeks would come to that island looking for her son, and so she had planned all along to return to Thessaly. Ulysses, as expected, had come with his men looking for Achilles. It had been prophesied that the Greeks could only win if Achilles fight with them on the fields of battle. Thetis had assured Ulysses that she did not know where Achilles had gotten off to. "He's always off hunting or seeking adventure," she said. "You know how young men are!"

Ulysses had sailed off, but he'd left behind a pair of spies, so Thetis had to be careful when she went to visit her daughter. Fortunately, she was immortal, so she'd summoned a Pegasus, and flown to another island somewhat near Skyros, then traveled the rest of the way on the back of a whale during the depths of a moonless night. She had expected to visit with Achilles, and she had been shocked to meet Pyrrha for the first time.

The girl who walked into the drawing room at the palace was so far removed from the son she remembered it took Thetis breath away. She had painted her face as some girls do, plucked her eyebrows and she moved with the fluid, feminine grace of a gazelle, floating across the marble floor, a bright smile on her bright, stunning face. Jewelry flashed from her wrists and ankles and ears. "Mother," she said with the most delightfully feminine intonations. "I am so happy to see you!"

They hugged, and then Thetis put her hands on Achilles slender little shoulders and held him at arms' length. "Pyrrha!" She said. "You've... changed so much!"

“I thank you, mother,” Achilles said, lowering himself daintily on a stool, knees together, hands in his lap. “Are you pleased?”

“I am so proud of you! You’re the vision of a perfect maiden!”

“The other girls have helped me ever so much,” Achilles said. “I am indebted to them.”

Other girls? Was her son now thinking of himself as a maiden? Thetis hoped so. It would move him that much further away from ever being a man again and facing an early death. Her hope was that should Ulysses ever find him, Achilles would be too much the maiden to ever go to war. So caught up in her thoughts was she that she almost— almost— did not notice the look on Achilles’ face. A look she knew too well. “You have a secret!” Thetis said, delighted at the prospect of sharing secrets with her adorable little girl.

Achilles blushed, his eyes flashing with excitement. He’d decided to reveal to reveal his love for Deidamia. “I do,” he said, looking away. “It’s... well... something that you may find quite surprising.”

“Oh, tell me!” Thetis said, reaching out and taking her son’s small, soft hand in her own.

“Well, mother, I have fallen in love!” Achilles said. He didn’t giggle, though he felt a giggle in his heart. One thing he’d learned is that butterflies did not giggle.

“What’s his name?” Thetis asked. She feared Achilles might guess at her scheming if she let on she knew or had even a sense of his love.

“*His* name?” Achilles said, pulling his hand free from his mother’s grasp and putting it to his chest to express his shock. “Do you think I would fall in love with a *boy*?”

“You are a maiden now, Pyrrha. It would not be uncommon. But, please, let my comment pass and tell me about her, then. Do I know her?”

“You do,” Achilles said, appalled his mother would think he had become such a maiden that he would give his heart to a boy. But, he was eager to tell her of his love, and so he chose to let it pass, as she had asked. “It is the King’s daughter, the very girl you chose to bring me into this world of girls. Deidamia.”

“She’s lovely,” Thetis said. “So tall! Oh, I am so happy for you! And does she know how you feel?”

“I... think so,” Achilles said, getting excited. He leaned toward his mother, and she noticed how his hands fluttered now as he talked. “She took me off to a secluded place in an orange grove and kissed me. She told me I was pretty, and she ... I’ve never felt so cherished! My heart almost burst!”

“I am so happy for you! Oh, she is quite an impressive young woman! It speaks well for you that she would find you desirable. Am I right to guess that the pretty paints on your face and all of, well this...” she waved at him. “Is because you are in love?”

“She told me she preferred girls who, well, here we are called butterflies. She likes girls who are,” he thought feminine, but it shamed him to admit it to his mother, so he searched for a better word, “Um, well...”

“Sweet? Adorable?” Her mother offered.

Achilles nodded. “I feel a little foolish, but I just want to please her. Is it wrong?”

“No,” Thetis said. “It is brave of you to sacrifice for the one you love.”

“Oh, mother. I have never been in love in before. I am happy, and yet so lonely and in pain when we are not together, and I need her so badly. It’s suffering!”

“Love is suffering,” Thetis said. “Especially for a woman.”

“So even love is to be harder for me now?”

“Even love. But you are my brave girl, and you can do anything you set your mind to.”

“Are you going to stay and eat the evening meal with us?” Achilles asked, not certain if he even wanted her to stay.

‘I can’t. My visits must be a secret! I don’t want anyone to notice my visits here and suspect your true identity.’

“That seems rather unlikely now, wouldn’t you say?” As Achilles asked the question, he felt that tingling again, his skin crawling as if he were in danger. Glancing back over his shoulder, trying to make it seem like he was just adjusting the shoulder strap on his dress, he saw Lycomedes standing on a balcony, half hidden by a pillar, watching them.

Thetis, following her daughter’s eyes, saw the King and waved. “King Lycomedes,” she said. “Come join us!”

“Mother!” Achilles hissed, terrified at the thought.

“I was just passing by and thought I would say hello!” Lycomedes shouted back with a little too much jolly old fellow. His voice sounded hoarse. “Your daughter has been fitting in quite well! She’s a delight!” He said, hurrying off.

“The old pervert,” Thetis said.

“You know?” Achilles said.

“Of course, I know. He’s a lecherous old man, the king. When I met him to ask about sending my daughter Pyrrha to live here he never stopped staring at my breasts.”

“He... looks at me...” Achilles whispered.... “In such a way it makes my skin crawl! Why did you send me to live with his family?”

“He will protect you from everyone but himself,” Thetis said. “And the other girls must protect you. You must never be alone. Always have another girl with you.”

“Why didn’t you warn me? I did not know that being a maiden would leave me so... vulnerable to these men. The girls tell me that all men are animals, and that I am always to be in danger of their bestial natures!”

“It is so much a part of the life of any girl or woman that I did not think of it. I am sorry, sweet Pyrrha.”

“I don’t like feeling so... helpless. So subjected to ever present danger!”

“None of us do, but it is the way of the world.”

“It shouldn’t be this way!”

“Welcome to a woman’s life, a woman’s world. But, for you, there is a great compensation for your sex.”

“Which is?”

“Deidamia.” She is worth it, is she not?”

“Yes,” Achilles said with a sigh. ‘Oh, she is worth the world!’”

“I’ll walk you back to your room,” Thetis said. ‘And do promise me you will be cautious! You must not wander about like a boy anymore.’”

“I promise, mother. I do.” He spoke the words, but even as he did his manly spirit rebelled against them. Why should he live in fear just because he was a girl now? Why should he allow men to shrink his world, to force him always to live in trembling, maidenly fear?

That night Achilles found himself sitting once more with the butterflies, chatting with the girls about a series of romantic poems they had heard recited that afternoon. Achilles kept glancing at Deidamia, who sat at the other end of the table, talking loudly about the swimming contest she and the Olympians had enjoyed that afternoon. Issa sat at her side, and once more Achilles burned with cold fury at the sight of them together. As the meal ended the sun set, musicians came to the patio and began to play music even as cool, sea breezes began to wash over the party.

Achilles looked up at the moon, with hovered full and cold in the inky sky, and he sighed at the sight of it, so beautiful, so distant. He felt a firm hand squeeze his shoulder and looked up to see Deidamia, his heart instantly leaping with excitement, his eyes fluttering. "Come dance," Deidamia ordered.

Achilles offered her his hand, and she helped him to his feet, then put her hand on the small of his back and guided him to the dance floor. Achilles pressed himself against her, breathing in the musky smell of her perfume, gazing in naked admiration at her strong chin, her arrogant mouth. Deidamia took his hand, put another on his hip and pulled him to her, his soft body pressing against hers, and she led, the two of them moving fluidly together. Achilles gazed up into her eyes, feeling that warm, happy feeling he felt the first time she had kissed him. He smiled, his prettiest smile, and though he wanted to speak, to tell her he loved her, that he needed her, he didn't. A maiden must govern her tongue, and she had to let her man speak first.

"You're more lovely than ever," Thetis finally said, staring into Achilles eyes. "The way you have dressed your face pleases me. And that sheen on your lips? Impossible to resist." She leaned down and kissed him, and

Achilles tilted his head back and caught the kiss, surrendered to it. His mind and body buzzed with confusing new feelings and emotions, but he had missed feeling this way, and he welcomed the return of the passionate feminine confusion that overcame him.

When the kiss ended, Achilles eyes searched hers, and he was pleased to see her burning with passion as she gazed down at his breasts. His eyes wandered to her strong collar bone, and he swooned as she let her hand slide down the small of his back to cup his plump behind and squeeze.

Achilles put his head against Deidamia's chest, breathing in her smell, loving the feeling of her skin against his cheek. Deidamia put her hand on his head, cupping it, pulling him in, while her other moved back to his back which his dress left bare. She ran her fingertips against his soft skin, along his spine, between his shoulder blades. "This feels good," Achilles said, thinking he could spend forever in her arms, swaying, dancing. "You feel good."

Deidamia kissed him on top of the head. "You are soft and sweet," she said. "A maiden, truly. I like how you have changed. How you are changing."

"I did it for you," Achilles said. "I did it all for you."

"I know," Deidamia said. And then she whispered in his ear, "It turns me on when you try so hard to please me. You're my girl. Mine. I own you."

Achilles felt a tremble of pure pleasure pass through him like a stroke of lightning. He felt thirsty and hot. He wanted, no needed, to be Deidamia's girl. And it thrilled him to hear her declare it. He knew he didn't need to respond. Deidamia was telling him, not asking. He was hers, and he would always be hers.

The dancing went on. Deidamia passed him off to Issa, and then he danced with other girls, all of them loving the night, the chance to move. They kissed and caressed each other playfully, and at some point Deidamia took Achilles by the hand and led him off to a quiet, secluded corner, and she kissed him and pulled his dress off, and then he felt someone come from behind and cup his ass. He glanced back to see Issa, and he felt scared and started to pull away, but Deidamia put her fingers to his cheek and turned him, kissing him, whispering, "I want you to do this."

"Yes," he said as Issa cupped his breasts, kissed him on the shoulder. Deidamia and Issa kissed and caressed him, lay him on his back and then he was lost in a cloud of kisses and touches until something inside him seemed to tighten and then explode, and he cried out in ecstasy as he felt his whole body a pure flame of female desire unleashed.

After he lay panting, his breasts rising and falling, beaded with sweat, one slender arm thrown across his eyes. Deidamia looked at him there, mighty Achilles, stunned and shaken, a girl lost in the afterglow of her first orgasm. She smiled, and slipped a finger between Achilles plump, crimson lips. He started to suck, some instinct driving him, and he sucked harder as he used her finger in deeper. Deidamia laughed, looking at Issa. She remembered Achilles when he'd first met her, the swaggering bull, so tall and strong and sure of himself, and seeing the girl he'd become she laughed, throwing her head back, tossing her hair as Achilles squeezed his round legs together and sucked her finger, and Issa laughed, too, as she looked at Deidamia, both of them knowing this slender, horny little girl had once been a warrior and a man.

Deidamia walked Achilles back to his room, as a man should. His hair had come down during their play, and it now hung down over his shoulders

in crimson gold curls. Strands were in his face, and Deidamia loved, too, to see him so shaken, such a perfect vision of a maiden. “Goodnight,” she said as she opened Achilles door for him. He tilted his head back and she kissed him goodnight. “Be good now.”

“You are such a great lover,” Achilles said in a soft voice. And then it slipped out. He couldn’t help himself. “I love you.”

“I know,” Deidamia said, giving him a pat on the butt. And with that she closed the door, leaving Achilles standing there filled with fear and insecurity.

I know? Achilles’ mind raced. Did that mean she didn’t love him? *Oh, I am a fool! I never should have said that. What was I thinking?* He almost ran after her, but no. It wasn’t... he couldn’t... He climbed onto his bed and curled up, hugging his knees to his chest, struggling against tears. *I’m overreacting*, he thought. *It’s nothing. I said it. That’s all. She doesn’t hate me!* But his maiden’s heart did not care for his logic or rationalization, and he finally buried his face in his pillow and wept with confusion, shame, love, desire. Joy. Once again, it was like he was feeling every feeling at once, and he didn’t even know why he was crying, but he knew he must.

Issa had followed the two of them, watching them walk together back to Achilles’ room. She alone knew this girl’s secret, and she hated her all the more knowing this silly little thing that had stolen Deidamia’s attention had been a man, an ass, truly. By what right did he now claim the life of a maiden and the love of one such as Deidamia?

Issa slit her eyes and went back to her room, found a piece of parchment and a pen, and she began to write a letter with the words:

Brave Ulysses, my cousin, I have news you may find interesting.

Chapter Nine

“I must paint you,” Deidamia said, taking Achilles hand and leading him away from the other girls, who had gathered on the beach for fun and games.

Achilles heart warmed. Deidamia led him to a spot near a ruined wall, overgrown with vines and moss. In front of it an ancient stone bench stood dappled in sunlight. “Lay here for me,” Deidamia said. “On your side, and take your dress off.”

“Y— as you wish,” Achilles said. His heart fluttered, and he felt nervous. Deidamia had seen him naked, had felt and kissed every inch of his body, but they’d been close together, he’d been lost in passion, and as he slipped out of his dress, carefully hanging it from a branch, he felt self-conscious, wondering if his waist was small enough, his skin radiant, his legs as round and pretty as Deidamia would like.

He started to remove his jewelry, but Deidamia said, “No. Keep it on.”

Achilles did as he was told, laying on his side on the bench, propping himself on one elbow, stretching his long legs out, letting his free arm lay along his hips. He felt the warm, Mediterranean breeze blow across his sex, the little patch between his legs, and goosebumps rose on his skin. He looked to Deidamia anxiously as she stood behind her easel and regarded him. Achilles sought desperately for any sign of approval in her eyes, or lust, but she seemed distant again, distracted.

Deidamia was thinking of Achilles once more, the way he looked when she first met him, and then at this slender little female he’d become, the sweet, pretty face, and her sex, her maidenly sex. She wanted to paint him like this, to capture him forever as the little maiden he’d become,

conquered by Deidamia. And she wanted, more, to push him deeper into the feminine life he deserved. “Stay just like that,” she said. “Don’t move.”

She painted, just getting the essentials, the light, the shapes, and she made sure to make a few alterations to the figure of the sweet little man who lay there before her. It was a sketch, and a good one. She was a talented artist. “I have what I need,” she said. “Careful. You will probably be stiff.”

Her concern touched Achilles’ maidenly heart. His arm, the one he’d been leaning on, was asleep, and it shot through with pain as he moved. ‘Ow!’ He squeaked, even as his legs also burned with pins and needles. Deidamia came over, grinning. “Oh, you poor little girl! You are so delicate!”

Her tone sounded mocking, but she sat next to Achilles and began to massage his shoulders. “Where does it hurt?” She asks.

‘My arm,’ he said. Deidamia kissed her way all up and down his arm, lingering on the soft flesh on the inside of his wrist, kissing, sucking, then smiling and asking, “better?”

“Better,” Achilles whispered, feeling like he was about to swoon. The concern, the way she was taking care of him, it thrilled the girl he was becoming. “The other night,” he said. “I was confused, and I’m sorry if I...”

Deidamia kissed him silent. Then she tugged on his ear, ran her fingers along his smooth jawline. “You’re a girl, a maiden. You are controlled by your heart, your emotions. It’s why I am attracted to you, little Pyrrha, my dove. If you weren’t such an emotional girl, I wouldn’t feel this fire.”

“I am pleased to hear it,” Achilles said. He was pleased, but at the same time he felt that insecurity, that need, to feminine madness. “Do you? I mean, how do you feel? What am I to you?”

“Oh, little dove,” she said. “You want to ask me if I love you, but you are too bashful!” She cupped his face with both hands and tilted his head back, kissing him again. “You are such a girl!”

“But, do you?” Achilles said, looking into Deidamia’s eyes, desperate for any sign that she felt the same.

“I don’t yet,” Deidamia said.

“Oh!” The noise came out of Achilles like he’d been jabbed with a needle. “I— I am a fool!”

“I don’t know yet,” Deidamia repeated. “I think I am falling in love with you, and yes, I do believe you could be the one. The one I love most, above all others.”

“What do I have to do? What would you have me be to please you?”

“Let me show you,” Deidamia said, taking his hand and leading him to the easel, the canvas. Achilles, still nude, felt exposed, vulnerable, and when he looked at the image Deidamia had made of him, he immediately crossed his arms across his breasts. It was him, the woman he’d become, but Deidamia had painted him with heavy, womanly breasts and wider, fuller hips.

“You are a beauty,” Deidamia said, stepping behind him, wrapping her arms around his waist, kissing him on his soft little shoulder. “You have the loveliest face I have ever seen. But I need a woman with a full figure. Skinny girls don’t interest me in the least.”

“But I don’t.... I’m sorry.... “

“Maybe you will blossom,” Deidamia said, squeezing Achilles. “Some girls fill in as they get older. For now, though, you asked what I am to you?”

“Yes,” Achilles said, squeezing his arms more tightly over his small breasts as he stared at the image she’d made of him. “What am I to you?”

“A very sweet and lovely friend,” Deidamia said. “One I care for deeply, even if she is a bit of a flatly patty.”

The cruel words stung, but Achilles knew a maiden must hide her feelings and be forever sweet and pleasing, so instead of expressing his hurt he said, “You are a gifted artist. Your strokes are so passionate!”

“I am good at everything,” Deidamia said. She cupped Achilles firm little behind and squeezed. “Come. Let’s kiss and cuddle.”

Achilles could not resist, but the whole time they were together he felt shame and embarrassment at the small size of his breasts, and he wondered if perhaps his mother might know of some magic to give him the bigger breasts and wider hips he knew he needed now, to be happy.

That night after the evening meal, Achilles went back to his room, stepped out of his dress and looked at himself in the mirror, turning to the side to examine his profile, seeing the way his small breasts blossomed from his chest above his flat tummy, the way his butt rose out, plump and firm, bigger in proportion to his hips than when he’d been a boy, but not as plump and inviting as many women. His olive skin was radiant, perfect, and he adored his slender little arms.

But he the body of a girl. He could see it now. The small breasts. The smallness of his hips. It wasn’t good enough. He wasn’t pretty enough. Deidamia was a goddess, a big, powerful girl who could run and throw like a man. She needed a woman, not a girl. Achilles turned away from the mirror burning with shame— and determination.

I am Achilles! He said to himself, draping a sheet over the mirror so he wouldn't have to look at his ridiculous body again. I am a warrior, and I get what I want! Now, he wanted Deidamia, and he would find some way to become the woman she desired. He got on his knees, folded his hands and prayed:

Aphrodite, goddess of beauty, I
Mighty Achilles, beseech thee
Give me the figure my lover desires
Make me full of breast, generous of hips
Take from me this girlish shape
And make me woman
And all woman
That I may win my love

Aphrodite, who had found herself in the arms of a strong young mortal man who had captured her fancy, sat up, confused. She had not been following Achilles' changes, and so to hear the mighty warrior call to her in the pretty voice of a young woman, to hear him beg for bigger breasts and wider hips, shocked and amused her. She called forth the image of Achilles, saw him as a shapely girl, naked, kneeling and praying, and she laughed, covering her mouth. He was a lovely lass! What had happened to him?

Aphrodite had chosen to stand with Troy against the Greeks, and she knew of the prophecy. A changed Achilles, made so much a girl that he now dreamed of full breasts and birthing hips would not be of much use to the Greeks! In a flash, she flew to Skyros and appeared in Achilles' room.

“Mighty Achilles,” she said, her voice oozing irony. “You are quite changed!”

‘Goddess!’ Achilles squealed, looking upon the vision of perfection that was Aphrodite, quickly dropping his eyes, remaining on his knees. “Oh! Be praised!”

Aphrodite smiled, shaking her head. How had this come to pass? How had Achilles been reduced to such a demure maiden? He looked at his long, red gold hair, his slender shoulders. Reaching down, she cupped his chin and tilted his face back. Achilles’ eyes dropped down and to the side, his cheeks blushed. “Darling girl, Aphrodite said, as she could not think of this pretty, shrinking thing as a man. “Look at me.”

Achilles did as he had been bade. “You’re so pretty,” he whispered, looking upon the bright face of the goddess, compelled to speak the words.

“And you are a lovely female, Achilles. I would not have recognized you. You called to me wanting full, womanly breasts? Wide hips?”

“Yes,” Achilles said, his voice edged with desperation. “I wish for them more than anything.”

“What if I were to offer you strength? Or to restore you to manhood? Would you not prefer these gifts? A shield which will protect you from all attacks?”

Achilles shook his head. “I must have the body to please the woman I love. Please. I beg you, great Aphrodite. Please, give me full breasts and the shape to please my love!”

Poor boy. Poor girl. Aphrodite did not know whether it could be more kind to grant or deny his request, but she knew, once more, that to grant it would render this once proud warrior less the man he’d been and favor the cause of the Trojan people. “Sweet girl,” she said. “Each morning, you

must rub cream into your breasts, and as you do, you must pray, earnestly asking for a bigger bosom. Each night, you must do the same, and throughout the day, think constantly of the future you desire, and call to me for this boon. I want you to think of nothing but how you can become ever more the woman your lover desires. Can you do that?"

"Yes," Achilles said, his eyes growing teary with gratitude. "Yes! Oh, thank you, goddess! Thank you! I pledge myself to you and will venerate you always!"

Aphrodite smiled and patted little Achilles on the head. "Good girl."

Chapter 10

Achilles called the servants and bade them to bring him a basin of cream in the morning before the rising bell tolled. In the morning they came, waking him from some confusing dream, and left the bowl of cream. He cupped the thick, frothy white liquid into his little hands and poured it over his breasts, then again and he proceeded to rub it into the soft mounds, his nipples, under and around, all the while whispering to his goddess, pleading with her to make his breasts swell until they were huge, full, and pleasing to Deidamia's eye.

All that week, he performed the ritual, praying and pouring cream over his breasts, and each morning and each night he stood in front of his mirror, looked at his girlish figure and struggled to hold back the tears. He'd become more self-conscious about his body, and how immature he seemed next to some of the other girls, especially Apollonia, and he took to tying a cloth beneath his girls to lift them and press them together, and sometimes he pushed soft rags into the top of his dress to exaggerate his feminine shape. When he looked in the mirror and saw that he seemed to have deeper cleavage and bigger breasts, he swelled with pride and sashayed out of his room, beaming with pride that his soft chest thrust out from his body.

Meanwhile, each day another girl announced that she had been claimed by some boy for marriage. With the war fast approaching, marriages were being made rapidly so the ceremony could be performed and the wedding nuptials completed before the men went off to fight. The girls were all laughing and crying, over joyed and consumed with sorrow for themselves and their girlfriends, and though Achilles still did not understand why he

and the other girls seemed to feel so many feelings all at once, he found himself on the same turbulent tide, laughing and weeping and missing his new found friends even before they had gone off to marry.

Finally, toward the end of the week, he saw the changes in his body. He could tell when he woke that his breasts felt bigger, and when he looked in the mirror, staring to examine his profile he confirmed with his own eyes as his breasts had swollen in the night from delightful apples to ripe melons. Further, the swoop at the base of his spine rising to his swelling behind was bigger and softer, too. Tears came to Achilles eyes, and he prayed thanks to the goddess, turning so his back faced the mirror and looking over his shoulder, thrilled to see the way he'd filled out. He eagerly poured cream over his breasts, prayed, and hoped for even more.

When he pulled his dress on, the fabric stretched tight across his butt, and strained to contain his breasts. He lifted them and pushed them together with his little hands, then pulled the top of his dress wider to show more cleavage. Looking in the mirror, he felt a thrill of feminine pride, and he bit his lip, excited to see how Deidamia would react when she saw his maturing figure. First, though, he had exercise with the other butterflies, and he couldn't wait for them to see his figure either. They would all be so jealous!

They were. The girls saw his body, more voluptuous than it had ever been, and they gasped and praised him, asked him his secrets. He said it was the exercises. "It just came from coming down here and being with all of you!" He did not want to admit that he had been given help by a goddess. It didn't seem maidenly.

"Well, you take after your mother," Apollonia said. "She is quite large up top as well!"

“Yes,” Achilles said, thinking of his mother for the first time in some days. What would she think of her son’s new breasts?

After exercises Achilles spent extra time on his makeup, and selecting his jewelry. He tried on dress after dress, tossing one after another onto his bed until he finally found the one he felt more perfectly celebrated his new curves. Looking in the mirror, turning this way and that, he giggled and pranced, watching the way his whole body bounced, and then he tossed his hair, put a hand on his hip and turned slightly to the side. “I am a woman now,” he said, smiling, his crimson lips glittering. “Deidamia must love me!”

He would not know of love, but Deidamia certainly noticed Achilles newly swollen shape, the soft and pretty curves that now screamed for attention, as well as the sparkling feminine pride in his eyes. After they ate their morning meal, she took Achilles by the hand and led him to the sitting room, then had him stand in the center, a beam of light pouring down on him and setting his red gold hair ablaze. “Turn,” she said.

Achilles turned in a circle, smoothly and gracefully, just as the butterflies had taught him. He put a hand on his hip, and ran the other through his hair, making sure to keep his shoulders back, thrusting his breasts forward, glowing with pride over how far they rose from his chest, how his nipples pointed up, semi-visible through the silk dress he wore. The dress came down only to the tops of his thighs, showing off his long, tanned legs, so brown and smooth.

“You blossomed,” Deidamia said. “You have grown into the shape of a woman.”

Achilles smiled., blushed with pride. He found himself playing with his bracelets, turning them on his slender wrists. "I did it for you," he said. "I would do anything for you."

"I know," Deidamia said.

"Do you love me now?" Achilles asked in his pretty little voice. He no longer sounded so desperate, but more like a woman who knew she was desirable and who expected to hear yes.

"There is only one more thing I need from you before I can give you all my love," Deidamia said, gazing at the gorgeous woman she had made of Achilles.

"What?"

"The truth," Deidamia said. She got up and walked to Achilles, took his hands in her own and then kissed his knuckles. He tilted his head back, looking up at her with his big, innocent eyes, batting those long, curly lashes.

"Truth?" Achilles said, feeling a chill pass through him. Fear.

"Who are you, really?" Deidamia said. "I know Thetis has no daughter. Tell me who you are, so that I may trust you and open my heart to you."

"You might hate me if you learn the truth," Achilles said. Whatever of the man he'd been that remained burned with shame at the idea of telling anyone who he was, who he'd been. What he'd become. "Do not ask this of me."

"Tell me who you are, and I will love you to the end of time."

Was it true? Could it be? Achilles did not know, but it was his heart's desire, the thing he craved more than anything else in the whole wide world. He had to risk it. He remembered sitting with his mother, so long ago, and she'd reminded him that he was her warrior girl, her brave girl, he

had always faced the dangers, the fears, and he had always found the courage within his girl's sweet little heart to what had to be done.

"It's going to be okay," Deidamia whispered, kissing him on the neck. "Tell me."

Achilles put his soft hand to her cheek and looked her in the eyes. "I am Achilles, son of Thetis. We met once, and I fell madly in love with you, but you told me you loved only girls. So, I have become one to please you, to win your love, for I cannot live without you."

"Achilles," Deidamia said, pretending she had not known all along. "The great warrior? You have become this soft little maiden for me? To please me?"

"Yes. I gave up everything I valued, everything I thought was so important, to become the girl you would love." Achilles felt his eyes filling with tears, felt himself beginning to tremble. "Was I a fool to do so? Do you hate me now?"

Deidamia answered with a kiss, leaning him back, holding him, their lips locked together, and when the kiss ended she said, "Knowing that inside this sweet maiden lives the soul the mighty Achilles only make me love you all the more." The tears welled up and Achilles wept with joy, Deidamia comforting her sweet little warrior, as a man must.

For the rest of that week, Achilles found himself always at Deidamia's side, his little arm hooked in hers. She strode around with him at her side, her trophy girl, showing her off to everyone, constantly praising her for her bust, her sweet, feminine nature. Achilles' breasts kept swelling until they were even bigger than Apollonia's, and his behind also swelled until he was every man's fantasy of the ideal female, built for sex and bearing children. He revealed in his new shape. When he walked, he could feel his whole

body jiggle now, his breasts and his butt, the soft flesh at the top of his thighs. He took comfort in that, pride, because it meant he was all woman now, and exactly the kind of woman Deidamia loved.

Deidamia would tease him when they were alone. "If you tried to run the races now you would knock yourself unconscious with those huge breasts of yours bouncing around!"

"Stop!" He would squeal, playfully slapping at her.

"You're so helpless! You couldn't fight off a kitten!"

It made Achilles feel pretty to be so helpless, to have Deidamia recognize it. "That's why I need you to protect me," he said without shame. He'd accepted the kind of woman he'd become, that she'd demanded he become.

"And I will, my little dove. I will. What is it like? To have such big breasts?"

Achilles bit his lip. Occasionally, something happened that brought home to him the irony of his situation. His girlfriend was asking him what it was like to have such big breasts? "It's wonderful," he sighed. "I feel so pretty, and I get so much attention from everyone, men and women, that I feel like a goddess. I would feel naked without my breasts, I would feel like a little girl."

"But don't they give you back aches? And sometimes I see them bump into things, like when you got up from the table the other day and knocked over your wine glass."

"Beauty is suffering," Achilles said. "The butterflies taught me that."

On the 29th day since his transformation, Achilles woke to find a red stain on his sheets, and he wept with joy, clapping his little hands despite the bloating he felt, the way his breasts seemed even bigger and more

sensitive than ever. He'd been praying to have his first period, eager to be like the other girls, and finally it had come, and he could truly call himself a woman.

That day, his mother arrived for a visit, and as Achilles walked into the sitting room. Her mouth dropped open. She could not believe the voluptuous figure he now possessed, the full breasts swaying with each graceful step. "Pyrrha?" She said, though she knew this stunning woman was her son, as his face was still the same vision of feminine perfection.

Achilles gestured at his body. "A little different than last time you saw me?" Thetis noted he still had that adorable girl's voice, while his speech seemed even more melodic and feminine.

"You blossomed! It doesn't even seem possible you could mature so fast?"

They hugged, and Thetis felt her son's full, soft breasts press against her own. "You're so beautiful! You take my breath away!"

Achilles sat and smiled his prettiest smile. He no longer felt the least bit embarrassed to be a stunningly beautiful woman. He took great pride in his feminine allure. He told Thetis all about his prayers to Aphrodite, how he had begged the goddess for bigger breasts. He is surely safe now, Thetis decided. He can never go back to being a man now that he craves all the things a girl wants, he takes pride in his femininity. It relieved her, even as she marveled as the pretty little doll her boy had become. She couldn't imagine this delightful damsel witnessing combat without fainting, a thought soon to grow stronger.

"Oh! I almost forgot to mention," Achilles said, examining his long, crimson finger nails. "I had my menses."

“Oh,” Thetis said, thinking that suffering his period would be a blow to her son, that he would have been terribly upset. “Are you okay? It must have been horrible.”

“Horrible?” Achilles said, shaking his head. “It was the happiest day of my life! Mother, all the other girls had already had theirs. Do you know how embarrassing it was for me that I hadn’t? I had been praying for mine, and I was so happy when it came, I can’t even tell you!”

“You were praying? Happy?” Thetis could not hide her shock.

Achilles covered her hand with his own. “Mother, I’m a girl now. Doesn’t every girl wish for her menses, to know that she is a woman?”

“Yes,” Thetis said. “Of course, sweet girl. Of course. And, I am happy for you!” She threw her arms around Achilles, hugging him, feeling for sure that he was safe now— no, she was safe now. There was nothing left in this delightful maiden of the man he’d been. He was all woman.

After visiting with his mother, Achilles decided to go and spend some time along in the garden. The girls were all napping, having exhausted themselves that morning, and he didn’t feel like sitting alone in his room. He found a bench beneath in a shaded corner, and he leaned back against the cool, stone wall and closed his eyes, enjoying the smell of the rose bushes that grew all around him. He’d just begun to drift off when he heard a deep, gruff, manly voice call, “Lady Pyrrha.”

Achilles felt a shock of fear at the sound of the man’s voice, and then he opened his eyes he made a small shout of fright to see King Lycomedes staring at him with those hard, hungry eyes locked right on the soft swelling of his breasts. Achilles instinctively pressed his legs together and crossed his arms over his chest, making himself small.

“My dear!” Lycomedes laughed. “No need to look so frightened!” He walked over and sat on the bench next to Achilles.

“You startled me, is all,” Achilles said, annoyed at the frightened sound in his little voice. Remembering his maidenly manners, he tried to hide his fear and smiled as prettily as he could. “I am sorry if I have offended you.”

“Not at all,” Lycomedes said, taking Achilles hand and kissing it. “Young girls frighten most easily. Truth to tell, you looked adorable.” He let his eyes roam over Achilles’ body. “You are *scrumptious*,” he said, and the way he pronounced *scrumptious* gave Achilles the chills. He ran his eyes up and down Achilles body once more, and when he once more looked to Achilles face, they burned with lust. Deidamia had her father’s eyes, but to see that same lust in his made Achilles tremble.

“Thank you for offering to protect and care for me, *sir*,” Achilles said, wanting to remind the man of the age gap, of his responsibilities.

“I’ll do more than that,” Lycomedes said, sliding closer to Achilles, so their legs touched. Achilles tried to pull his hand free, but Lycomedes held it tight, he started to kiss Achilles on the inside of his arm. “I haven’t been able to stop thinking about you since you first came here. They say Helen’s face launched a thousand ships? Yours could launch a thousand thousand! I must taste those lips!” He leaned in, but Achilles turned his head away and felt the man’s wet lips land on his cheek instead.

“A man must sometimes show restraint,” Achilles said. “In order to honor his pledges.”

“I am your King,” Lycomedes said. “You must obey me.”

“Only should your commands be just!” Achilles cried, trying to get up and run away, but Lycomedes’ grabbed his hips and pulled him back down,

now climbing onto Achilles lap, laughing. “Your resistance only makes me grow hotter!”

Achilles cried out, feeling the man’s hard member pressing against his thigh. Lycomedes grabbed his chin and forced him to look at him. “Yield to me, missy. I will make it quick.”

Achilles pulled his jaw free and shifted his hips. “Mind your manners, my lord! You are being quite rude!”

“You dare resist me still? Do you want me to force it on you?”

“I want you to keep it in your pants!” Chilled heart was racing, and he felt a terror like he’d never felt before. Lycomedes was so big and strong, and Achilles was so weak and small! But he couldn’t allow this to happen. He couldn’t allow the father of the woman he loved to take him.

Lycomedes reached into the top of Achilles’ dress and pulled one of his breasts free, the nipple was hard. “Your body does not lie, bitch! You want it, and I am going to give it to you!”

“No!” Achilles said, dragging his fingernails across Lycomedes’ forehead, drawing blood.

“Oh, I am taking you now you little slut, and the more you fight the better I will enjoy it.”

“I will not yield,” Achilles answered through clenched teeth. Lycomedes reached down and pulled up the hem of Achilles’ dress, shoving his legs apart. Achilles felt terrified, exposed, vulnerable, but not helpless, for when Lycomedes began to undue his own pants, Achilles thought back to wrestling moves he’d learned as a boy, when he’s had to contend with bigger, stronger boys, and hooking an ankle behind Lycomedes, he butted the man in the chin with his head and then using all the strength in his

long legs, he threw Lycomedes backward, sending crashing against a stone table which shattered with the force of his fall.

“Someone has attacked the king!” One of the guards yelled, rushing into the space, spear jabbing at Achilles. More of the King’s men rushed in, swords and spears drawn. Lycomedes was on the ground, woozy, blood in his face. ‘Treason!’ Traitor!’ The guard yelled, pointing his spear at Achilles.

Achilles tugged at the hem of his dress, pulling it back down over his hips, then quickly pulled his dress back over his exposed breast even as he saw the guards all ogling him. “I am just a girl!” He squealed, playing the maiden. “How could I overpower such a big, strong man?”

“I saw ... heard it all!” The guard shouted.

“Lycomedes? My husband?” The Queen called from somewhere in the palace. “Is he hurt? Where is he?” Her voice was getting closer.

“When the king tried to—” The guard shouted.

“Shut up!” Lycomedes said. “Can’t you hear the queen coming? Get this wench out of here!”

One of the soldiers grabbed Achilles by the arm and dragged him from the garden. Lycomedes watched him go, enjoying the sight of his long legs, and that ass! She truly was a goddess, and he knew he would not rest until he had thrown her down and taken her maidenhead. But for now, alas, he watched her run off, even as he began to formulate the excuses he would use to befuddle his wife.

His wife saw Achilles being dragged away, and her heart burned with jealousy and hate. She’d seen how her husband had eyed the girl, practically stripping her bare with his lecherous eyes. But she composed herself to scheming, hurrying into the garden, where she found her

husband being helped to his feet, a woman's claw marks bleeding on his forehead. "My husband!" She cried. "Were you attacked, or did you do this to yourself?"

"I... slipped and fell..." He said.

Thetis put her arms around him, "Poor, dear. I am glad you are okay." She looked around. Did I hear Pyrrha's voice?"

"You heard only the foolish woman in your own head conjuring strife where there is none," Lycomedes said.

"Oh, was it my imagination when I found you with—"

"Privacy!" Lycomedes said., waving the guard away. "And if I catch you lingering about seeking gossip, I will have the tongues cut out of your heads." The men scattered in a clattering of arms. "Woman, enough!"

"Stay away from that girl!" Theatis spat. "You agreed to protect her, and Thetis is no common woman to be trifled with. Zeus, himself, came to her wedding! Do you want to bring the wrath of the King of Gods down on our house?"

"I will govern my appetites. I will control my urges toward the girl with the force of my will."

"Ha! Then we are surely doomed."

"What would you have me do?" Lycomedes said. He knew the truth of his wife's words, and being reminded of Thetis powers and connections, he trembled to think what would happen if he did take the maiden. And yet that smooth, radiant skin, those lips, those breasts! He knew he could not control himself.

"Remove the temptation. I have been looking for a match for our nephew, Periphas. She would be a prize for him, being of royal and immortal blood. Give her to him."

“Do what you will with the girl,” Lycomedes said. “If you can secure her mother’s consent, so be it.”

“I believe her mother will be quite pleased with the match. I will broach the subject with her on her next visit.”

Chapter 11

The men dragged Achilles back to his room and practically threw him onto his bed, slamming the door as they left. Achilles curled up on his bed, tucking his legs under him, biting his lip. He was so confused, embarrassed, ashamed and yet...

The feeling of throwing Lycomedes down had awoken in him the joy of masculine prowess, of being strong, domineering. He clenched one little fist and punched his own soft little palm, feeling his breasts jiggle. He had learned to enjoy feeling helpless, dependent, clinging to Deidamia's arm, the rarest of accessories, but now he felt again the thrill of strength. Perhaps he could...

And yet, no. Deidamia loved his feminine weakness, his emotional frailty. She loved him as Pyrrha. He got up and went to the mirror, tugging at his dress, adjusting it, lifting his heavy breasts and pressing them together. He looked at his bright face, the plump lips, the bright, innocent eyes. "I must be Pyrrha," he said in his sweet, chirping voice. "I must forever swear off the life of a man."

The idea had been planted, though, and over the next few days as he found himself laying in the sand with the butterflies, or clinging to Deidamia's arm as they walked in the gardens, he felt a growing restlessness in his mind, a need to do more, be more. But what more could he be with this body?

The war times weddings came like spring storms, and Achilles found himself a bridesmaid at every one, he and the other girls wearing matching dresses, clothing flowers, and he was overcome each time with tears of laughter and tears of loss, as one girl after another was taken by her man.

He watched the men, so tall and broad shouldered, so strong. He wondered sometimes what it would be like to lay with one of them, and he wished sometimes that he was them, raising his girl's veil to kiss her sweet lips.

Deidamia seemed ever more distant. Her eyes often looked to the horizon, and when she kissed him and called him "little dove" he felt her mind was elsewhere, that she thinking of someone else and not her beloved Pyrrha. Finally, as they sat together watching the sunset one evening, Achilles took her hand and said, "Tell me what troubles your mind."

Deidamia squeezed his hand and said, "I have never been happier than these past weeks with you, Achilles. It was bliss."

Achilles? The fact that she used his name sent a jolt of fear through Achilles little heart. "What is it? You sound as if you are saying good bye."

"You must have known, somewhere deep inside, that this couldn't last."

"What? No! What are you saying?" Achilles felt that emptiness in him growing, that terrible void. The mere thought of being separated from Deidamia filled him with terror.

"I am to be married," Deidamia said. She brushed a stray curl from Achilles' cheek. "In two weeks! I must leave you, my parents, Skyros." For the first time since Achilles had met her, tears filled her eyes, and in empathy to her tears as well as his own sense of aching loss and confusion Achilles wept as well. The girls threw their arms around each other, crying, hugging.

When the tempestuous tears had ended, Deidamia wiped Achilles from his soft cheeks. "I never thought you would leave me," Achilles said.

“You dear, naive girl,” Deidamia said. “Don’t you know it is a girl’s fate to marry and bear her mate’s children?”

“But you don’t like men,” Achilles said.

“As if that has ever mattered,” Deidamia said, her voice laced with bitter recrimination. “I am a King’s daughter. I am far too valuable a prize to be allowed my freedom. I have always known it.”

“But, how will you endure it?” Achilles said, shivering at the thought of being served up to some man, to have to spread his legs and.... No. He would never.

“Alcohol,” Deidamia said.

“Take me with you!” Achilles said. “Let me love you in secret, let me keep you warm at night, let me smother you with kisses...”

“It can’t be,” Deidamia said. “You will have to go and live with your husband when the time comes.”

“I am not to marry,” Achilles said. “Ever. You know who I am? I could never allow a man to be my master, to thrust himself into me.”

“Honey, little dove, my sweet,” Deidamia said. “It’s really not up to you.”

Achilles head spun. His whole world, everything he’d thought and expected, all his plans for the future, a life with Deidamia as her dutiful mate, swept away, and his delusion, his vanity, his feminine foolishness exposed. He couldn’t accept this. Had he become a maiden, prayed for this body, all so he could be handed over to some man to deliver a brood of crying brats? “Let’s run away!” He said. “Make our own lives together!”

“Two beautiful young women alone in the world? We would end up slaves, or worse. The world is not safe for women, especially ones as pretty as you. We need the protection of a man.”

“This is not the Deidamia I know. The Deidamia I know is fearless!”

“A girl can’t make it alone in this world, pretty Achilles. It isn’t possible.”

“My mother has made it alone.”

“Perhaps you have forgotten the story of how your parents met?”

Deidamia said, shaking her head laughing. “Did not your father hunt her like an animal, tie her up and torture her until she agreed to marry him?”

“I... oh...” Achilles said, idly playing with one of his earrings. He imagined the scene now, but pictured himself bound, Lycomedes leering at him. “I I don’t...”

Deidamia kissed him silent. “Let us love one another these last few weeks we have together. Let us love as no two girls have ever loved. Let us love each time as if it is the last time.”

Achilles moaned, his lips, his body enflame with passion.

“I want you to be my maid of honor,” Deidamia said, pulling his dress down, covering his hard nipples with her hot, wet mouth, sucking. Achilles gasped, squeezing his legs together, feeling himself getting hot and wet. Pulling her mouth from Achilles’ breast, her saliva trailing from her mouth, glistening hot on his soft skin, Deidamia kissed him again, and he dug his nails into her back. “Will mighty Achilles agree to be my maid of honor?” Deidamia teased. “Will he put on his prettiest dress and be my girl?”

“Yes,” Achilles said, smiling, kissing Deidamia along her collar bone. “Yes. Yes.” Deidamia’s maid of honor. He pictured himself standing next to her, smiling brightly, clothing a bouquet of flowers, presented to the whole world as the favorite girl of the woman he loved. It would be the greatest moment in his life, his greatest accomplishment. He cupped his breasts and said, “kiss me down here. Please! Make me glad I am a maiden.”

Deidamia laughed and took his nipple into her mouth once more, chewing with her teeth, teasing with her tongue, loving the soft feminine moans coming from the man she'd conquered.

Chapter 12

Achilles did not sleep that night. Once more he found himself overwhelmed by a storm of feminine fears and emotions. He had come to think of himself as a maiden, he had accepted his life as a girl, he'd even learned to treasure the sweet pleasure of being helpless, pretty and dependent on someone stronger. But now it had all been swept away, and a new life lay before him. Deidamia, the woman he loved, off to marry. And what would he do? Go and live with his mother? Perhaps he could become a priestess in the temple of Aphrodite?

Or be bound to a man, to become his wife, to bear his children?

Never that, he decided. He remembered throwing Lycomedes down. The man it had awoken in him. His mother had said he was to be a woman for the rest of his life, that there was no hope for him to be restored to manhood. But what the Gods had done could be undone. Perhaps he could pray to another? And yet he tried to imagine being a man once more. He got up and looked in the mirror at his pretty face, his round little shoulders, his voluptuous figure. He would miss being beautiful, being a woman, arraying himself in gorgeous gowns, pretty bracelets. He didn't know if he could remember how to be a man. More he'd grown used to the pampered life— silk sheets and soft beds, languorous days on the beach, dancing in the sultry breezes at night. Could he face life in a tent on the edge of the battlefield now that he knew what it was to be a princess?

It was only two days later that Achilles found himself sentenced to marriage. His mother had come in for one of her visits but instead of meeting Achilles right away she'd gone off with Theatis, bidding Achilles to wait for her in the garden. Achilles' heart had begun to pound with fear at

the thought of being alone, of what man might come along and — do what men do— and so he'd excused himself, gone back to his room and sat, pensively waiting. His women's intuition told him that his mother plotted marriage, but he held hope it wasn't so. Eventually, an escort came to take him back to the garden to meet his mother, and walking with the big, tall men to either side of him, Achilles couldn't but feel he was being led to his execution.

His mother waited with Theatis, all smiles, and they both greeted Achilles with the most effusive hugs and kisses. "Is something the matter?" Achilles asked as he sat.

"Heavens no," Theatis said, waving away the idea. "In fact, your mother has good news, exciting news!"

'Oh?' Achilles said, heart racing in terror at what he thought was coming, at what he knew was coming.

Thetis covered Achilles hand with her own, the smile never leaving her face. "I am so excited for you, sweet daughter. I have found a most excellent match for you, and we have made the arrangements for you to marry!"

Achilles mouth dropped open, and he as much as he thought he was prepared for this, he felt like he'd just been kicked in the stomach by a mule. "Married?" He shook his head. "Me?" He looked at Theatis, his mother, and a strangled laughed escaped his crimson lips. "You must be mad. I do NOT wish to marry, mother!"

Thetis glanced at Theatis, a chagrined look on her face that said, *children, am I right?* "I understand this must come as a shock, but with the war looming..."

“My nephew Periphas is a noble and handsome young man,” Theatis cut in. “He will make a fine husband.”

“He really is a smart match,” Thetis said. “Rich, and tall, too...”

Rich and tall? Does she take me for a common maiden, to be enticed by such things? Achilles wondered.

“All the girls swoon over him.” Theatis said. “You would be the envy of all the girls.”

“You two would look so good together...”

“I do not favor men,” Achilles said. “I do not seek the company of men, and I would not welcome one into my bed!” Achilles snapped, horrified at what he was hearing.

Silence. Thetis and Theatis exchanged glances. “You can have a girl on the side,” Thetis said.

“Oh, it is quite common. He will not care so long as you give him babies,” Theatis said.

“Babies? I don’t want babies!”

Thetis and Theatis both laughed at that, and Achilles, feeling himself growing hot, took a few deep breaths, trying to calm himself before he had a most unladylike tantrum. “I do not find this matter one that calls for mirth,” he finally managed.

“You just— it’s that you remind me of myself, that’s all,” Thetis said.

“I had no wish to become a wife or a mother at your age,” Thetis said. “I just want to be young and pretty and free.”

“So, what happened?” Achilles said. “Why not follow your heart?”

“I had to follow my parents,” Theatis said, “and do my duty.”

Duty. The same word Deidamia had used. But why should it be a woman’s duty to live such a limited life? Achilles wondered.

“Let me speak to Pyrrha alone for a bit,” Thetis said.

“Of course.”

Thetis and Theatis hugged, and as she was leaving Theatis said, “You really must meet Periphas, Pyrrha. He is quite charming!”

Achilles thought to faint with vomiting, but remembering his manners he smiled and said, “I am sure you are right, Queen Theatis, and I thank you for your interest in my future.”

“Good girl!” Thetis said after Theatis left. “You really have become a proper young lady!”

“I have, but I did it so I could be with the woman I loved, and now everything has come to naught. To be made some man’s wife? I would rather die!”

They talked. Argued. Cried. In the end, Achilles had become too much the maiden to assert himself. He was the kind of girl now who was used to others making decisions for her, and so she agreed to meet Periphas, to be courted by him, but not to marry. “Should I find him wanting, I must wait for a better man,” he said.

“Agreed. But you must give him a fair chance. Agreed?”

“Agreed,” Achilles said.

“Good girl,” Thetis said. She looked at Achilles. The eye makeup he used had run when he’d cried, but it only made him more beautiful. He had a bright face, big, pretty eyes, perfectly sculpted brows. He was a vision of feminine perfection now, and marriage and motherhood was his doom. A girl so beautiful would, if she were to remain single, create such strife as even the Gods had never seen. It was a happy sad time for her, sending her son off to be courted, to become a bride, but it was the way of the world. She could only pray to the gods that he would find the same solace

in his babies that she had, and suffer less of the maternal angst that had plagued her, that had driven her to turn her son from a mighty warrior destined for fame a glory into a girl, pursued by men, destined now to be a bride, a wife, a mommy.

Well, it was every girl's fate. Achilles come to accept it, just as so many had before him. For now, she decided she would meet with this Periphas and give him some suggestions on how to win the heart of the lovely Pyrrha, most gentle of all the maidens.

With Deidamia's wedding approaching and so much else happening, Achilles and the other girls were busy, frantic, stressed. As maid of honor a great many responsibilities fell to Achilles, and he spent a lot of time with Theatis going over every detail from the seating at the feast to the music and the celebration after. Theatis agonized over every detail, changing her mind about every minor detail from the color of the table clothes to the whether to bring in musicians from Athens or use locals to the what gifts to leave on the beds of the visiting royals. Achilles wanted very badly to be of help, but Theatis seemed mostly to want him there to yell at and agonize over her choices, and he found himself overwhelmed to the point of tears at times, longing for the simplicity of a sword, a shield and a man to fight.

Each night when he returned to his room, he found some gift from Periphas—perfume, a necklace, earrings. Achilles shook his head. Each of the items was exquisite, finely crafted, beautiful. But, still. He was Princess Pyrrha, descended from the Titans. Did this boy truly think to impress him with baubles?

The day before the wedding, Periphas had at last arrived, and Achilles made himself pretty for their meeting. He did not care to impress Periphas, and he took none of the delight in his efforts he took when preparing

himself for Deidamia. No. In this case he intended to wield his beauty as a weapon, to cow and intimidate Periphas, to let him know he was out of his league. Perhaps he, realizing the folly of pursuing his better, would retreat and save himself the shame of marrying a woman so far above him.

Achilles smiled as he imagined the scene playing out. He sprayed some perfume on his wrists, rubbed them together and then rubbed them on his neck. Looking in the mirror, he saw his eyes grown hard and fierce, like they once looked when he strode into battle. He would crush this silly man, and he would remain free! He pulled to top of his dress wider, letting more of her deep, soft cleavage show. Then, he strode off to wage war, his hips swaying proudly.

Achilles arrived at the sitting room where they would meet first, as was costume. He made some small talk with his mother and Theatis, and then Periphas arrived. Achilles remained seated, did not smile, but held out his little hand. Periphas took it and kissed it. "People sing the praises of your beauty through the world, but you are far more beautiful than even the words of the most talented poets could convey."

Achilles rolled his eyes. Periphas did not seem intimidated by his beauty at all, which annoyed him.

"We will give you love birds your privacy," Thetis said, displeased with Achilles' rude conduct. "But you, young man, remember we are right outside! Be on your best behavior!"

Periphas smiled, a proud, confident smile. "Of course, Lady Thetis."

Achilles looked him over. He was quite tall, and with the broadest shoulders. It was true, he was not an ill-formed man. He had a full head of curly black hair, and that smile! But still. Achilles crossed his legs and adjusted his skirt. He was just a man.

“May I sit?” Periphas said.

Seems kind of wimpy, Achilles thought. “If you want,” he said, looking away, plucking at a strand of his hair, yawning. “You should know I agreed to be courted only reluctantly.”

“And you, little girl, should know that I get what I want.”

“Little girl?” Achilles said, sitting up and regarding the man with furious eyes. “Do you dare talk down to me?”

“If you continue to act like a petulant child, I may go so far as to spank you,” Periphas said with a grin.

“You are quite full of yourself, aren’t you?” Achilles said. He leaned forward to give Periphas a better view of his breasts.

Periphas looked down at Achilles generous gifts, then back at him with cool regard. “Stop displaying your body like a common whore,” Periphas said in a cool, even voice of command.

Achilles sat back, shocked, but his maidenly nature made him obey. He even raised a small hand to his chest, covering his cleavage in sudden modesty. “You are not what I expected.”

Periphas, who’d been told Pyrrha would respond to a strong hand, shrugged. “And what did you expect?”

“A typical man. Passionate for horses and wine, gambling and fornicating.”

“Then I am no typical man,” Periphas said.

“And what are your passions, then?” Achilles asked.

“Glory,” Periphas said, his voice going deeper, growing hoarse, his eyes growing hard like those of a shark. “Justice. I ache for this war to begin, that I may stride the field of battle beneath the banner of my king, smite the ignoble men of Troy, who would kidnap our Greek women, steal them and

trade them like cattle. I would split the skulls of every last one of them, and scatter their bones in the desert!”

“Oh, my,” Achilles said, his own voice hoarse as his mouth had grown so dry, his skin so hot. He was... shaken. His Periphas was truly a man among men. To hear him speak of such manly deeds, to display such passion!

“I am sorry. My vulgar speech must have showed your delicate ears, Lady Pyrrha.”

“No,” Achilles said, squeezing his knees together against some growing need... within him. “I am... impressed... with your passion, your zeal. Your eagerness to fight for justice. You... you have moved me, Lord Periphas.”

“You sound parched,” Periphas said. He poured some wine. “Drink,” he said. “And tell me now of Pyrrha.”

He handed the glass to Achilles, who drank as he’d been commanded by manly Periphas. The wine was sweet, but it burned as it rolled down his throat and it made him all warm in his deepest places. Periphas had not just awoken some new passion in Achilles regarding men. Indeed, to his surprise he wished he could kiss the man right then and there.

But he also wished to be him, to hold a sword, to fight for glory.

After, he told his mother that, yes, he would marry Periphas if that was her wish for him, and a date for the wedding was set. Did Achilles want to marry? He did not know. He wasn’t sure what he wanted anymore, but he knew he was a girl, and everyone wanted him to marry, so he just said yes as it seemed what a girls was supposed to say.

Chapter 13

Achilles lay on his back, naked. Deidamia placed a sprig of holly across his upper lip. "There. You have a mustache. Now you are a man once more."

Achilles tried to lower his voice and speak in the flat tones of a man. "Give me babies! I want babies!"

Both girls giggled. They kissed. "I want this to last forever," Achilles said.

"Silly girl," Deidamia said.

"I know."

He'd been thinking more and more of asking the Gods to restore him. He couldn't force ever being happy again once his days with Deidamia ended, and the prospect of dying in the war now struck his girlish heart as the romantic thing he could ever do, dying of a broken heart, preferring not to go on living if he could not be with his true love. As he thought about his death, how he would call out Deidamia! Just as he closed his eyes and bid this cruel world goodbye, a cry escaped his lips. "Oh!" And a single tear rolled down his cheek.

"What is it?" Deidamia said, alarmed to see her lover so quickly turn from joy to sorrow.

"I just imagined myself without you," Achilles said. "It hurts too much!"

"And yet we must bear it," Deidamia. "And we will."

She kissed Achilles and held him, and they fell asleep there in the sand, entwined in each other's arms. How long they slept, they did not know, but they woke to the sound of horns blasting, and the harbor bells ringing. Climbing to their feet, brushing the sand off their brown skin, they hurried

out to find the guards, who'd been keeping watch nearby. "What is it?" Deidamia cried. "What has happened?"

"Word spreads that the great Ulysses arrives," the man said.

"Ulysses?" Achilles gasped, and when he looked to Deidamia, his eyes were full of fear.

"Don't worry," she said, knowing that Ulysses had no doubt come looking for Achilles. "I will keep you safe!"

Chapter 14

The girls hurried back to the palace. They dressed for the mid-day meal, ate, Achilles pensively waiting for Ulysses to appear, to unmask him before all his friends. He was ashamed for them to know he'd once been a boy, so vulgar and coarse. They would all laugh at him, and he would lose all his friends! Periphas would no doubt break off the marriage, which was— well, he didn't know if that was good or bad.

As lunch began to reach an end, a messenger appeared. "Ladies," he said. "I come with greeting from mighty Ulysses. As a show of his respect and appreciation for the great people and King of Skyros, he does bring gifts for all the ladies of the court! With the blessing and permission of your noble King and Queen, you will all be escorted to the market, where a tent full of precious wonders awaits! Now, go and freshen yourself, and then join Ulysses for a party!"

The girls all began chattering with excitement. Deidamia leaned over to Achilles and whispered, "It's a trap. I am sure of it!"

"What should I do?" Achilles said, his eyes wide. "Tell me!"

"Let me consider," Deidamia said.

They went back to Achilles' room, as he had more of the feminine tools needed for a girl to look her best. Deidamia sat so Achilles could fix her hair. "You are so careless with your braids," Achilles said, vexed at her carefree ways. "I shall have to pull all this out and start over."

Deidamia sighed. She had learned not to argue with Achilles when it came to matters of hair or fashion, so she minded her tongue, letting her little help meet fuss with her hair as she thought about Ulysses and how to foil his scheme.

“I am not certain what Ulysses plans,” Deidamia said while Achilles pulled out her sloppy braids. “But I am sure he seeks you. He must have gotten word somehow that you hide among the girls of the court, so he wishes to gather us together in one place.”

“How could he know I hide here among the girls?” Achilles said, once more humiliated to think people knew he was once a boy. It was too shameful to face.

“People talk. Word spreads. Perhaps he followed your mother or heard rumors of her frequent visits. I do not know, but I am sure that is why he has decided to throw this party.”

Deidamia’s words filled Achilles with feminine fear, and he felt his heart begin to race. “I should hide!” He said. “Stay here! If I am not at the party, he can’t find me out!”

“Your absence would be noted,” Deidamia said. “That alone might reveal you to be the girl once known as Achilles.”

“So, what should I do then?” Achilles said as he began to brush out Deidamia’s hair, grateful to have something to do to distract himself, to calm him. He’d found brushing hair, braiding hair— these tasks always calmed him when he felt anxious, and since becoming a maiden he felt anxious— well, all the time!

“We will go to the party, and I will keep my eyes ever open for whatever scheme Ulysses has planned. He is a most dangerous man because he fights like a woman, always plotting and scheming, laying snares. But I will outsmart him. I have yet to meet the man I can’t best in a match of wits!”

Achilles felt his cheeks growing warm. He loved it when she talked so aggressively, when she spoke with such confidence. He began to braid her

hair. He was scared of what might come, but he knew his mate would keep him safe.

The girls were carried down to the pavilion for the party in carriages, and as they arrived they were handed glasses of chilled wine in which lemon, orange and lime wedges floated. There were sticky honey cakes and candied cherries. And there were men. Ulysses men stood sentry all around the tent, their bodies hard and tanned from all the hours spent at sea, with great beards and wavy hair on their chests, and the arms and shoulders coiled with muscle. Glancing at them, always out of the corner of his eyes, as it was most unladylike to stare directly at a man when appreciating his beauty, Achilles felt himself once more drawn to them, wondering what it would be like to kiss them, to feel those stiff beards bristling against his soft cheeks, to press his soft chest against theirs, hard as an iron shield. And longed once more to stand among them, a man above men, one of the strongest and most feared fighters in all the world.

One the girls had sipped some wine and eaten of the cakes, some of the men came in carrying great crates and they began to unload them on a table covered in silk— Achilles's eyes sparkled with joy at the sight of all the pretty bracelets and rings, waist chains and anklets and— oh!— his heart skipped a beat as the men placed several tiara flashing with jewels on the table. He had to have one!

The men also lay many fine weapons on another table— flashing swords and mighty shield of the finest workmanship, some Achilles clearly recognized as the work of Hephaestus, God of Smithing, and he stared in wonder at the beauty of the weapons and armor laid out there, and he thought that one should in particular, carved with the image of the blazing

sun, would look quite darling hanging above a fireplace. “Don’t look at the weapons!” Deidamia hissed in his ear.

“Pardon?”

Deidamia took his hand and pulled him off to the side. “This is the trap!” She said. “Ulysses hopes to lure you into the open. He knows no maiden would have the slightest interest in arms and armor. He would see which girl seems fascinated by them and spy you out!”

“Oh,” Achilles said, looking out of the corner of his eyes to spot Ulysses. Indeed, the trickster stood off to the side, watching Achilles intently. “He stares at me now!” Achilles said, leaning close to Deidamia, putting his arm around her, snuggling against her.

“Just act naturally,” Deidamia said.

“Girls!” Ulysses shouted. “You may each select any one item your heart desires from the treasures we have placed before you. It will be a gift from Ulysses to you!”

The girls all shrieks with joy and went to look at the jewelry. Deidamia put her hand on the small of Achilles back and guided him over, which was not hard as he longed to pick one of the tiaras anyway. *Hmpf!* He thought, putting his nose in the air. *Ulysses is not so clever as my girlfriend!*

He glanced back over his round little shoulder to see Ulysses watching him giggling and gushing over a tiara, obviously surprised, annoyed and—was that desperation? Achilles remembered the prophecy. The Greeks could not win the war if he weren’t present. He’d been about to put a tiara on his head, but he stopped and set it down, feeling.... Guilty. What of the men who would die because he chose the soft, maiden’s life? What of Helen, who would remain trapped, the prisoner of a disgusting man who treated her like an animal. Even the maiden in Achilles owed it to her to do

what was right, and, besides, Deidamia was soon to be lost to him. He looked over at the weapons.

“What are you doing?” Deidamia said. “You will give yourself away.”

“Perhaps it would be better?” Achilles said. “Denied the chance to your lover and helpmate, would my life not be better spent winning the war, freeing Helen?”

“No! Don’t be a fool!” Deidamia said.

“I have been a fool,” Achilles said. “Just a silly fool of a girl!” He started to toward the weapons, meaning to take up one of the swords, to reveal himself to Ulysses, to go and fight and die, a broken hearted girl with nothing to live for!

Deidamia grabbed his little wrist and pulled him back toward the tables loaded with feminine baubles. “Be a good little girl and put the tiara on your silly empty head!” Deidamia said.

“I don’t want to live without you!” Achilles screamed as the tears began to pour down his cheeks. “I can’t live without you!”

“Stop making a scene!” Deidamia said, grabbing him, pulling him away from the manly weapons. But it was too late, Ulysses was stepping forward, smiling triumphantly.

“You!” Ulysses said. “You are Achilles!”

He was pointing at Deidamia. She raised her eyebrows, amused. “Me? The warrior Achilles? You are quite mistaken.” The fool, Deidamia thought, triumphantly. When her father heard that Ulysses had publicly accused her of being a man, he would be lucky to leave the island alive. And then the smile vanished from her face as she saw Issa step next to Achilles and whisper in his ear.

“Her?” He said, looking at Achilles. “But, are you sure? She’s so... really?”

Issa nodded, her eyes burning with hate and jealousy.

Achilles pivoted his finger to point at the shrinking, weeping maiden. “You are Achilles! I call on you as a matter of honor to speak the truth and reveal your true name!”

“Don’t say a word!” Deidamia said, throwing her arms protectively over Achilles shoulders.

“No,” Achilles said. ‘It’s over.’ Huddling against Deidamia, he wiped his tears and said, “I am Achilles, or I was before I became the maiden Pyrrha who stands before you now, and begs you to take pity on him, as he is just a girl now, just a maiden with a broken heart.”

Chapter 15

Achilles sat, knees together, his head against Deidamia's shoulder as the adults decided his fate. As a girl he knew he had no say in what would happen, so he kept quiet, as a maiden is meant to do. Deidamia took his hand and held it in both of hers.

"Achilles must resume his manly shape and fight with us at Troy!" Ulysses said.

"My daughter is not a warrior!" Thetis said. "Look at her! She is a shrinking little kitten of a girl!"

"The results of your crusade enchantments!" Ulysses said. "What sort of woman feminizes her own son?"

"How dare you!?" Thetis shouted, rising, fists clenched, charging toward Ulysses like a tigress.

Thetis stepped in front of her, seeking to calm her. "Please!" She shouted. "This is not helping! We must all calm down and think of what is best for all!"

"I care only for what is best for my daughter!" Thetis said. "But what would Ulysses, who abandons his own wife and children to go off in search of glory, know of caring for one's children?"

"Woman!" Ulysses said. "Hold your tongue!"

"I am a queen and daughter of the Gods!" Thetis said. "And you are only a mortal man."

"Your mom is a lioness!" Deidamia said. "I like her."

"She is fierce," Achilles said. "Just like you."

“While Thetis cares only for herself, I am pleading with you all that we do what is best for Greece,” Ulysses said. “We all make sacrifices in times of war, and Helen remains prisoner!”

“Oh, you’re so noble!” Thetis spat.

“I believe we can all have what we want,” Periphas, who had been sitting and listening calmly, said.

The room grew quiet, and all turned to look at him. He stood. “Here is what I propose. The prophecy states only that Achilles must be among the Greeks, but not that he must fight. So, I marry the lovely Pyrrha, who has been promised me. Then she comes and stays with me at the battlefield. Achilles is with the Greeks, albeit in this maidenly form, and we all win!”

Ulysses thought. Shrugged. “I am satisfied with that outcome.”

“I, too,” Thetis said, “as my son will not have to throw her life away on the foolish and childish pursuit of glory.”

“You just had to throw that I, didn’t you?” Ulysses laughed, now meeting Thetis eyes. He’d been impressed with her passionate tension.

“That was the least I could manage,” Thetis said. Ulysses looked like he would be fun in bed, and she wondered what wonders he might work with that clever tongue.

“So, it is settled,” Periphas said. “We are in accord?”

“Your boyfriend is pretty amazing,” Deidamia said. “I think he will take care of you.”

“It seems so,” Achilles whispered. “But me? Living in a tent? I’m a princess?”

“We are in accord,” Ulysses said.

“I consent,” Thetis said.

“Good, then—“

“One moment!” Deidamia said. “All is not settled!”

“What?” Ulysses said.

“Achilles is a princess, and she can no be expected to live like a soldier!”

“Nor would I ask it of the woman I love!” Periphas answered, and when he turned his eyes to Achilles, they grew soft with such care and compassion that his heart fluttered. “I know what a sensitive and delicate girl you are, sweet Achilles, and I shall build for you a palace on the sand, such as has never been seen! There will not be a girl in all the world who loves in greater comfort! Will that satisfy my love?”

Achilles smiled and nodded, but then he whispered, “Can you please call me Pyrrha? It is my name!”

“Pyrrha, then, my love, I am devoted to you always, and I will always do whatever it takes to make you happy!” Periphas shouted.

“To the lovely Pyrrha, most beautiful girl in the world!” Ulysses shouted.

“To Pyrrha!” All shouted.

“Let us toast and celebrate this historic day!”

“Go to him,” Deidamia whispered into Achilles ear. “Show him you appreciate his manly concern for you.”

Achilles went to his fiancé. Deidamia had commanded it, and he would always do as his lover bid him do. Periphas gathered little Achilles into his arm and pulled him close, planting a kiss on his plush lips. Achilles leg rose until his heel touched his behind, and he leaned against his man, *thinking, a girl could get used to this.* And yet, when he felt the bulge in Periphas’ robe press against his thigh, it made him feel ill at ease, and he wondered what it would be like when they lay together and consummated their marriage.

Chapter 16

The night before his wedding, after the wedding party had had their feast and revels, Deidamia took Achilles hand and led him down the stairs to the beach. A full moon hovered in the sky, silvery cloud webs drifting across its face. They went down to the edge of the beach, where the gentle waves washed up just inches before their bare feet. Achilles dug his toes into the soft sand while Deidamia kissed him and got him out of his dress. His breasts swayed free, nipples hard, and they kissed and caressed one another, softly moaning. Achilles' breath grew short, his breasts heaved.

"I have a surprise for you," Deidamia said, and she pulled smooth, marble phallus from her robe. It glistened in the moonlight, and Achilles squeezed his legs together at the sight of it. "I am your soul mate," Deidamia said. "I should take your maiden head. Get on your hands and knees."

"I'm... scared..." Achilles said.

"Do it," Deidamia said.

Achilles felt a lump in his throat, a pit in his stomach. He trembled, but he obeyed, getting onto his hands and knees, his breasts swaying from his chest. Deidamia took her position behind him, slapping him on the ass, then putting a hand on the small of his back. Achilles wiggled his hips nervously, and Deidamia said, "You look good from this position."

Achilles looked back over his shoulder, and seeing the fear in his big, pretty eyes enflamed Deidamia's passions all the more. The waves began to lap at Achilles' fingers, cold and salty, and as Deidamia began to tease him with the phallus, brushing it against his most sensitive places, he gasped and, arching his back, raising his behind, he stared up at the moon.

“You like that, don’t you?”

“Yes,” Achilles admitted, his voice ragged with passion. He felt Deidamia push the phallus into him and gasped, “Oh!” Deidamia began pushing it, in and out, gentle at first, then harder and harder. “Goddess!” Achilles gasped as his whole body burned with pleasure. “Oh! Oh! Oh!” When he felt Deidamia push in, he thrust back, wanting it in, deeper, deeper, needing it like he’d never needed anything in his life, his breasts swinging wildly beneath him as the waves rolled in, bathing both of them now in white, foamy spray that clung to their smooth, brown skin.

“You’re a dirty girl!” Deidamia said, slapping Achilles’ on the butt again. “Filthy!”

“Ooooooh!” Achilles’ cried out. “Yes! Yes! Harder! Deeper!”

“Beg for it you little slut!”

Dirty girl. Slut. Achilles felt a thrill to hear these words coming from the woman he loved, barked out by Deidamia in an angry, threatening voice that sent thrills through his whole body. “Pound me!” He screamed.

“Deeper! Harder! Goddess! Oh, Goddess!”

Achilles started to make little chirping noises and knew he was about pop. She pounded, slapped, loving the little sounds he was making, loving the feeling of power she got dominating this sweet little thing that had once been a man. Achilles nipples ached, his hair had come undone and fell across his face, he felt the sticky, salty foam of the waves all over his body, the phallus inside him, deep inside him, and a desperate need as it pulled back, leaving a sweet void and a fear and then a thrill Deidamia slammed back into him, and the tension built and grew and he moaned and begged for release and then he finally felt it, his whole body tensed and then expanded, his whole body engulfed in a blazing inferno of pleasure.

His limbs went weak, and he fell on his side in the wet sand, his hip high in the air. Deidamia was in him in an instant, smothering him with passionate kisses. The waves washed over them there, intertwined, kissing, holding each other laughing and in love beneath the swollen white moon.

As the tide moved in, they crawled higher onto the beach, sitting beneath a great growth of hyacinth. “Was it good for you?” Deidamia said.

Achilles bit his lip and nodded, still buzzing in the afterglow.

“Good,” Deidamia said, kissing him on the cheek.

“I don’t want to marry,” Achilles said. “I can’t bear to be separated from you.”

“Periphas is a noble man and will be a devoted husband.”

“I know, a girl couldn’t hope for much better, but—”

“What?”

“The thought of giving myself to a man, of letting him— inside me? It— I don’t want that.”

“Neither do I,” Deidamia said. “But we must do our duty.”

“What if? Would you hate me if I ended this? If I threw myself from the highest tower? I could take poison, or cut these soft wrists...”

“You will NOT,” Deidamia said. “If I am to suffer a maiden’s fate, then so can little Achilles. I can’t do this alone! You will marry, and you will bare children, just as you must, just as I must. We will write and talk of our lives as wives and mothers. We will complain about our husbands and dote over our children, and each year we will get together with our children and sneak a few moments of bliss. You must be there for me, dear girl, and we will suffer and celebrate our lives as women together.”

Achilles nodded, smiled, tears rolling down his cheeks. "I will do it. I will do it all for you."

That night, back in his room alone, thinking about his wedding, his wedding bed, Achilles fell to his knees.

The prayer came to him, suddenly, and with great force. He closed his eyes and whispered softly, "Hera, goddess of marriage, I beseech thee, let me be the girl my husband deserves.. Let my nature be changed as my body, my spirit reshaped into whatever he desires, that I may please him and care for him as a wife must Let me be free of all that remains of Achilles, that I may a sweet and docile maiden, a wife and mother! Please.... please..." he whispered, folding his hands over his chest. "Let it be so."

The wedding passed in a blur. The reception. Achilles found himself standing before his husband in a sheer silken gown, his face painted, hair perfect, earrings sparkling in his little ears, bracelets flashing at his wrists. His nipples were hard and poked out from the thin material of his dress. Periphas lay back on the bed, his eyes burning with hunger. It thrilled Achilles to see how his beauty drove his husband mad with hunger. "Turn," Periphas said. Achilles turned to give his husband a clear view of his backside, arching his back and pushing his full, round behind up invitingly. He looked back over his little round shoulder and smiled.

"You are a goddess," Periphas said. 'Come here and let me show you how much I love you."

Achilles turned, put a hand on his hip and walked over to his husband, letting his big, round hips sway, his brightest, prettiest smile on his face, crimson lips wet and ready. "I can't wait," he said softly, and it was true. Hera had answered his prayers, and Mighty Achilles wanted nothing more

than to lay back, spread his legs and please his man. When he got to the bed, he crawled to Periphas, who grabbed him, lifted him as if he weighted nothing, and threw him down on his back, his whole soft body jiggling. Periphas growled as grabbed the top of Achilles dress and ripped it off him, throwing the tattered rags to the side as he jammed a hand between Achilles' legs and put his hot mouth on his breast, sucking his nipple.

“Oh!” Achilles cried out. His husband was playing rough, and — maiden that he was— he loved it.

Epilogue. Four years later

“Grandma!” The golden-haired little boys cried out as they ran to Thetis. She smothered them in hugs and kisses, then handed them some small presents she’d brought for her visit. They thanked her and ran off to play with their gifts, wooden soldiers painted to look like Myrmidons.

“I’m sorry I can’t get up to greet you!” Achilles called from his chair at the back of the receiving room of his little palace by the sea. His third child, little Deidamia, suckled at his breast.

“She’s getting so big!” Thetis said, looking adoringly at her granddaughter, already with a head of lovely red-golden hair, just like her mother.

“Please, sit, mother,” Achilles said. “It’s so good to see you!”

Thetis sat, looking at her son sitting there nursing his baby. He’d never looked lovelier— or happier. It had not been an easy decision to lure him into a woman’s life, but seeing him there now, a happy young mother, she knew she’d done the right thing. “Motherhood suits you,” Thetis said.

Achilles smiled, looking down contentedly at the little girl suckling at his teat. “I have never felt such love,” he said. “Such a connection. It’s a joy to....”

“Jerk!” One of his sons yelled from the other room.

“Idiot!”

“Shut up!” There was a slam and then a shout.

“Briseis!” Achilles called. “Please take the boys outside to play!”

“Yes, mistress!” Briseis called. “Come, you two!” She called from the other room. “Let’s go.”

“Boys,” Achilles said. “Always rough housing and so loud. I don’t think I will ever understand them, though I was one once.”

“Men will never make sense,” Thetis said. “It is all we can do to love them. And how are things with your husband?”

The look on Achilles’ face said it all— a mixture of adoration, frustration, annoyance and worry, but most of all love. “He is a good man,” Achilles said. “And he takes care of me and the children. I just wish we could be closer. He seems so distant most of time. I want us to be closer, the closest any two people could be, but when I try to reach him, the deeper part of him I know hides beneath his manly defenses, he recoils and pushed me away!”

“It is always the way with men,” Thetis said.

“And I worry so! Each morning when he goes off to fight I watch him, full of fear that he will fall in battle. Mother, I worry all the time— about him, my children, my friends. I fret so and I am afraid I will break apart.”

“That just means you are a good woman,” Thetis said. “To be a woman is to worry. And yet, I can see it in your eyes that you have also found the joys of your life as a mother and a wife.”

“Yes. When he comes home from battle, his blood hot, he is so handsome and wild! And yet, so gentle and caring with me and the children! And my boys! I adore them so, as much as they vex me, and now I have a girl, too, and I can’t wait until her hair gets longer and I can braid it and brush it and— oh! It is a joy to be a mother, too.”

Deidamia finished feeding, so Achilles put her in her crib, and pulled the top of his dress closed.

“Do you hear from Deidamia?”

“Yes. We write. She has two children now, and we plan to spend a month together at her palace in early summer. I can’t wait to see her again! It feels like it has been forever! But, I have only spoken of myself and my life. What of you, mother? How are things with you?”

“Good. Great. MY daughter is safe and happily married, and that is what makes me happy. I am so glad you will have a long, joyful life. It is all I ever wanted. Do you ever— well, do you ever wish you had remained a man? That it could be you who goes out and fights for glory?”

“Some days,” Achilles said. “When the baby is crying, and the boys are fighting, when I am having a difficult period, the cramps more painful than usual, and Briseis is being catty, and when the battle is at a lull and Periphas is sitting around in one of his grumpy moods being NO HELP! I wish for just one day he could be the wife and I go swing my sword and play the man. Mother, he has no idea how hard I work! He wouldn’t last a day as a woman and a mother!”

Thetis laughed. “Every wife that ever was has felt the same,” she said. They looked in each other’s eyes and smiled, and they said the word at the same time and in the same tone, “Men!”

The End